

Excerpt from *Saxxons in Witherston* (Black Opal Books, 2019) by Betty Jean Craige

Jake and Mev, with Tracker in the patrol car's back seat, stopped at 4200 West Bank Road where a PRIVATE PROPERTY – KEEP OUT sign had been nailed to the mailbox post. They turned right onto the steep driveway that took them down to the cabin.

Jake got out of the car.

"Stay here till I signal you, Mev," Jake said. "Tracker, come with me."

Tracker accompanied Jake up the porch steps to the front door, which swung open when Jake touched the knob.

"Anybody home?" Mev heard Jake called out. "This is Chief McCoy."

Jake and Tracker disappeared into the cabin.

Then Jake reappeared and beckoned to Mev. "Nobody's here. Let's look around back."

Tracker, with his nose to the ground, led them past a battered black Dodge Ram with a Confederate flag bumper sticker, past the bloodied body of a large male puppy, to the outhouse, where he pawed the door and commenced to howl.

"Are you here, Crockett Wood?" Jake knocked on the door.

"Sheesh," Mev said. "Smells like death!"

Jake knocked again. He tried to open the door, but it had been bolted. Then he peered through the crescent moon cut-out.

"Christ! There's a dead man sitting on the john!"

With a screwdriver Jake pried the wood door open. A thin man with unkempt white hair and grizzled beard, his jeans around his knees and his white T-shirt stained with blood, tumbled out.

"Oh, my god! He was shot!"

"Could be suicide. But who'd kill himself in an outhouse?" Jake looked inside. "I don't see a gun."

"He may have been shot through the moon."

"Must have been."

"There are no tracks."

"So he was shot before the storm."

"Rigor mortis hasn't left his body," Mev said. "He died within the last thirty hours."

"From the looks of it I'd guess yesterday morning, maybe twenty-four hours ago, or around that."

"If this is Crockett Wood he looks older than sixty-five."