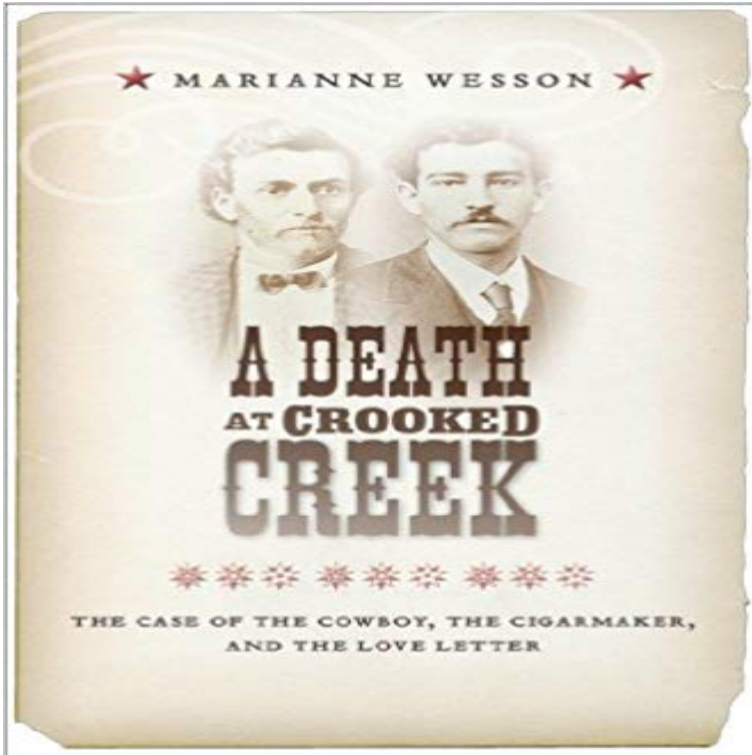


A Death at Crooked Creek: The Case of the Cowboy, the Cigarmaker, and the Love Letter



This is an extraordinary and ground-breaking book, a wonderfully creative mix of fact and theory, imagination and drama. Anyone with an interest in law, history, or, for that matter, great storytelling will fall in love with *A Death at Crooked Creek*. The startling origin of the complex intention exception to the hearsay evidence rule becomes canvas on which a grand and marvelously detailed tale is told. This is modern narrative at its best: a marriage of spectacular writing and hard, documented truth presented by a brilliant author who doubles as a gifted and fastidious legal scholar and historian. Andrew Popper, American University One winter night in 1879, at a lonely Kansas campsite near Crooked Creek, a man was shot to death. The dead man's traveling companion identified him as John Hillmon, a cowboy from Lawrence who had been attempting to carve out a life on the blustery prairie. The case might have been soon forgotten and the apparent widow, Sallie Hillmon, left to mourn except for the \$25,000 life insurance policies Hillmon had taken out shortly before his departure. The insurance companies refused to pay on the policies, claiming that the dead man was not John Hillmon, and Sallie was forced to take them to court in a case that would reach the Supreme Court twice. The companies' case rested on a crucial piece of evidence: a faded love letter written by a disappeared cigarmaker, declaring his intent to travel westward with a man named Hillmon. In *A Death at Crooked Creek*, Marianne Wesson re-examines the long-neglected evidence in the case of the Kansas cowboy and his wife, recreating the court scenes that led to a significant Supreme Court ruling on the admissibility of hearsay evidence. Wesson employs modern forensic methods to examine the body of the dead man, attempting to determine his true identity and finally put this fascinating mystery to

rest. This engaging and vividly imagined work combines the drama, intrigue, and emotion of excellent storytelling with cutting-edge forensic investigation techniques and legal theory. Wesson superbly imagined A Death at Crooked Creek will have general readers, history buffs, and legal scholars alike wondering whether history, and the Justices, may have misunderstood altogether the events at that bleak winter campsite.

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