

BAD BLOOD IN THE BOOKSHOP

By Eddie Cope and Carl Williams

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CHARACTERS

CLARICE DELOVELY	Pretty, young shop owner.
CHESTER G. WHILAKERS	An over-educated hero.
SYLVESTER SWINEHEART	A man of evil schemes.
DAME WINIFRED SNITWHISTLE	Over-dramatic ex-actress.
SHERIFF HORNSWOGGLER	Dumb and corrupt.
FANN C. FREE	Book-publishing heiress.

TIME & PLACE

1890. A small bookshop in Cactus Junction, Texas. Door R to street. Door L to cellar. Books on shelves, a sales counter, a couple of chairs.

PROP LIST

Ten-dollar bill (Swineheart)	Small book (Chester)
Whiskey bottle (Swineheart)	Large book (Chester)
Several dollar bills (Swineheart)	Carpetbag (Dame)
Handkerchief (Swineheart)	Carpetbag (Clarice)
Bottle of chloroform (Swineheart)	Bottle of whiskey (Chester)
Short length of rope (Swineheart)	Small trunk (Chester and Clarice)
Book (Chester)	Manuscript (Swineheart)
Handcuffs (Sheriff)	Handgun (Dame)
Paper bag with rope and chloroform bottle (Chester)	
Loose writing papers (scattered by Swineheart)	

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AT RISE: SYLVESTER SWINEHEART looks at several books and takes one off the shelf.

SWINEHEART: "A Christmas Carol." This should be over with the songbooks. What in the dickens is it doing here?

(SHERIFF HORNSWOGGLER enters.)

SHERIFF: Mornin'.

SWINEHEART: Good morning, Bubba.

SHERIFF: Bubba? You gotta show a little more respect to your brother-in-law, now that I been elected Sheriff.

SWINEHEART: All right . . . Sheriff Bubba.

SHERIFF: I want you to call me Sheriff Hornswoggler.

SWINEHEART: Are you sure about that?

SHERIFF: On second thought, just call me Sheriff.

SWINEHEART: What can I do for you, Sheriff? Come to buy a book?

SHERIFF: A book? What would I do with a book? No, I'm here to collect a contribution.

SWINEHEART: This is something new. A contribution for what?

SHERIFF: For my favorite charity, Me.

SWINEHEART: And how often will you expect this contribution?

SHERIFF: Every month.

SWINEHEART: I wouldn't give you a plugged nickel. Not unless there was something in it for me.

SHERIFF: There is. You'll have my personal services.

SWINEHEART: Really? To do what?

SHERIFF: Suppose you want somebody arrested.

SWINEHEART: A regular sheriff would do that without any contribution.

SHERIFF: Even if the somebody you want arrested ain't done nothin'?

SWINEHEART: I see the possibilities. But I'm still not sure it's worth the expense.

SHERIFF: Or if you don't just want them put in jail, I could even . . . **(looks around)** . . . put them down.

SWINEHEART: You mean like six feet under? **(points downward)**

SHERIFF: I don't care how many feet they got. Head, hips, and heels, it all gets planted 'neath a cactus.

SWINEHEART: An interesting proposition. How much would these personal services cost me?

SHERIFF: Let's say twenty bucks a month.

SWINEHEART: Let's say ten bucks a month. Family discount. (**hands him the money**) Here's my first month's contribution.

SHERIFF: Fine. You got any problems you want me to solve?

SWINEHEART: Just one. She's arriving today from London. Clarice DeLovely is my third cousin, once removed. I'd like to see her twice removed, if you know what I mean.

SHERIFF: How come?

SWINEHEART: Her father died and willed this bookshop to her, leaving me out in the cold, except as temporary manager.

SHERIFF: And if she takes over the shop, you won't be able to— (**drops to a whisper**)—do that other little business you run out of here.

SWINEHEART: That's why I want you to take care of her.

SHERIFF: You mean . . . (**looks around, then points downward**)

SWINEHEART: An easy job. I'm pretty sure she only has two feet.

SHERIFF: How far down you want her planted?

SWINEHEART: I'll leave that up to you . . . or rather, down to you.

SHERIFF: Let me know when she gets to town. Right now I've got other contributions to collect. (**exits**)

SWINEHEART: Nothing like a civil servant hard at work. (**aside**) And he is nothing like a civil servant hard at work. (**turns back to the books and picks one up**) What do we have here? "Little Women." (**lustful laugh**) Well, now . . . I'll just take a peek. (**opens book**) Bah. No pictures.

(**SWINEHEART closes the book in disgust. CHESTER G. WHILAKERS enters with his nose in a book.**)

CHESTER: (**reading**) "Gnats do not have eyebrows."

SWINEHEART: (**angrily**) You're tardy!

CHESTER: No, I'm Chester, your clerk.

SWINEHEART: Was that supposed to be funny?

CHESTER: Was what supposed to be funny?

SWINEHEART: I swear.

CHESTER: Please don't.

SWINEHEART: I never would've hired you if I didn't need somebody who knew something about books. If you're gonna work for me, you have to be on time. And put down that book!

CHESTER: Yes, sir. I was attempting to improve my mind.

SWINEHEART: You'll need a bigger book.

CHESTER: You should read it when I'm finished.

SWINEHEART: Are you trying to talk back to me?

CHESTER: I guess I wasn't trying hard enough.

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SWINEHEART: While you're not doing anything, go down to the cellar where the rare books are and tidy it up.

CHESTER: What for?

SWINEHEART: Because I said to! (**CHESTER exits to cellar. Calling after him**) And don't waste time reading any of them books. (**aside**) That kid's impossible. I don't trust him and his sissy college education. (**SHERIFF enters. Aside**) Now here's a man I can trust.

SHERIFF: Mornin'.

SWINEHEART: What brings you back so soon?

SHERIFF: Do you have change for a fifty?

SWINEHEART: I see the collection business is booming. Give me the fifty and I'll give you back five dollars and the rest in books.

SHERIFF: What do you take me for?

SWINEHEART: With any luck, forty-five dollars.

SHERIFF: Forget it. (**exits**)

SWINEHEART: That man could drive a body to drink. Which isn't a bad idea. (**picks up a whiskey bottle**) Empty. (**goes to cellar door**) Chester! Get yourself up here! (**moves away from door**) I knew that boy would be good for something besides reading all my books. That is, all my cousin's books.

CHESTER: (**enters from cellar reading another book**) "Women were not allowed to act on stage at the Globe Theatre."

SWINEHEART: What?! Lollygagging again?

CHESTER: I found this old book on the life of Shakespeare.

SWINEHEART: I heard of him. He died a long time ago.

CHESTER: (**pleased and surprised**) That's right!

SWINEHEART: Nigh on twenty years. Harry Shakespeare. Ran a saloon over in El Paso. Which reminds me. I want you to go buy me a bottle at the saloon. Here's some money. See if they'll take that book instead. I've got too many books and too little cash.

CHESTER: Yes, sir. I'll be right back. (**exits**)

SWINEHEART: (**picks up another book; aside**) Look how thick this one is! "Moby Dick"? Don't know who he was, but that's one whale of a book!

(FANN C. FREE, an attractive customer, enters.)

FREE: Hello. Could you help me?

SWINEHEART: (**leers**) I don't know, but you could certainly help me.

FREE: Do you sell rare books?

SWINEHEART: Some are rare, some are medium rare. What's your interest in them?

FREE: My father is the famous New York book publisher, Homer Free. There's money to be made in rare books.

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SWINEHEART: Money in books? I don't believe it.

FREE: I was just passing through town, and I saw your shop.

SWINEHEART: Just passing through, huh? All alone?

FREE: I am an independent woman.

SWINEHEART: No strings attached? Just the way I like 'em.

FREE: Are you being impertinent?

SWINEHEART: Not yet, but give me time.

FREE: I'll just look around.

SWINEHEART: Help yourself. I'll see what I can find for you. (**secretly pulls out a bottle of chloroform**) I'm sure I've got something here that should do the job. (**opens the bottle, dampens his handkerchief**)

FREE: (**sniffs**) What's that smell?

SWINEHEART: Oh, just something to keep the book weevils away.

FREE: Book weevils? Are they anything like boll weevils?

SWINEHEART: Except they have a taste for culture. I don't cotton to it myself.

FREE: I believe it smells like . . . like chloroform.

(SWINEHEART grabs her and holds the handkerchief over her nose and mouth.)

SWINEHEART: Take a deep breath, my dear. And don't be alarmed when you wake up bound and gagged. I'm glad you like to travel. I'll have you across the border in no time. (**evil laugh as SHE loses consciousness**) Now I'll take you down to them rare books you wanted to see.

(SWINEHEART drags her through the door to the cellar. A moment later CLARICE DeLOVELY and her chaperone DAME WINIFRED SNITWHISTLE enter through front door. They each carry a carpetbag. CLARICE spins around with joy.)

CLARICE: My bookshop! Oh, Winifred, it's so quaint. I'm going to love owning it.

DAME: You already own it. The question is, will you love running it?

CLARICE: (**softly**) I know I shall.

DAME: Project, my dear! Breathe from the diaphragm!

CLARICE: (**louder**) I know I shall!

DAME: Much better, Clarice. Always play to the deaf man in the back row. And speak distinctly—"trippingly on the tongue."

CLARICE: You taught me so much in London.

DAME: Your late father engaged me to tutor you in the essentials of the theater, since you were set on pursuing that unrewarding craft.

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CLARICE: I'm surprised you agreed to accompany me to America.

DAME: The world's a stage, dear heart.

CLARICE: You've been my protector from many a wicked actor with more than theatrics on his mind.

DAME: All men are actors when it comes to love.

CLARICE: **(looks around)** No one seems to be around.

DAME: Where is that Mr. Swinehead?

CLARICE: Swineheart. A distant cousin of my late, lamented father.

DAME: Distant, indeed. By an entire ocean and half of Texas.

(CHESTER enters carrying a bottle of whiskey, still reading the Shakespeare book. DAME SNITWHISTLE looks at him disapprovingly.)

CHESTER: **(reading)** "In 1582 he married Anne Hathaway and lived in Stratford." **(DAME SNITWHISTLE clears her throat dramatically, making CHESTER look up.)** Oh, excuse me. I was just reading about Shakespeare.

DAME: Shakespeare and whiskey. Another actor.

CHESTER: The whiskey isn't for me. It's for my boss, Mr. Swineheart.

CLARICE: I'm Clarice DeLovely, Mr. Swineheart's cousin, the new owner. This is my traveling companion, Dame Winifred Snitwhistle.

DAME: And you are?

CHESTER: Speechless. At meeting such a refined young lady in this unrefined town.

CLARICE: Thank you, Mr.—?

CHESTER: Chester G. Whilakers. I assist Mr. Swineheart in . . . **(looks awkwardly at the bottle, sets it down)** . . . various duties.

DAME: And why was the shop left unattended?

CHESTER: I didn't know it was. I would've been back sooner, but I had to stop and move some dusty old trunk that was blocking the sidewalk. I tossed it in the dump around the corner.

DAME: You did what?!

CLARICE: That was my father's trunk! It contained all his research papers pertaining to the British stage.

DAME: It's irreplaceable!

CLARICE: Please help us retrieve it!

CHESTER: Of course—right away—I'm sorry.

(THEY hurry out the front door. A moment later SWINEHEART enters from the cellar carrying a short length of rope.)

SWINEHEART: **(dusts himself off)** Thirsty work, trussing up stray women. **(bellows)** Chester! Where are you, you lazy lout? **(sees the**

bottle) Ah! He's not so worthless after all. (**drinks**)

(CHESTER and CLARICE enter carrying the trunk, with DAME SNITWHISTLE following.)

DAME: Careful with it.

SWINEHEART: What have we here?

DAME: Put it down stage left. (**CLARICE goes left while CHESTER pulls right. DAME points.**) Stage left. Left!

(THEY set down the trunk.)

CLARICE: Thank you, Mr. Whilakers.

CHESTER: (**showing interest**) Call me Chester.

SWINEHEART: Chester!

CHESTER: Mr. Swineheart.

SWINEHEART: If you want to keep your job, you'll start doing some work around here.

CLARICE: Whether he keeps his job or not will be up to me, cousin Sylvester.

SWINEHEART: So you're cousin Clarice. I wasn't expecting someone so . . . so . . . (**looking her over, leering**)

CHESTER: Refined.

SWINEHEART: Get to work!

CHESTER: Yes, sir. (**heads to cellar door**)

SWINEHEART: Wait! Where are you going?

CHESTER: To finish cleaning up the cellar.

SWINEHEART: (**to ladies**) Just one moment. Be right back. Help yourself to a book. (**goes to CHESTER, lowers voice**) I need you to run another errand. Go to the general store and get me some more rope.

CHESTER: Rope?

SWINEHEART: And another bottle of chloroform.

CHESTER: Why do you want chloroform?

SWINEHEART: (**in his face**) I gargle with it!

CHESTER: (**drawing back**) Maybe you should try something stronger.

SWINEHEART: Get going!

CHESTER: How do I pay for it?

SWINEHEART: On account.

CHESTER: On account of what?

SWINEHEART: On a count of three, I'm gonna wring your neck! One . . . two . . .

(CHESTER exits in a hurry.)

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CLARICE: I do hope he's coming back.

SWINEHEART: He better, or he's fired. At least that's what I'd recommend, cousin.

DAME: Perhaps you should listen to him, Clarice. The young man seems suspect.

CLARICE: All young men seem suspect to you.

SWINEHEART: **(to DAME)** I do hope you don't suspect me of anything.

DAME: She said "young men."

CLARICE: I must thank you, cousin, for watching over the bookshop until my arrival. Father had such far-flung interests. It seems everywhere he traveled, he opened a business.

DAME: Most of which closed in his wake. This bookshop was about all he had left when he died.

CLARICE: How is business here?

SWINEHEART: Business?

DAME: We'll be wanting to look at your books.

SWINEHEART: Here they are! You can see as many as you like.
(points all around)

CLARICE: Your business ledgers.

SWINEHEART: Ah! Well, now . . . I believe I may have left them down in the cellar, where I keep the rare books.

DAME: Rare books? I'd like to see those.

SWINEHEART: I promise I'll be taking you down there in just a short while. Both of you.

CLARICE: Why can't we go now?

SWINEHEART: We have to wait for Chester to return. Just in case a customer comes in.

(SHERIFF enters front door.)

DAME: Here's one now.

SWINEHEART: That's no customer. That's my brother-in-law the sheriff, and just the man I wanna see.

SHERIFF: Mornin'. You got change for a hundred?

SWINEHEART: If I didn't have change for a fifty, how could I have change for a hundred?

SHERIFF: **(scratches his head)** I'm not good with riddles.

SWINEHEART: I'd like you to meet two ladies from the United Kingdom.

SHERIFF: **(suspiciously)** What church is that? Say, you're not going 'round asking for money, are you? We don't let no women do that here in Cactus Junction . . . except down at Miss Ruby's.

CLARICE: What do you insinuate, sir?

SHERIFF: **(perplexed)** I'm not sure I ever 'sinuated anything.

SWINEHEART: This is the young lady I told you about. My cousin Clarice.

SHERIFF: Ohhhh.

DAME: And what, pray tell, does "Ohhhh" mean?

SHERIFF: Pray? You sure you ain't with a church?

DAME: How did such a dimwit ever get elected Sheriff?

SWINEHEART: The last three sheriffs was shot. The citizens figured Bubba wouldn't be worth shooting.

CLARICE: Bubba?

SHERIFF: Sheriff Bubba.

Thank you for reading this free excerpt from **BAD BLOOD IN THE BOOKSHOP** by Eddie Cope and Carl Williams. For performance rights and/or a complete copy of the script, please contact us at:

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