



The Case of the Good-Looking Corpse

Caroline Lawrence

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P.K. Pinkerton is back in the second book of this whip-cracking series set in America's wild west. The death of sadistic desperado Whittlin Walt has created an opening for 'Chief of the Comstock Desperados'. Several young gunfighters are battling it out in the saloons and streets of Virginia City.

The Case of the Good-Looking Corpse Details

Date : Published June 7th 2012 by Orion Children's Books

ISBN : 9781444001709

Author : Caroline Lawrence

Format : Hardcover 313 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Mystery, Childrens, Middle Grade, Crime, Westerns, Adventure

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From Reader Review *The Case of the Good-Looking Corpse* for online ebook

Liviana says

The random books Penguin sends me makes me happy. None of the other publishers tend to send me off the wall stuff. But Penguin does and I've found some real gems that way. Let's be honest, a middle grade western mystery? Pfft.

But P.K. PINKERTON AND THE PETRIFIED MAN was terrific. Let's face it, mystery series live and die based on the personalities of their detectives. P.K. is most definitely a personality. He's twelve years old and recently orphaned. He's started a detective agency where he uses his skills with disguise, language, and tracking. However, he has a Thorn - he's bad at reading faces and detecting lies, both important skills for a detective.

P.K. is autistic, but it's described in period terms. An older reader will figure it out, but for a younger reader he'll just be a little different. Caroline Lawrence did an excellent job with the period language. She uses words that are easy to understand and a little fun, never ones that feel overly archaic or pretentious. The haphazard capitalization also feels like how a twelve year old might write.

Honestly, all the period stuff is cool. Lawrence really brings the American West to life without romanticizing it. P.K. is half Lakota and thus not welcome everywhere. The girl who likes him treats him differently after learning his heritage. Entertainers put on shows in blackface. The murder P.K. investigates isn't a priority with the law since the victim was a Soiled Dove. (The references to prostitution are fairly circumspect.) P.K.'s client is a former slave. (The Civil War is raging, although P.K. is mostly oblivious.) At the same time, Lawrence doesn't make it seem like a terrible time and place to live. Just a tough one.

One of the characters is Sam Clemens, before he was Mark Twain. I liked that he was used sparingly. Readers familiar with Mark Twain will have much to chuckle about in his appearances and the joke doesn't wear out its welcome. If any of the other characters were historical figures, I didn't notice them.

P.K. PINKERTON AND THE PETRIFIED MAN is a page-turning, character-driven mystery. I liked how all the clues came together and P.K. came up with a plan to bring the murderer to justice. Lawrence never gets too bogged down in the historical and character detail to remember she's telling a mystery - a clever one at that. THE PETRIFIED MAN is a genuine gem.

Sarah says

I loved *The Case of the Deadly Desperados* so couldn't wait to catch up with our young detective P.K. Pinkerton as he goes about solving his latest mystery in *The Case of the Good-Looking Corpse*. I mentioned in my review of the first book that I wasn't sure of P.K.'s gender and now having read the second book I have to admit that is still the case so I'm going to continue to refer to him as male as that is the way he spends most of his time acting. I have to applaud the author for making me change my mind so many times throughout the book without ever providing a definitive answer though. I think one of P.K.'s charms is his innocence, the way he refuses to conform completely to one gender or the other and the fact that he has no embarrassment about dressing as a girl when he needs a disguise.

This story picks up right after the last one ends and we see P.K. setting up shop as a Private Detective. Unfortunately nobody seems to take a 12 year old detective seriously so he has plenty of time on his hands while he waits for his first case. That was until a young girl called Martha comes to him for help, she worked as a lady's maid for Short Sally and was the only witness to her murder. Martha is terrified that the killer will come after her next and begs P.K. to solve the case and keep her safe. P.K. is determined to do a good job on his first case to prove that he can make it as a Detective but when his witness goes missing things get a whole lot more complicated.

If you've read the first book you'll already know that P.K. is a young autistic child who has many foibles and eccentricities. He also has a lot of difficulty reading people and understanding their facial expressions which can lead to some amusing misunderstandings. I love P.K's outlook on life, he tries so hard to understand why people do the things they do but at the same time he makes no apologies for the way he sees things. In a lot of ways you could think of him as someone who is quite simple but just to survive in the Wild West as an orphan shows how smart he really is.

Caroline Lawrence does such a fantastic job of pulling you into the story and making it feel like you have stepped back in time, she includes so many little details that just add depth to P.K's world and I can't read these books without having a smile on my face. I'm not sure what age range these children's books are aimed at but can say without hesitation that as an adult I thoroughly enjoy reading them. Alongside P.K. we have been introduced to a great selection of characters and I particularly enjoy watching Poker Face Jace teaching P.K. the signs to look for when someone feeling a strong emotion. If you liked the first book then you'll love this one just as much and I really hope that we get to read more of P.K's adventures in the future.

Sean Harding says

Second entry in this series set in the old west and with a young detective is even better than the first, with a top notch story and great characters, with the best character far and away being the charming and elusive PK Pinkerton. A good read.

Beth Kemp says

Great story, told in an amazing voice. Strongly recommended for 10+

This book does a fabulous job of bringing the Wild West to modern kids without shying away from unpleasant details, at the same time not overloading them. Having P. K. narrate means that we get a child's eye view which is at once naive and realistic. There are shootings, men of extremely dubious morals and prostitutes in this story, set against a background of Civil War, slavery and crime. And yet, this is a children's book which I would happily read to/with my 8 yr old in a year or so. There is nothing grisly or gratuitous, P. K.'s matter-of-fact narration avoids any glorification or romanticisation of the less savoury aspects, and it's all done subtly enough for the younger readers to remain blissfully unaware of some of the detail.

P.K.'s voice is so compelling. I really haven't read another book like it. It's been compared to Mark Haddon's "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" because both narrators seem to be on the autism spectrum (P.K. refers to having a "thorn" which makes interpreting non-verbal cues difficult, and also means being touched is unwelcome), but there are key differences. I would say that Haddon's book is more 'about'

Christopher being autistic, whereas here it is just one aspect of P. K.'s character. Caroline Lawrence also uses P. K.'s naivety as a narrator to more humorous effect - this naivety coming as much from age as it does from the 'thorn'.

The plot works well as a mystery, with a satisfying conclusion which is set up effectively through the story. As with all good mysteries, there are subplots and side tracks to confound the reader as well as the detective. Historical accuracy is important to the author (she also wrote the Roman Mysteries, for which the Classical Association have honoured her with a prize), so you can be sure that kids will learn something of the US from the nineteenth century simply by immersing themselves in P.K.'s world for a while. I particularly enjoyed the insertion of Sam Clemens at the earliest stage of his journalistic career (later to write as Mark Twain).

Overall, there is much to commend in this book that makes it worthwhile for child readers. But they will want to read it - and should read it - because it truly is a cracking read that they can happily get lost in.

Rachel Hamilton says

If anyone wants a lesson in world-building, they can't get better than a Caroline Lawrence book.

Her Roman Mysteries are so well-crafted they're used as part of the 'Romans' curriculum in many junior schools, and her PK Pinkerton Mysteries paint an equally compelling portrait of the American West of the 1860s.

I read 'The Case of the Good Looking Corpse' on a warm afternoon in the United Arab Emirates, sitting on the terrace, gazing out over scrubland and scorched earth, and as I turned the pages I was there in that Wild West frontier town, with its prospectors, newspapermen, gunslingers and dancing girls. Caroline Lawrence recreates a society of people busy gambling, indulging 'gentlemen callers', and cheerfully murdering and racially abusing each other so skillfully that readers of all ages can access the details at a level which suits them.

This is largely due to the brilliant but naïve narrator, 12 year-old P.K Pinkerton, who spends the majority of the book 'beneath the shadow of the hangman's noose', desperately trying to solve the murder of Short Sally and convince the jury not to hang him by the neck until he's dead.

I'm a sucker for quirky fictional characters like PK, who help kids understand that it's cool to be unique and that having a different kind of brain can lead to better, more creative answers. (Another fantastic example is Ted, from Siobhan Dowd's 'The London Eye Mystery').

In today's world, PK would have a label and a diagnosis. In 1860s Nevada, he simply has Foibles, Eccentricities and Thorns – including a problem with reading faces and a dislike of being touched – all of which make for an original and frequently hilarious narrator.

There is also a special treat for book lovers in the subtle addition of the character of Sam Clements – whose role has a special significance for those familiar with Mark Twain. It is no understatement to say that I LOVED this book and wouldn't hesitate to give it 5 stars.

Ella Hansen says

If you like mystery or western this series is definitely for you. Even if you don't like either, it is well written and action packed and great for those who like amazing well thought out plot twists.

Cameron says

P.K. Pinkerton and the Petrified Man is set in the wild west in Virginia City. P.K. Pinkerton, an orphan twelve year old child, is recruited to find the murderer of Short Sally. P.K. finds that this will not be an easy task as many men look the same.

This book was a very easy read, about three hours, but it was very fun to read. It makes up for length in it's invigorating storyline. I would recommend this book to people who want a quick, entertaining read.

Cheesecake says

My daughter and I enjoyed this just as much as the first one. How often can you say that about a sequel??

Kalilah says

Really enjoyable read. I am liking this series a lot! P. K is such an interesting character. The mysteries are fun too.

Mrs.Karen says

Loved this one! It's a western mystery, something that I think will have good appeal to kids, especially boys. In 1862, after killing one desperado and ridding Virginia City of two others, twelve-year-old P.K. Pinkerton opens up a detective office and waits for a mystery to solve. One enters in the form of young Martha, a maid who witnesses her employer's murder. Afraid of being found by the murderer, Martha leaves before giving P.K. one small clue that makes no sense. Undaunted, P.K. carries on to gather evidence and more clues with the help of a card playing buddy named Poker Face Jace and a struggling newspaper reporter named Sam Clemens. Gunslingers, gamblers, doctors and lawyers all converge in to help P.K. solve the crime and open a window on a mystery of his own creating.

Westerns are not prevalent in kids literature, and most often when they are present, they are historical in nature. In 'Petrified Man', the author mixes history, mystery and the West and comes up with a story that will capture readers from the first page. This is the second book in the P.K. Pinkerton series and it is fairly easy to pick up the story line without having read the first book, although I suspect readers will be like me and want to read the first book when finishing this.

Zachary Rit says

P.K. Pinkerton and the Petrified Man is set in 1862 out in the wild west. It's the second book in the series and has thrilling shoot outs, mystery, and comedy. There's many reasons why this book is exciting and tells a great story beyond itself. P.K. Pinkerton is a 12 year orphan, and detective with asperger's, he has trouble reading people's faces and still a really good detective nonetheless.

It was mid-day in Virginia City, Nevada, and Pinkerton was encountered by a former slave girl named Martha. Martha asks for protection as in because she just seen a murder and the murderer is coming after her. A Couple chapters later and she comes up missing, nowhere to be found. Pinkerson thinks it might have been the Three Desperados who take her. So P.k. sets out on an adventure with Poker Face Jace around town and anywhere nearby to discover where she has been taken. Pinkerton is an orphan who did detecting to help out anyone/everyone in need of help. Poker Face Jace is an expert face reader who is also Pinkertons friend. Martha is a former slave whose employer Short Sally was just murdered in-front of her. The author is Caroline Lawrence, she's best known for mystery novels. She has countless other good books along with this one.

There's a good theme to this book "there's always justice to be done" whether it's good or bad. Throughout the entire book he did things no matter what it was to just to get clues or even answers to anywhere might the girl be. If that means breaking into an house and searching through things, or accidentally burning down a popular barn to the ground and almost getting hanged for it.

It's a really good book overall, but whenever he's not breaking into a house or burning down a farm it gets sluggish and boring. I had troubles just getting through some parts because of how much it lacked the content to keep me entertained. There's so many things about the book though that are great and kept making me want to read more.

Bottom line:

The book has character and really great points, but if you can handle low points and high points then I'd recommend it.

Lana Jackson says

1862 Virginia City. Twelve-year-old P.K. Pinkerton has just launched his detective business. His first client is the ten-year-old servant, Martha, of recently murdered Short Sally. Martha is hiding from the killer because she can identify him. P.K. must protect Martha's whereabouts during this investigation.

This is a delightful mystery with lots of action, bad guys and disguises. Poker Face Jace continues to teach P.K. how to read a person's body language, and P.K. is able to use these skills not only in his search for the murderer, but also to discern when Poker Face Jace is troubled about something.

P.K. is harboring a secret that is not revealed, but the reader can make a good guess. Also, the search for the killer and following of clues is written in such a way that allows the reader to participate in the elimination of suspects.

As in the first book of the series, this one also has a sprinkling of profanity that I wish was not included, not even in the interest of authenticity of time period. Since P.K. succumbs to repeating some of the profanity he hears, I feel this encourages a young reader to copy the protagonist. As a children's writer, I feel strongly about setting an example for young readers. An alternative would be creative expression replacements.

I like the glossary in the back of the book that defined historical references.

Victoria Hooper says

You know how there are certain authors whose books you feel sure you're going to enjoy, because you always do? Caroline Lawrence is one of those for me. She just gets stories. And this one didn't disappoint.

Pinky was a wonderful character in the first book and he/she continues to be a great narrator in this one. Pinky is a twelve-year-old, half-Sioux, autistic child living in the American Wild West in 1862. The first book had some deliberate confusion as to whether Pinky is a boy or a girl, which was worked into the plot in an interesting way. This one answers that question... at least, I think it does! For the sake of not giving away spoilers, I will refer to Pinky as a boy, the gender he/she is presented as at the beginning of the first book, and leave readers to find out for themselves. I think perhaps one of the best things about the gender mystery is that it *is* so hard to tell – Pinky's actions and thoughts don't give it away, despite the book being told in first person. This reminds us that boys and girls aren't that different at all, and that separating life into 'boy things' and 'girl things' can be really daft.

Pinky is learning more and more how to interact with people and what makes them tick, an essential skill for a private eye. Poor Pinky still has a lot of trouble while developing this skill, however, and it is constantly getting him into trouble. This, combined with a killer who is determined to stop the investigation at all costs, even if it means killing both Pinky and the witness, makes for a very exciting story that races at break-neck speed from start to finish. This book is extremely hard to put down!

Pinky sees the world in a very straight-forward, and sometimes slightly naive way. He always says exactly what he thinks, and Caroline Lawrence makes great use of the first person perspective to get this across. He's a fantastic character to see the world through, because he simply observes without judging. The author pulls no punches with the depiction of the Wild West world; there's murder and violence, guns, blood, angry mobs, desperados, drinking and gambling, opium dens, war, slavery, oppression, prejudice, racism, prostitution... everything that really existed at that time in history.

Pinky interacts with all this, and with all kinds of people throughout the story. In fact, the mystery itself revolves around the murder of a prostitute. At no point does Pinky ever question the victim's profession or lifestyle; it simply would not occur to him to do so. He also never reacts to anything with an attitude that might be typical of the time. He is hired by a runaway slave girl and immediately accepts the case. He shows equal amounts of respect to everyone, and when compiling a suspect list he does not consider a vicar any less likely to be a killer than another man. Pinky disguises himself in many different roles in order to carry out his investigation, which shows how the people around him react differently depending on his appearance.

Pinky's matter-of-fact perspective and tendency to treat everyone the same highlights how hypocritical everyone else's prejudices really are, as well as making Pinky a very likeable character. His very unbiased approach to the world also allows the reader to see the Wild West for what it was, through honest eyes, in

order to come to their own conclusions. This is a fantastic way to tell children about the past, as well as quite a unique approach to a detective story that is extremely effective.

This story has a more complex mystery than the first book, which was focussed instead on action and introducing the main characters. There's a good group of suspects and a variety of interesting motives that make for an intriguing story. It's also very possible for the readers to solve the mystery themselves, as no clues are hidden from them. This makes the book fun and interactive too. Pinky will often lay out the clues he has found so far and work through the situation logically, allowing the reader to do the same. There are some interesting observations about the complexity of human motivations. When Pinky does finally solve the mystery, he reveals the killer in a very dramatic ending that even manages to draw some pathos for the killer. This might be a children's book, but it's a lot deeper than many adult murder mysteries I've read.

This is a wonderful sequel to *The Case of the Deadly Desperados*, and possibly even better than the first book. It's fun and exciting, as well as educational. Children will learn a lot about life in America in the 1800s, as well as about people and their motivations, and about tolerance. It also has some great maps in the front that really bring the town to life! Can't wait for more from this series.

This review also appears on my blog.

Thank you to Caroline Lawrence for providing a review copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Tracy Terry says

Billed as a book for children, of what age range I can only hazard a guess (one site puts it as low as ages 5 to 9) though I'm pretty sure it must be for older children children aged 11+.

I don't know perhaps I'm out of touch as to just what is suitable reading material for this age range or perhaps I'm just shying away from them reading unpleasant details BUT there were several elements to this particular novel that concerned me various gruesome descriptions, men of fairly doubtful morals, the mention of prostitutes and what seemed like the continuous mention/pen and ink images of guns to name but a few.

Reading it as an adult though I loved the maps and the little sketches that headed each chapter and whilst I thought the plot was lacking a certain something, I thought the characters were fairly well written, the fact that the main character, P.K., was a 'half Indian' commendable, the fact that he had so many obsessions and foibles interesting.

What really annoyed me however was the author's constant use '&' instead of the word 'and'. Trendy? Making a statement? I don't know BUT I think that in the battle for good grammar, punctuation and spelling the author did no favours to children in overusing what I consider a sloppy alternative.

The second book in a series from an acclaimed author, though I haven't read the first instalment myself I know many consider this, if anything, a better read.

Jeannette says

A wonderful story with a wonderful character by a wonderful author. MY full review is here:
<http://www.jetowey.com/2012/06/case-o...>
