

# Bad Sister

US : 1931 : dir. Hobart Henley : Universal : 71 min  
 prod: Carl Laemmle Jr : scr: Raymond L Schrock & Tom Reed : dir.ph.: Karl Freund  
[David Durand](#) .....  
 Conrad Nagel; Sidney Fox; Bette Davis; ZaSu Pitts; Slim Summerville; Charles Winninger;  
 Emma Dunn; Humphrey Bogart; Bert Roach

| Ref:  | Pages | Sources | Stills | Words | Ω □ ∞ Z ∞ | Copy on VHS | Last Viewed   |
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| 2104a | 5½    | 6       | 7      | 1,604 | 3 - - - - | No          | <i>unseen</i> |



Holmstrom's caption to the above reads "Exit bumping.." and I'm sure I can't better that.  
 Source: The Moving Picture Boy



*The silent cinema was not quite dead, as you see. L to R: Emma Dunn, Sidney Fox, Davis, Charles Winninger  
Source: Illustrated History of the Movies – Bette Davis*

**Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:**

"Adaptation of the Booth Tarkington story "The Flirt" with film debuts by Fox (the bad sister) and Davis (the good sister). Small town girl falls for a man who wants to swindle her father and his friends. \*\*½ "

**Halliwell's Film Guide review:**

"A small-town coquette falls for a city slicker, and her quiet sister gets her steady boy friend. A teenage potboiler of its day, remarkable only for its cast. Scr: Raymond L Schrock & Tom Reed, from the story "The Flirt" by Booth Tarkington."

**The Good Film and Video Guide review:**

"A wayward girl (Sidney Fox) leaves her best beau (Conrad Nagel) for an out-of-town stranger (Humphrey Bogart) who seduces her. Besides Bogart, there is Bette Davis, as the good sister, an equally small role. Emma Dunn and Charles Winninger are the parents, ZaSu Pitts

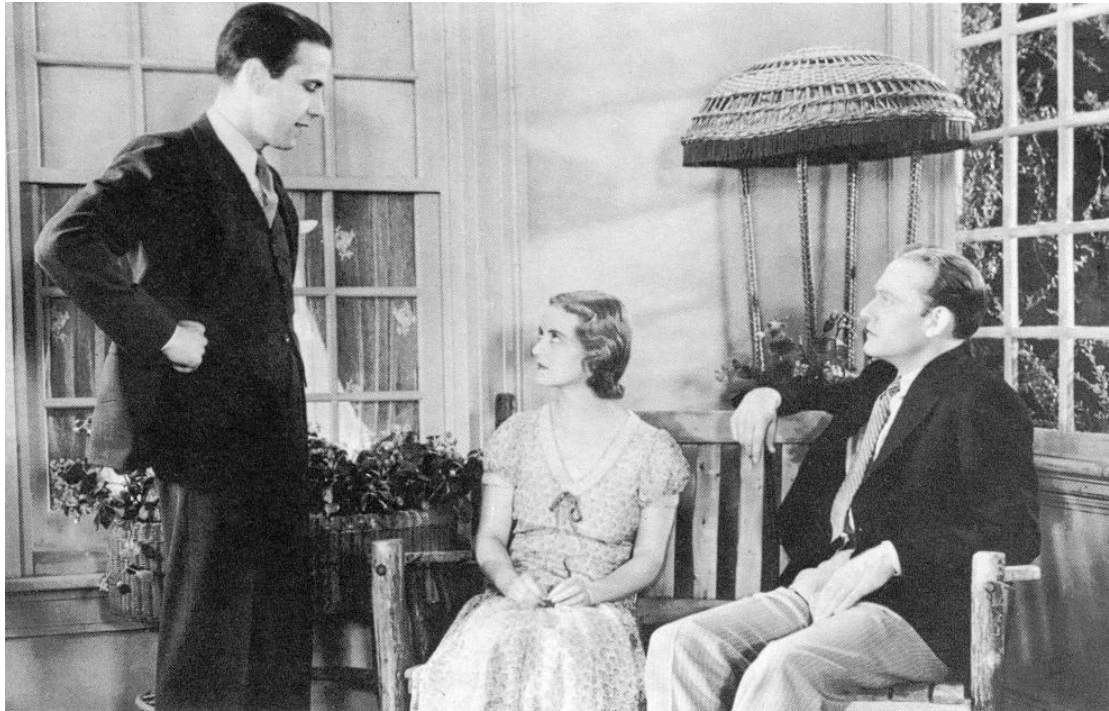
is the maid and the source is a story by Booth Tarkington. \* "

**New York Times review:**

"What starts out to be a homely Hoosier tragedy finishes as a wooden and insecurely presented story of two sisters who should have known better. The misses Sidney Fox and Bette Davis, who are not unknown along the Rialto, make their debut in films as Marianne and Laura Madison. Miss Fox makes a charming Marianne, but her delicate English intonation is sadly out of place in Council City. Miss Davis' interpretation of Laura is too lugubrious and tends to destroy the sympathy the audience is expected to feel for the young woman."

**Weekly Variety review:**

"Sidney Fox is restricted to this small-town big-ideal girl and as such is pleasing. Bette Davis holds much promise in her handling of Laura, sweet, simple and the very essence of repression."



Above: Look again, that is indeed a very young Humphrey Bogart striking his best caddish pose, with Conrad Nagel right as the salt-of-the-earth jilted by flirt Sidney Fox in Bogart's favour. This was the only time in Bogart's career he courted a Sidney.

Source: *The Films of Bette Davis*



Above: the heroine melts away in a decorous swoon. Have you noticed that women don't seem to drop like flies anymore? Does this mean they were faking it all along? Or are they getting testosterone supplements in the modern diet? Did they have secret swooning lessons before the war perhaps? The world deserves answers to such questions.

Source: *The Films of Bette Davis*



Left: good sister meets bad sister, but good sister's all in white, and bad sister's wearing the black hat, so no danger of confusion there.

Source: *The Films of Bette Davis*



*The Hollywood megastar that very nearly wasn't. But "Davis has lovely eyes" cameraman Karl Freund mysteriously reported to Laemmle.*  
Source: *The Films of Bette Davis*

#### The Universal Story review:

"Though Carl Laemmle Jr claimed that Bette Davis had about as much sex appeal as Slim Summerville, he allowed her to make her screen debut in **"BAD SISTER"**, playing the relatively minor role of Laura Madison, the good sister. The movie was a remake of Booth Tarkington's novel, "The Flirt", first filmed by the studio in 1916 as a Bluebird Production, and remade in 1922. This third version also marked the debut of Sidney Fox who, as Marianne Madison, the more flamboyant of the two sisters, understandably made much more of an impression than Davis, both on audiences and on the critics. Humphrey Bogart was cast as Valentine Corliss, a swindler and the man Marianne elopes with but is later deserted by, while Conrad Nagel, as Dr Dick Lindley, received top billing and was paired with Miss Davis. Papa Madison was played by the reliable Charles Winninger, with other roles under Hobart Henley's direction going to ZaSu Pitts, Slim Summerville, Emma Dunn and Bert Roach. It was scripted by Raymond L Schrock and Tom Reed, whose dialogue remained sorely in need of the kiss of life throughout."

#### The Films of Bette Davis review:

"Marianne Madison (Sidney Fox), the spoiled daughter of a small-town Indiana merchant (Charles Winninger), is so bored by the charms of her suitors that she falls in love with Valentine Corliss (Humphrey Bogart), an unctuous confidence man in town to swindle local businessmen. By promising to build a prosperous factory, Valentine dupes Marianne into forging her father's name to a letter of endorsement which he then uses to elicit money from other merchants. Once he has amassed a sizeable amount, he skips town and induces Marianne to elope with him. He deserts her soon afterward, leaving her to repent in a shabby hotel room.

While Marianne is away with Valentine, her sister Laura (Bette Davis), who has confided her innermost desires only to the pages of her diary, reveals to young Dr. Dick Lindley (Conrad Nagel) that she has been in love with him for years, although she knows he loves Marianne. Sadder and wiser, Marianne returns home admitting that her foolish behaviour has almost ruined her life. To avert further scandal, she accepts a proposal of marriage from a wealthy

young man (Bert Roach) whom she previously held in amused contempt. Dr. Lindley, aware he had only been infatuated with the flirtatious Marianne, realises he loves quiet and dependable Laura.

On the strength of her stage performances in "The Wild Duck", "Broken Dishes" and "Solid South", Bette Davis was given a screen test that resulted in a six-month contract with Universal Studios. Plans to star her in Preston Sturges' "**SLIGHTLY DISHONORABLE**" were abandoned after Carl Laemmle, Jr. met her and exclaimed, "She has about as much sex-appeal as Slim Summerville!" Using her for the contracted six months, Universal cast her in support of Sidney Fox in "**BAD SISTER**". Miss Fox, another screen newcomer, was awarded the role in Sturges' comedy, originally intended for Davis."

**Illustrated History of the Movies – Bette Davis**  
excerpt:

"December 1930.. During the Christmas holidays she was tested for "**HEART IN HAND**" (eventually released as "**A HOUSE DIVIDED**"), a Walter Huston film, directed by William Wyler. However, the wardrobe department attired Davis in a low-cut cotton dress that prompted Wyler to comment "What do you think of these girls who show their chests and think they can get jobs?" Davis says it made her too self-conscious to test well, and the role went to Helen Chandler.

Finally, she learned that she was being considered for "**GAMBLING DAUGHTERS**", a film version of Booth Tarkington's "The Flirt", opposite Conrad Nagel. But when the film went into production, Sidney Fox had the female lead, playing a hell-raising siren, and Davis had a secondary role as her drab sister. But at least she was working, and in good company: Humphrey Bogart (his fourth film), ZaSu Pitts, Charles Winninger, Emma Dunn, Bert Roach, and her so-called lookalike, Slim Summerville.

Davis says the film was unbelievably bad and so was she. The New York Times critic found her "too lugubrious" to hold audience sympathy in a

"wooden and insecurely presented story of two sisters who should have known better in the first place". Variety was more favourable: "Bette Davis holds much promise in her handling of Laura - sweet, simple, and the very essence of repression". Before release, "**GAMBLING DAUGHTERS**" was retitled "**BAD SISTER**" (1931). Davis later called it the worst experience of her life. Surprisingly, when option time arrived, her contract was renewed for three months. The reason was not her performance in "**BAD SISTER**", but rather the recommendation of that film's photographer, Karl Freund, who told Laemmle "Davis has lovely eyes"..."

[no listing in "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "The Critics' Film Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

**The Moving Picture Boy** entry on Durand:

"The dark, handsome David Durrant (his real name) first achieved fame as a radio prodigy known as "Little Boy Blue". One of his earliest ventures into screen work was with "**Our Gang**" (in "**UNCLE TOM'S UNCLE**"), but it didn't lead to Gang membership. This didn't matter. Durand, a better-looking Frankie Darro, did very well indeed. Like Frankie Thomas, who had the lead in "**WEDNESDAY'S CHILD**", Dave Durand later joined Hollywood's teenage pool of urban delinquency: "**ANGELS WITH DIRTY FACES**", "**A CRIMINAL IS BORN**", "**STREETS OF NEW YORK**" and "**BOYS' REFORMATORY**" will do for 1938-39 starters. And though the personable youth was sometimes allowed to represent sterling qualities - "**SCOUTS TO THE RESCUE**", "**KIRK OF THE CAMPUS**", "**NAVAL ACADEMY**" - it still didn't add up to the sort of career such a gifted boy had had a right to expect. One of his last featured acting roles was in "**MILLION DOLLAR KID**" (44)."



*Another aspect of quintessential boyhood in western culture – the boy as anti-Cupid, investing great energy and joy in sabotaging elder sister's romantic life. Boys instinctively went to war on "mushy stuff"*

*Source: The Films of Bette Davis*

Really of next to no interest here at all, except that it's a Booth Tarkington story, with a meddlesome younger boy in the family. David Durand was 10. Some of his earlier films - all lost in obscurity now - included "**GET YOUR MAN**" (27), "**TROPIC MADNESS**" (28), "**LADIES LOVE BRUTES**" (30), "**ROBINSON CRUSOE AND SON**" (32) and "**LITTLE MEN**" (34). Nothing is known of the two earlier film versions of this story, but Dixieland author Booth Tarkington's books were filmed very many times in the twenties and thirties, and the central characters as often as not were mischievous children. His sensibilities were those of the pre-civil rights movement South, which is very largely why his works have not endured and Twain's have.

See subject index under **BOOTH TARKINGTON**.