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Opening extract from

The Case of the Good-Looking Corpse

Written by

Caroline Lawrence

Published by

Orion Children's Books

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THE P.K. PINKERTON MYSTERIES

The Case of the Good-looking Corpse

Also by Caroline Lawrence

THE P.K. PINKERTON MYSTERIES
The Case of the Deadly Desperados

THE ROMAN MYSTERY SCROLLS
The Sewer Demon

THE ROMAN MYSTERIES
I The Thieves of Ostia
II The Secrets of Vesuvius
III The Pirates of Pompeii
IV The Assassins of Rome
V The Dolphins of Laurentum
VI The Twelve Tasks of Flavia Gemina
VII The Enemies of Jupiter
VIII The Gladiators from Capua
IX The Colossus of Rhodes
X The Fugitive from Corinth
XI The Sirens of Surrentum
XII The Charioteer of Delphi
XIII The Slave-girl from Jerusalem
XIV The Beggar of Volubilis
XV The Scribes from Alexandria
XVI The Prophet from Ephesus
XVII The Man from Pomegranate Street

The First Roman Mysteries Quiz Book
The Second Roman Mysteries Quiz Book
Trimalchio's Feast and Other Mini-mysteries
The Legionary from Londinium and Other Mini-mysteries
The Roman Mysteries Treasury
From Ostia to Alexandria with Flavia Gemina

THE P.K. PINKERTON MYSTERIES

The Case of the Good-looking Corpse

Caroline Lawrence

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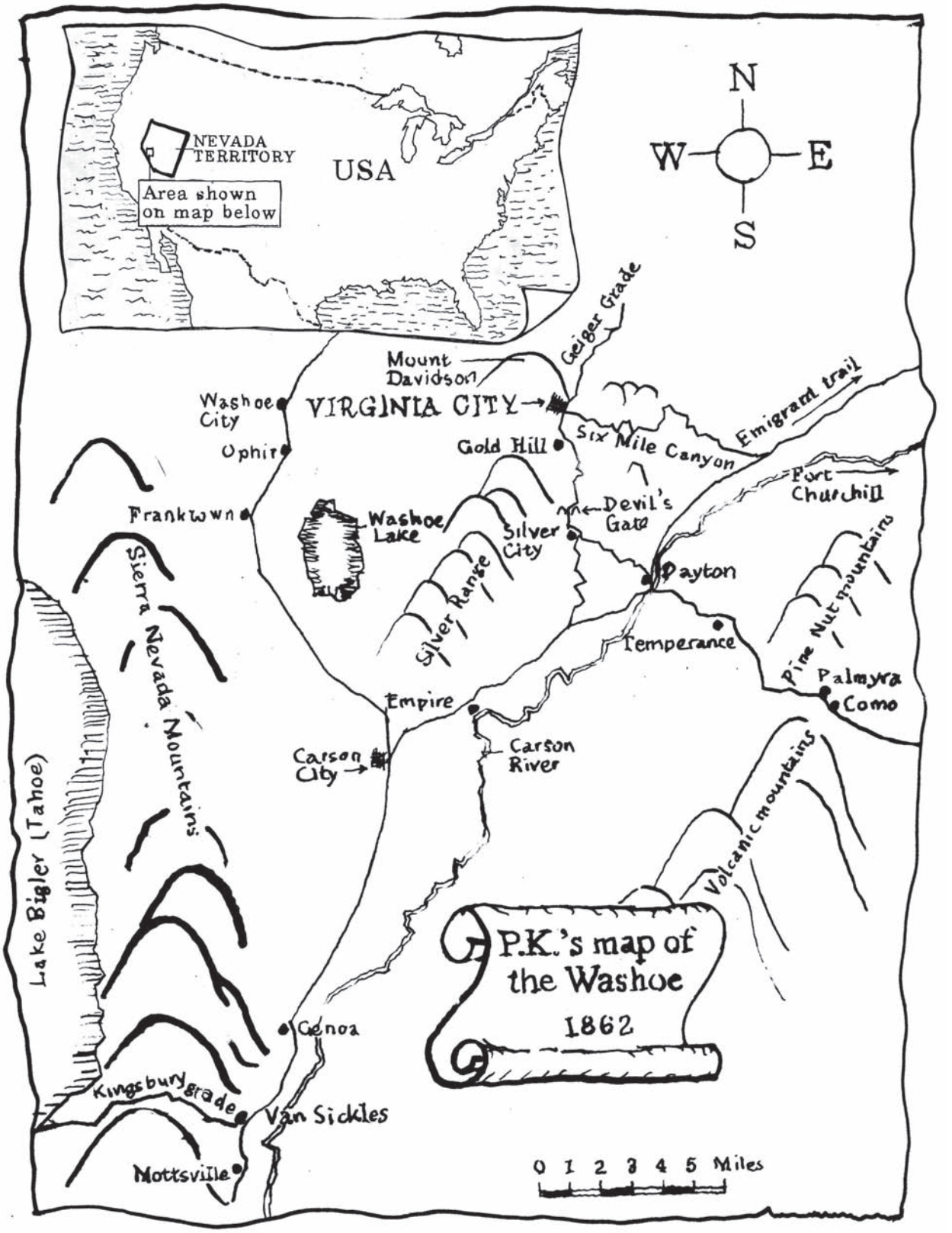
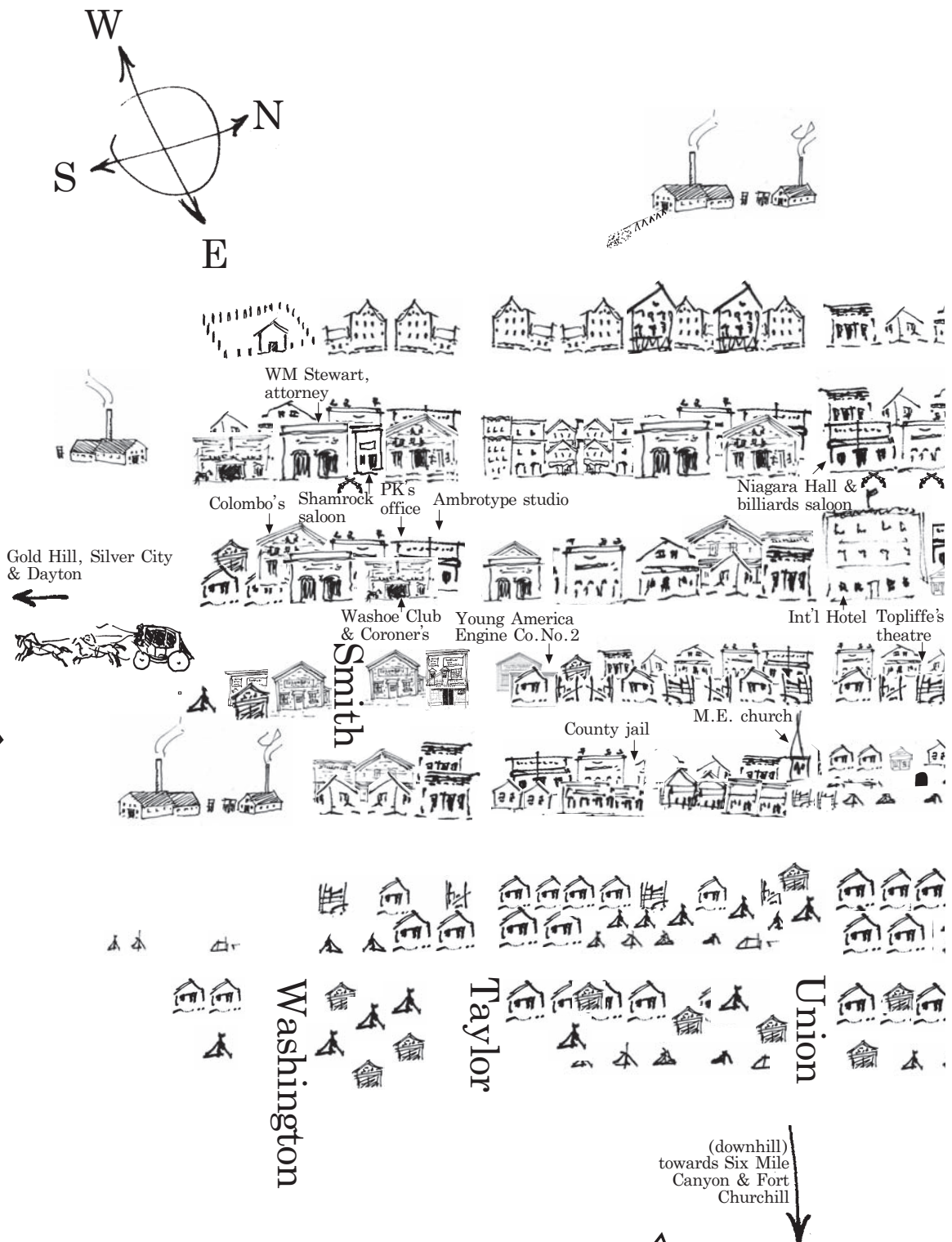
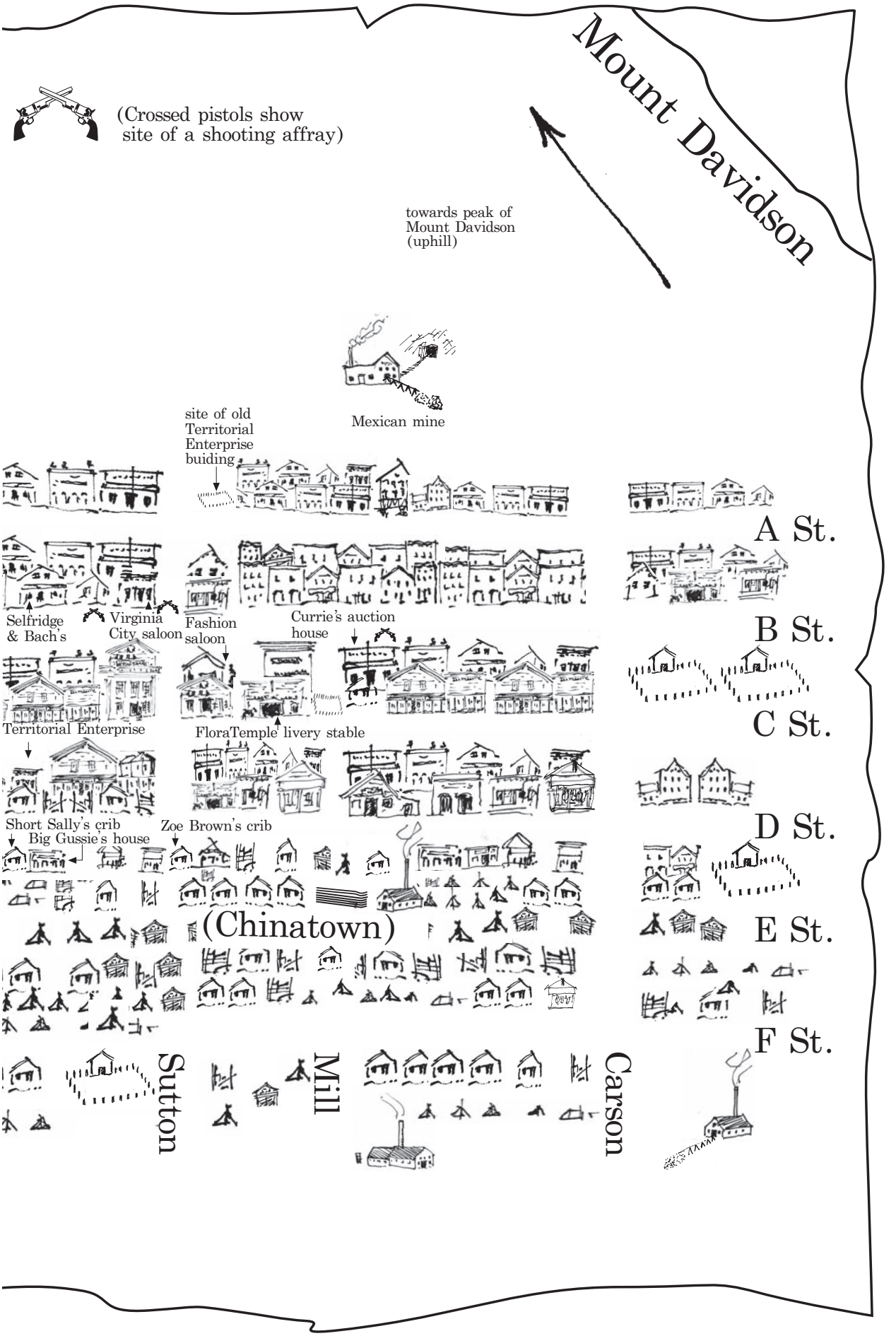
To Nevada historian and B Street B&B proprietress, Carolyn Eichin, who introduced me to the Journals of Alfred Doten, a vein I can mine for years.


NEVADA TERRITORY
USA
Area shown on map below
N
W
E
S
Geiger Grade
Mount Davidson
VIRGINIA CITY
Washoe City
Ophir
Gold Hill
Six Mile Canyon
Emigrant trail
Fort Churchill
Devil's Gate
Franktown
Washoe Lake
Silver City
Silver Range
Dayton
Sierra Nevada Mountains
Pine Nut mountains
Temperance
Palmyra
Como
Empire
Carson City
Carson River
Volcanic mountains
Lake Bigler (Tahoe)
P.K.'s map of the Washoe
1862
Genoa
Kingsbury grade
Van Sickles
Mottsville
0 1 2 3 4 5 Miles

Virginia City in 1862




Mount Davidson
(Crossed pistols show site of a shooting affray)
towards peak of Mount Davidson (uphill)
Mexican mine
site of old Territorial Enterprise buiding
A St.
Selfridge & Bach's
Virginia City saloon
Fashion saloon
Currie's auction house
B St.
Territorial Enterprise
FloraTemple livery stable
C St.
Short Sally's crib
Big Gussie's house
Zoe Brown's crib
D St.
(Chinatown)
E St.
F St.
Sutton
Mill
Carson

LEDGER SHEET 1

My name is P.K. Pinkerton & I am a Private Eye operating out of Virginia City, Nevada Territory. At the moment I am in Jail on the charge of Murder.

I am writing this Journal because my lawyer told me to set down my side of the story. He told me to write it as if I was talking to a jury of '12 good men and true' or a kindly sympathetic Judge with 'white hair and twinkling eyes'.

He said I should start by putting my name, age & qualifications.

I have already stated my name: P.K. Pinkerton.

I am 12 years old.

I can read & write & I can speak American and Lakota. I can also speak a little Spanish & Chinese & a few words of French.

I am real good at tracking & hunting. My eyes are as sharp as a hawk's & my ears are as keen as a rabbit's &

my sense of smell is almost as good as a bear's.

For the sake of honesty, I must confess that I have a Thorn.

My Thorn is that people confound me. I am not good at reading people's faces & sometimes have trouble knowing if they are telling the truth or lying.

As well as my Thorn, I have some Foibles & Eccentricities.

One of my Foibles is that I get the Mulligrubs.

One of my Eccentricities is I like Collecting things.

It is my Foibles & Eccentricities – and my Thorn – that have landed me here in jail today, beneath the shadow of the hangman's noose.

LEDGER SHEET 2

Here is what happened.

After vanquishing three Deadly Desperados last Monday, I used $300 of the Reward Money to buy premises for my new business.

Mr. Sol Bloomfield was in the process of amalgamating his two small Tobacco Stores into one big Emporium down on C Street. I bought the smallest of his stores, the one on South B Street. Although it is long & narrow it suits me fine because it is located next to a Photographic Studio (where I can get disguises) and the Colombo Restaurant (where I take my meals).

Mr. Bloomfield removed the last of his cigars & snuff & pipe tobacco from that store on Tuesday evening at 5.00 pm.

I moved in on Tuesday evening at 6.00 pm.

I opened my door for business at 9.00 am on Weds 1 October.

I had put up a shingle outside my front door with the words: *P.K. Pinkerton, Private Eye. We Hardly Ever Sleep*. And I had a big sign in the window of the door that told people I was OPEN.

I had been greatly supported by the townsfolk after vanquishing a deadly desperado a few days before, and I was confident that I would soon get many clients. My foster pa Emmet always used to tell me to 'strike while the iron is hot'.

But all that morning not a single person came in through my door.

Maybe it was because the Washoe Zephyr had been blowing hard since the night before. I had been finishing the account of my first Case and did not notice but now that I had nothing to do but sit and wait for clients, the powerful wind seemed to taunt me. They call it a 'zephyr' but it was howling & moaning & spitting gravel at my shop front. My left arm began to throb where I had been shot two days before by a .22 caliber ball.

I began to feel very low.

By and by I felt so low that I was in danger of getting the Mulligrubs.

'The Mulligrubs' is what my Foster Ma Evangeline called a bad kind of trance that creeps up on me when I feel low. I can stay in those Bad Trances for hours. I rock & moan & cannot easily be roused. When I come out of those trances, my brain feels thick & wooly, as if my head was stuffed full of cotton balls. Getting the Mulligrubs is another one of my Foibles.

Ma Evangeline – God rest her soul – taught me a way of staving off the Mulligrubs. If I concentrate on ordering a Collection it distracts me & I forget to be low. When I was living with Ma Evangeline and Pa Emmet down in Temperance, they let me keep a Bug Collection & a Button Collection.

But I did not have either of those collections at my new residence in Virginia City, so I looked about me with an aim to starting a new one.

Mr. Sol Bloomfield had left all the labels on the shelves along with the tobacco crumbs & flakes that gave the place its distinctive smell.

I went back to my desk & found a pack of cigarrito papers & spread them out & copied down the names of all the different tobaccos. Then I went to the shelves and found bits of tobacco & started to put a sample of each tobacco on top of every label.

Using an out-of-date brochure that Mr. Bloomfield left behind, I catalogued over 50 Cuban Cigars, 32 Domestic Cigars, 17 types of Leaf Tobacco, 12 different Plugs & Twists and 6 varieties of Snuff.

So that made over 100 types of smoking, chewing and leaf tobacco. I decided to call it my Big Tobacco Collection so that it would begin with 'B' like my other 2 collections: Bugs & Buttons.

Sometimes I looked up at the door that still admitted no Clients & I felt kind of queasy in my stomach. But as soon as I returned to my new task I felt better.

In this way I staved off the Mulligrubs & fought

the urge to be downcast. Sometimes I even forgot my throbbing arm & the howling wind & the memory of the terrible thing I had seen in my cabin down in Temperance.

It was a little past 5pm and the sun had just dipped behind Mount Davidson, when a bearded miner flung open the door to my office. I was so absorbed in ordering flecks of snuff that I almost jumped out of my skin. Some of that Zephyr whirled in and threatened to stir up my Big Tobacco Collection, so I shielded it with my arms & asked the man to shut the door.

He did so & stood there panting.

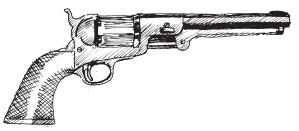
As I said, I am not good at reading people. It is my Thorn.

Ma Evangeline taught me 5 facial Expressions to look out for.

No. 1 - If someone's mouth curves up & their eyes crinkle, that is a Genuine Smile.
No. 2 - If their mouth stretches sideways & their eyes are not crinkled, that is a Fake Smile.
No. 3 - If a person turns down their mouth & crinkles up their nose, they are disgusted.
No. 4 - If their eyes open real wide, they are probably surprised or scared.
No. 5 - If they make their eyes narrow, they are either mad at you or thinking or suspicious.

The eyes of the miner who had just burst into my office were open real wide.

It was definitely Expression No. 4.

He was scared.

I thought, ‘At last. Someone has brought me a mystery to solve.’