

Poppy smoothed her bright blue dress and shook the shiny coins in her hand as she gathered up her cloak. "Keep working this claim Billy and you'll be rich as a Misahnese banker in no time!"

"Not if I keep giving it all to you, I won't Poppy dear." Billy smiled shyly.

"Well, some things are worth the price." She laughed as she tied the red ribbon in her dark hair and started off through the woods back toward town jingling the coins in her hand all the way. Some things, she thought to herself, but not the coins and the freebie she had to give to that filthy Marth to get directions to claim #34. She needed a way around him. She needed to find a way to steal or copy his map. Then her little enterprise could really take off. Why wait for the fools to come into town where there were lots of girls to choose from? All she had to do was read the posting in the tavern every Friday night to see who had the money, and then find them at their claim. Miners always enjoyed a little evening romp it seemed. And even though it was a bit uncomfortable and dirty, it was nothing a hot bath and some lilac oil couldn't fix. And no one else gets paid. "Poppy, you may have had a lot of bad ideas in your life, but this is not one of them!" she said aloud to the forest as the lights of Port Elry came into view.

A tall dark shadow stepped into the path in front of her, her hand quickly grasped the little dagger in her garter and drew it as the hands grabbed her. Such cold, cold hands, she thought as the blade plunged into her attacker's belly, it didn't seem like they even noticed. She panicked, fear rising in her breast but far, far too late. Her eyes darkened and she knew, she had had her last bad idea.

As morning dawned, Billy made his way into town to collect the payment on his claim. He saw her sitting there leaning against a tree, a look of stark terror frozen forever on her pale face. The pretty blue dress, the red ribbon, the dark hair, the crusted blood. His eye caught the glint of the coins still gripped tightly in one hand. He pried the fingers open taking the coins and as he touched her, he thought sadly, such cold, cold hands.