



Bad Blood

E. E. Smith

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Bad Blood is a fun, old-style whodunit to engage amateur sleuths.

If Nancy Drew and Sam Spade had spawned a child, it would be Alexis J. (Lexie) Smith, a smart-cookie private eye with attitude whose “discreet inquiries” quickly solve crimes, repair fractured families, and put thugs where they belong. Set in the late 1940s, *Bad Blood* is the second book in E. E. Smith’s mystery series featuring detective Lexie Smith.

The book’s title is a clever descriptor for the novel’s two rather disjointed story lines. One, set in Sacramento, focuses on the bad blood of fractured family relationships. The other, set in London, centers on a forensic scientist’s discovery of a formula for artificial blood. Each tale could be a self-contained mystery, replete with shadowy characters and tough talk.

Action begins in Lexie’s shabby third-floor walk-up office when the half-sister to the detective’s murdered former heartthrob Frank, hires Smith to investigate her stepmother for stealing an expensive necklace. Lexie’s expert sleuthing endears the detective to the wealthy, well-connected parents of her late unrequited love, providing a clear boost to her struggling business.

The second half of the novel takes place in England, site of action for the first book in the series, *Death by Misadventure*. Lexie returns to Britain, responding to a “request” from an MI5 detective inspector to whom she owes a favor. She must spy on a former professor who invented a formula for making artificial blood, a formula so important that governments and underworld figures around the globe are willing to go to great lengths to obtain it.

Bad Blood is an easy-to-read mystery with appealing characters and enough foreshadowing to allow readers to play detective along with Smith. In typical “hardboiled” style, the novel includes a crusty detective, brandished weapons and gunshots, car chases, and tethered victims, and sufficient twists to keep readers’ interest.

The tale is a welcome respite from contemporary mysteries that too often describe grisly murders in the goriest detail possible. Instead, *Bad Blood* is an old-style whodunit that focuses on spare descriptions and pithy dialogue to move the plot forward. Neither literary nor complex, *Bad Blood* nonetheless is a fun read, one interesting enough to keep amateur sleuths involved without taxing them unduly.

Bad Blood is a good book to read while curled up in front of the fireplace on a snowy evening or stretched out on a chaise lounge under the summer sun.

NANCY WALKER (February 12, 2014)

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