

Murder at Jamestown

Chapter Eleven: Remember

Jamestowne Colony, 1610

He lay on the ground, rocking himself side to side. His eyes were squeezed shut, and his body shuddered. Next to him on the cellar floor was a small bone, so small. Almost elfin. It was burned at one end and bore marks along its length that attested to recent butchering.

He couldn't bear to look at it.

His belly ached. It had ached for days and days, and for weeks and longer. All he had thought about for so long had been filling it, filling his belly. He had dreamed of leaving their scanty protection inside the fort to hunt, but his fear of the natives had been even greater than his gnawing belly.

And eventually, he had been too weak to even crawl to the door to relieve himself.

Getting to the cellar had been an ordeal. He had more fallen than climbed down the hole into the raw earthen space beneath the cabin that passed for a home. He had lain there for some time, he didn't know how long. There was no day or night in that place.

He felt like everything was night now.

She had already been there, he told himself. She had fallen through the floor and landed hard. He had heard her cries, but they were weak and so was he. He could not help her. No one could help her. No one would help either one of them.

He had been sure he would die there.

Her cries had grown weaker, over time. She had whimpered for a while. It seemed like years she had whimpered. His own voice had risen in his throat, cracked and raspy, and he had echoed the sounds she was making. They had cried out wordlessly for mercy together, a macabre opera played out in the dirt.

And then her whimpers had ceased. And he had wept dry tears, because there was nothing left inside him to make tears or to make sound. He was an empty wineskin, nothing but bones covered by taut leather, no life left in him.

No life left in her.

But she had been plump once.

And that was when he thought of it. Not him alone, his friend who lay just outside the door and too weak to come in, they had thought of it together.

Hadn't they? Had they both had the idea? Or had it been his alone?

They couldn't hunt. And they were dying.

But she was already dead.

When he awoke on the floor of the cellar, she was there, still warm. Not breathing. Surely not breathing.

His knife had lain in his boot for these weeks with no meat to cut.

Dear God, he only wanted to live.

Later, he couldn't bear to look at the bones. His belly no longer ached, and he wept, this time fat salty tears of shame. He wasn't hungry, but he was empty empty empty.

Jamestown, Present Day

Kitty and Bryan stared. Seeing blood on the carpeted floor had been an anxious moment, but this was nauseating. Where Hank lay, he

appeared to be a mannequin: his arms and legs were at angles, but his face was unmarred and he appeared to be a lifeless dummy rather than a corpse.

This body, on the other hand. It was stiff and remained in the awkward pose it had formed when stuffed inside the copier--because surely it was stuffed inside, nothing about this seemed like a grown man who had played hide and seek before dying an accidental death. There was blood everywhere, on the body's head and hands, and what Kitty could see of his face where it was covered with the stiffened arms.

Bryan was retching into the wastebasket behind her. Kitty had to admit that she was sorely tempted to do the same.

"Bryan," she said as kindly as she could. "Do you know him?"

Bryan nodded miserably. "Marty Ganguly," he said with an air of a man delivering unwanted news.

The knot in Kitty's gut tightened. She'd already known, really, but hearing Bryan identify the body was a confirmation of her fears. It also meant that some of the pieces were coming together.

Kitty walked quickly over to the cabinets on the opposite side of the room and rummaged inside until she came out with a pair of latex gloves from a box at the back. Slipping these one, she made her way

back to the copier. The task she was undertaking required more protection than wrapping her hands in the tail of her shirt.

With her fingertips covered to prevent leaving--or damaging--any evidence, Kitty reached past the frozen elbow and pulled back Marty Ganguly's lower lip to reveal his inner jawline.

The left molar was missing, and a bloody gap was left in its place.

"Well, that answers that question," Kitty said solemnly. Bryan fumbled in a pile of paper towels and cleaned his face as she pretended not to notice. He silently moved the waste basket to the hallway out of sight before coming back to join her. They gazed wordlessly down at the remains of Mr. Ganguly.

"We should tell...I mean, I guess we should tell Greg?" Bryan said uncertainly.

Kitty paused, then nodded silently. Telling Greg made sense: technically, he was the highest ranking staff member on site, and he would therefore be nominally responsible for everything that had been going on this long, long day. No wonder he had blown his cool when they'd discovered Hank earlier. This was going to send a tightly-wound guy like him over the edge, Kitty was sure.

She sighed, then looked sideways at Bryan. "You want to go get

him?"

Bryan was still green, and was clearly happy for any excuse to leave the room. He was out the door like a shot before Kitty had even finished talking.

The tooth. So it had been Marty's after all. But it had ended up outside, where it was discovered as if it were an artifact. In the soil that Hank and Brandon had been sifting.

But Marty's body was here, in the copy room. Folded up like a rag doll and shoved inside a copy machine.

Because Kitty had zero doubt that this body had been deliberately placed here. More to the point, she was sure that it was placed here before Hank was killed. There were no flower petals on Marty's shoes or body--for him to have been placed in the copier after Hank would mean that either Marty or the killer would have needed to navigate through TWO sets of flower petals in order to squeeze Marty into the machine, but there wasn't a single one anywhere on him.

In addition, Hank's body had been shoved behind the copier, which was shut so tight that Kitty had struggled to pop the back panel off to free Ganguly. Hank's body must have placed pressure on the panel and made it stick tight, possibly with the adhesive effects of Marty's congealing blood.

Even Kitty blanched a little at that gruesome thought.

If Hank had been killed first, the panel wouldn't have been so tight. And some of Marty's blood would likely have gotten on the younger man's body. No, Kitty was quite certain that Marty had been killed first, stuffed inside the copier, and then Hank had been killed later.

And the letterhead? Hank had been clutching a scrap of Magnolia letterhead in his fingers when they'd found his body. It was what sent Kitty looking for Marty in the first place. But how did that figure into Marty's death?

Not to mention the two sets of flowers. Ruth had made it seem as though Stella might be guilty of killing Hank, but that seemed so unlikely. The girl was clearly besotted with Hank, and while he hadn't seemed to return her affection in equal measure, by every account he was an exceedingly kind boy who had gone out of his way to be gentle with her infatuation. Kitty didn't really think Stella was a viable suspect

Except. Hadn't Stella nearly attacked Brandon? Really, she HAD attacked him, and with some measure of skill, too. Though she be but little, Shakespeare had said. Kitty had a sneaking suspicion that in a street fight, Stella might be a good one to have on your side--rather than against you.

Maybe she shouldn't count the small girl out just yet.

Bryan's voice came down the hall toward her as she stood with arms crossed over her midsection and gazed down on Marty Ganguly's tragic body. It shook her from her recitation of the facts-to-date, less because he was returning than because of the tone of his voice. Bryan was, uncharacteristically, very angry.

"I don't especially give a crap, GREG," he was saying. "If you want to be the guy in charge, then the buck stops with you."

The volume and emotion in Bryan's voice were both unusually high, but even that didn't surprise Kitty as much as his direct disagreement with an authority figure. Bryan must be pretty rattled to abandon his core guiding principle, namely to keep himself as invisible as possible.

Greg was replying dismissively, so at least he hadn't been changed too dramatically by this experience. "The buck stops with me? Are you being serious right now? This isn't some garbage novel your aunt wrote on her way to work, Brown. There's no 'buck' and I do NOT have to be responsible for every crisis that happens around here."

By this time, the two men had rounded the corner and stopped dead at the doorway to the copy room. Greg stopped talking abruptly, and neither he nor Bryan appeared to be in any hurry at all to enter. Or help.

Greg's eyes were massive, huge saucers with the entire iris exposed and standing starkly against the whites. His face was equally icy, and had gone pallid almost instantly when he entered the room. Kitty noticed he was sweating when he reached up a shaking hand to wipe his upper lip; it continued over his face until it brushed through his hair, continuing along until it gripped the back of his neck tightly, pulling the skin taut and painfully reddened from the pressure.

"Greg," Kitty said, as softly as she could and still be firm.

For a split, ridiculous second, Kitty thought Bryan had stuck a pin in Greg's backside. The usually composed and impeccably dressed director was not only shaking and sweaty, but when she said his name, he jumped as though bitten. He could barely tear his eyes away from Marty's body, lying curled and stiff on the floor at Kitty's feet. Other than opening the panel on the back of the copier to find the body in the first place, Kitty had left it where it fell on its own, and worked not to step too near it.

Greg was clearly deeply affected, but Kitty couldn't tell by what. Appalled? Fearful? Disgusted? Any of these seemed like they played across his face in those first few seconds.

"Greg," Kitty repeated. "Do you know who this is?"

He stared without moving. His hand still gripped the back of his neck. Bryan, seeming to soften after his bout of anger and showing

far more compassion than Kitty would ever have mustered for Greg, watched the smaller man reach outside the door and bring the waste basket back in, just in case it was needed. Greg's face certainly made that seem like a wise move.

"Greg," Kitty said more firmly. "Do you recognize this man?"

Greg nodded, slowly and dumbly. His hand massaged the back of his neck unconsciously, but as he became aware of it, Greg seemed to shake himself and regain some measure of composure. He put his hand mock-casually back in his pants pocket, and gestured with the other toward the corpse on the floor.

"He's...he's the accountant, right? The one who was investigating the Trust."

Kitty replied, "Is he? I've never met him."

Greg's usual asperity seemed to return. "And why would you? There was no reason for him to interact with anyone who wasn't at the highest level of administration."

This last comment seemed to be aimed at Bryan, even though Greg was directing his words toward Kitty--and his gaze at the body on the floor.

"Which would mean you, right?" Kitty asked.

"Yes, exactly."

"And what was your relationship?"

Greg seemed irritated, and made a small tsk-ing noise. “What does that even mean?”

Kitty raised her eyebrows in mild surprise. “Just...what I said. What was your relationship with the accountant?”

“Do you mean a personal relationship?” Greg asked, mild defensiveness in his voice.

Kitty’s eyebrows went up even higher. “I didn’t mean that, but does that mean you had a personal relationship?”

“No,” Greg fairly sneered. “I did not.”

“So then what was your relationship?”

Greg’s face told Kitty he was already tired of answering questions. “I wouldn’t even call it a relationship. He was the accountant hired to investigate Preservation Virginia, I am an executive on the staff of Preservation Virginia, we interacted in the course of his investigation and that was all.”

He shrugged slightly.

“Did you like him?”

This question seemed to surprise Greg. “Who cares?”

“I would have thought you would care, Greg,” Kitty replied rapid-fire, “since he was killed in your facility while investigating your organization with you on site.”

This seemed to shake Greg again, and he dialed back on his

attitude. “Well. Yes.”

“So did you? Like him?”

Greg pursed his lips and seemed to be avoiding rolling his eyes, perhaps out of respect for the dead--or perhaps out of fear of Kitty’s wrath.

“There wasn’t much to like,” he told her.

“What does that mean?”

“Dr. Campbell,” Greg told her. “This guy...”

He gestured mutely at the body on the ground between their feet. Bryan made a face like he might need the waste basket again himself.

Greg continued, “This guy wore short sleeve work shirts with a tie. A clip on. He was a low-level government type who only cared about keeping his rows and columns all lined up.”

“So...he was careful?” Kitty probed.

Greg scoffed. “He was more than careful. He was the rule-followingest rule follower you’ve ever met. Never met a cut corner he didn’t want to set right. Never met a missing piece of paper he didn’t want to chase down--beware to all receipts, that’s all I can say. That man was going to make it his mission to find every last one.”

Kitty nodded. That tracked with what she’d learned from Bryan.

“And you’re not a fan of rule followers, I guess?”

A cunning look came over Greg’s face. “Listen, Campbell. If

you're good enough at what you do, then you know that some rules can be broken and it doesn't make a difference--and some rules can be broken and it makes ALL the difference."

"And you're that good at your job?"

Greg was smug. "Some might say that, yes."

"Do you think you take risks?" she asked him.

Greg's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "What do you mean by that?"

Now it was Kitty's turn to shrug. "Just what I asked. You said Mr. Ganguly here was very careful, do you think you take risks?"

Suddenly Greg's face relaxed and he looked smug again. He started to cross his arms over his chest, and then shoved both hands into his pockets like a yachtsman on the beach, rocking back and forth on his heels as he spoke.

"I know what this is," he told her. "This is Brandon."

"What's Brandon?" Bryan piped in from where he hovered in the doorway, almost too loudly.

Greg let out a laugh that was more of a snort. "Exactly. Brandon has been talking smack about me again, right? Punk."

"You think he's a punk?" Kitty asked.

"Doesn't matter how much money his daddy has, he's a punk," Greg told her emphatically. "That kid just wants one thing: to not have

to answer to anyone. He'll lie, or fight, or charm you and convince you of what he wants you to think, just to smooth the path in front of him."

Kitty was surprised at this speech from Greg. "I didn't think you bothered to get to know the students very well, Greg."

"Brandon is one of those people, Dr. Campbell, who makes sure you know who they are," Greg said. "He grew up rich, and he's assuming he'll always be rich, and as far as he knows, there are only two ways to get anything: you charm it out of people or you bully it out of them."

"That's been your experience with Brandon, too?"

"Let's just say he and I don't see eye to eye," was the response.

Kitty glanced back down at Marty Ganguly, frozen into his fetal position on the floor, his blood coating the interior of the copy machine.

"Brandon said you like to take risks, did that lead to conflict with Marty?"

Greg didn't seem ready to let the topic of Brandon go, however. "Everyone here thinks he's so great, right?"

"I don't," Bryan said quietly.

Greg glanced idly over his shoulder and barely broke in his speech. "But did you see him with Stella earlier? I thought those two were going to have a cage match right here, over a dead body."

His face was almost gleeful at the prospect.

“And her!” Greg went on. “She’s the most ridiculous human! Pining away over some mousy kid on the crew who was never going to go for her. That Hank, I mean, he and Marty were a real pair, couple of rule following blowhards.”

“You didn’t like either of them?”

“I don’t like any of them,” Greg fairly spat at her. “And if you ask me, tiny or not, that Stella could be the one who did...who did...this thing.”

He gestured at their feet and once again his face was pallid and drawn, almost as if in his vitriolic monologue he had forgotten the circumstances that had brought him to this room.

Bryan pushed the waste basket not-so-subtly closer to Greg with his foot.

“You think Stella killed...both of them?” Kitty was startled to realize that was what Greg was implying.

“You bet she could have,” Greg told her, looking ill.

“That tiny thing, all by herself?” Bryan looked equally startled by Greg’s statement.

“With Ruth’s help, absolutely,” Greg told them firmly, working to recover himself.

Kitty and Bryan looked at one another, eyes wide.

“I mean,” Bryan said slowly. “Ruth can be really mean.”

Greg leaped on this statement and ran with it. “Not just mean, manipulative. Have you seen how she works the crew, how she mothers them to make them feel safe and secure then gets them to share all their secrets with her?”

Greg was looking intensely at Kitty as he told her this. Bryan’s head was cocked to one side and seemed to nod in agreement.

“And the way she is with Stella!” Greg fairly crowed. “That poor kid would do anything the old lady said, just to get more attention. I bet the two of them could have done this together, for sure.”

“How?”

“What?” Greg asked dumbly.

“How?” Kitty repeated. “How would they have done that?”

Greg looked around wildly, taking his hands out of his pockets and gesturing helplessly. Kitty noticed that one sleeve was rolled up but the other was buttoned tightly at the wrist.

“I don’t know! Whacked them over the head, whatever! We should have the police here to figure that out, not a bunch of amateurs!”

“They’ll be here soon enough,” Kitty told him.

She looked at Bryan again. “But I think if we don’t figure out who killed these men before they get here, that the wrong person is going to jail for a long, long time.”