

Murder at Jamestown

Chapter Thirteen: First The Pistol

Kitty yanked back, hard, on the door to the Archaerium. And promptly flew forward into the glass, smacking her face on the door-frame. She held on to the handle more out of surprise than anything else, and realized she'd expected the door to be unlocked.

Of course it wasn't unlocked. It was barely 6 am, dawn breaking over the horizon. Birds were beginning to sing in the branches of the trees overhanging the river, and the police would arrive any moment.

She needed to get inside the building.

She pulled back hard on the handle again, making a loud clanging sound. She rattled the door in its frame, frustrated, peering down the dark hallway to see if she could spot a light inside.

Out of the gloom came Bryan, racing down the hall, his right leg slipping out from under him on the slick tile. He skidded to a stop and snapped the deadbolt open on the door.

Kitty burst through and pushed past him and called over her shoulder, "Bryan, come on!"

He looked confused and frozen in the morning light filtering at a steep angle through the door. He held his hands out to his sides, as if uncertain what to do, but as Kitty turned and raced down the hallway from which he had just emerged, he raised and lowered his arms as if surrendering to confusion and followed after her.

Kitty dashed into the copier room. Standing on the threshold, she scanned the details of the area: the copier pulled away from the wall where they'd discovered Ganguly's body; Hank's legs extending out beyond the cramped space where the machine had once stood; the flower petals all across the carpet. Mentally, she tallied the thoughts she'd had while over the well, adding up the pieces to see if they fit.

Finishing the puzzle. Picking the lock.

Her gut clenched and she felt the rush of satisfaction she'd experienced when that office door had popped open beneath her fingers, and the cold breath of air conditioning had caressed her cheek earlier in the evening. It was the satisfaction of gaining access, finding an answer, temporarily taking control.

She knew she knew the answer now.

"I need everyone here, now," she said to Bryan, with perhaps

more authority than she'd intended. He jumped at the sound of her voice.

He stammered, "Ev..everyone?"

Kitty took a deep breath, then spoke as gently as she could with the adrenaline coursing through her veins. "Yes. Bryan, everyone. Greg was right, this is a job for the police. But they have to arrest the right person, and I know who that is. Bring the others here, I have a few last questions to ask and then I'll know for sure."

Bryan nodded mutely, looked briefly over her shoulder into the room and just as quickly averted his eyes, then took off in an awkward lope down the perpendicular corridor to collect the other crew members from the graduate carrell.

Kitty paced in a circle in the hallway. One night? Was that all it had been? It felt more like a year. She had stopped and started and stopped again so many times, asking herself why she felt so compelled to dig into this gruesome situation instead of just leaving it alone.

Like she had asked herself so many times why she felt compelled to dig into the ground to unearth the past. Like she had asked herself why she picked locks just to feel the air brush against her cheek.

Her circle was interrupted by the suddenly loud sound of feet moving en masse down the hall. The crew were on their way.

With a little self-consciousness, Kitty turned to face them, squaring her shoulders and standing firm in the light spilling from the copier room doorway. She was blocking the entrance, deliberately--she had been telling Bryan the truth, she did have a few last questions to ask before she was totally sure. But in no event was she going to let anyone disturb the scene before she could prove what she thought she knew.

Five sets of eyes looked back at her: Brandon, tall and muscled, with his haughty air and watchful eyes; Greg, seemingly indifferent and irritated; Ruth, matronly and clucking like a hen; Stella, nervous and nibbling her nails while leaning toward Ruth; and Bryan, staring hard at Kitty like he desperately needed her to have the answers.

She took one glance back into the copier room, then looked back at all of them, confident in what she knew.

"Hank and Marty Ganguly were murdered," she told them.

"Yeah, duh," said Brandon from where he towered over the others.

Kitty nodded, but didn't crack a smile.

"We found Hank first, behind the copy machine," she continued.

Brandon rolled his eyes, showing impatience. Kitty ignored him.

"It would have been tempting to think that Hank was killed

first,” Kitty went on. “We found him first, so as far as we knew, he was the only victim.”

She saw Bryan wince at the word. It had been so easy this far to pretend that it was all a bad dream, that there was no “victim,” but saying it aloud made it all too real.

“But there was another victim: Marty Ganguly, the accountant,” Kitty added.

They all looked back at her numbly. Ruth put her arm around Stella, who was weeping silently.

Kitty took a deep breath. “Dr. Brown and I have spent this long, long night thinking through what happened, how it happened, but also WHY it happened. Because there is no reason that I can think of that both these people would have been killed, nothing that connects them to one another.”

She nodded to herself. “But there was: the killer. The killer IS the connection between these two, that and the simple fact that both of them wanted to do the right thing.

“Marty Ganguly was a forensic accountant. He was sent here by Preservation Virginia because someone was stealing funds from them. Embezzling, if you want to get specific.”

The assembled crew all blinked back at her, looks of confusion or

surprise on their faces.

“We checked the files in the lab. Marty Ganguly was investigating the embezzlement of funds from the organization and I believe he knew who it was. I think that’s what got him killed.”

Ruth swiveled her head to look at Bryan, then turned back to Kitty.

“But, Dr. Campbell,” she said, “none of the crew could have done that, could they? It would have had to be someone in charge.”

Brandon piped up, “Yeah, someone like you, right? So maybe the cat was guarding the henhouse, or whatever?”

Kitty shook her head at both of them. “Not necessarily. All of us have been here for most of the summer. Each of you has worked in the field as part of field school, but you’ve also each run errands for Dr. Brown or for me, and that included carrying documents or delivering communication between the field school and Preservation Virginia. Embezzlement can be, in lots of cases, just a corporate version of identity theft. It can be stealing bank account numbers to make withdrawals or setting up false businesses to collect on legitimate invoices, just in your pocket instead of the organization.

“So it didn’t have to be someone in charge--that would have been easier, for me anyway. Then there would have been fewer ques-

tions to ask. But no, anyone here could have been stealing from the organization, and Marty Ganguly knew about it. So did Hank.”

“Wait, how did Hank know?” Stella asked, snapping her head up and blinking eyes that were red and puffy from tears.

“Hank saw it happen,” Kitty told her.

This brought a vocal reaction from the entire group as they all exclaimed and looked at one another in surprise.

Kitty held out her palms to calm them down.

“Hank had a piece of paper in his hand when we found him. A small scrap of letterhead with a magnolia blossom on the top. The corporate logo of Marty’s accountancy firm. We didn’t find any of that letterhead anywhere else in the lab, only in the files that Marty was handling as part of his investigation. Hank couldn’t have just picked it up.”

“Really? Not even in the copy room?” Greg sneered.

Kitty shook her head. “Hank was, as even you said, Greg, an impeccably honest and forthright young man. Had he discovered a sensitive document in the copy room, he would have turned it over. If it was clutched, ripped into pieces, in his hand--well, that implies it was taken from him by force before he had the chance to turn it in. It implies that he didn’t have time to turn it over. So even if he did find it in the copy room, Greg, he knew what was on it.

“But I don’t think he just found it. I think he discovered it--

which is a little different. I think Hank stumbled upon Marty’s murder, and that’s what got him killed.”

At this, Stella swooned slightly into Ruth’s arms. Everyone leaned toward her slightly out of concern, except Brandon, who rolled his eyes again.

When it was clear that Stella was going to be alright, they turned back to Kitty, who continued, watching each of them closely.

“Hank’s body was covered in two types of flowers: rue, and pansies. At least, it seemed to be covered, but when I looked more closely, I could tell it wasn’t, actually.”

Five sets of eyes swiveled toward the copy room door, but they all seemed to be trying not to let on.

“Hank was lying on TOP of the rue flowers. The pansies are on top of Hank.”

Brandon clicked his tongue softly and nodded. “Superimposition.”

Kitty nodded. “Exactly.”

Ruth drew her eyebrows together and started to ask a question, but Kitty cut her off.

“If the lowest layer in an excavated unit is the oldest, Ruth, then what does it mean that Hank was on top of the rue flowers but the pansies were on top of him?”

Ruth blinked slowly, then answered quietly as though from a far distance: “That the rue flowers were already there when Hank fell down. And the pansies were thrown on top of him after he was dead.”

Kitty nodded, not unlike a professor hearing an oral report.

“That’s right. And that’s what tipped me off. That, and the well.”

Now Bryan was the one to frown in confusion. “Kitty..”

“Just now, I was outside, right?” she said, partly to Bryan but also to the group as a whole. “I was...standing near the well. And thinking about the artifacts that have come out of it, the story they tell. Like the pistol, and the halberd.”

Brandon laughed. “Man, that dude was having a rotten day. First he loses his gun, then he tries to fish it out with his spear, then he loses the spear, too?? I mean, how much worse can it get??”

Kitty nodded firmly. “Exactly, Brandon. That’s when it all came together for me. What must it have been like for him, this man whose life was changed in a single afternoon by losing the two things most important to him? And then I started thinking about how he would never have dropped the halberd into the well unless he’d already lost the pistol.

“That pistol was the most valuable thing to a soldier in Jamestown at that time. Probably the most valuable thing to any of the settlers, and nearly impossible to replace. What must it have felt like to him to know it was right in front of him, but he couldn’t just get it back,

couldn’t un-do what he’d done?”

“And the desperation he must have felt. To take his halberd, which was issued when he became a soldier and was his responsibility to keep safe, to take that and reshape it and try to use it as a fishhook--how desperate must he have been? How hopeless?”

The crew seemed to sense that these were rhetorical questions, because none of them responded.

“That describes our killer, too. Desperate. Wishing they could go back in time, wishing they could un-do what they’d done in the heat of the moment, but helpless to do that.”

Stella shook her head, “I don’t understand. How could you possibly know that?”

“The language of flowers,” Bryan said softly.

“The language of flowers,” Kitty repeated. “Rue, in the language of flowers, means regret. I think Marty Ganguly was killed when he confronted the embezzler, and they immediately felt guilty for it. Horribly, horribly guilty. Guilty enough to try and leave a message that they regretted what had happened. And that may have been what got them caught.”

“By you?” Ruth asked.

Kitty shook her head. “By Hank.”

At this, Stella’s tears started flowing again.

“People who embezzle from a company have a pretty specific profile, actually,” Kitty told her. “They tend to take risks they shouldn’t take, spend money they don’t have. A risk-taker like that, someone who wants to live on the edge and steal from a large organization, someone like that is very likely to react in the moment and regret it at leisure.

“Which is when our killer came back. Marty was stuffed in that copier very soon after he died--there was no blood outside the machine, just inside, and his body was clearly not stiff when he was stuffed in.”

Bryan winced at this description.

“So the killer immediately leaped into action, but once the door was closed, they felt horribly guilty. And came back to leave the flowers.”

“Why would someone do something stupid like that?” Brandon asked, his voice exasperated. “Leave flowers all over a room used by literally everyone in the building? How would that NOT draw attention to the body, which they would have been trying to hide?”

“I wondered that, too,” Kitty agreed. But look where we found them: under Hank’s body, which was between the copier and the wall. The killer left the flowers where the machine would have covered them up once it was rolled back into place.”

“So it was a girl,” Brandon told her with confidence.

Kitty blinked. “What makes you say that?”

“Dude,” he scoffed. “Only a girl would go to that kind of trouble.

To leave flowers? Come on.”

Kitty shook her head. “I don’t know about that. It’s only in recent history that flowers have been more associated with women. More importantly, it would take some physical strength to heave Marty’s body into the copier.”

“Stella’s strong,” Greg pointed out.

Kitty nodded. “She is, we saw that. I don’t think you, Ruth, have the physical strength to do it, though.”

Ruth blushed.

“But that doesn’t mean you’re not guilty,” Kitty said.

Cries came from the group as they all looked at Ruth. Stella backed away from her mother hen’s arms.

“Hank’s body was on top of the rue flowers. That means he arrived after the killer threw out the flowers but before they had time to put the copier back in place. I think Hank’s murder was an accident, too, but I think Ruth has known about it much longer than she is letting on. Haven’t you, Ruth?”

All eyes turned toward the older woman.

Ruth’s face was white as a sheet, and she looked back at Kitty with an almost panicky expression.

“I...” she began, but the words drifted off into an inaudible whisper.

Stella let out a muffled scream, her hand over her mouth, shaking her head from side to side.

“Wait, YOU?” Brandon exclaimed.

Ruth looked between them, and then around at all the others as they moved slowly away from her.

“No, no, I didn’t! I didn’t kill him! I didn’t!”

“But she just said...” Greg started, angrily pointing at Kitty but with his eyes locked firmly on Ruth. Ruth held his gaze, her own face pleading.

“You did this,” Greg continued, his eyes boring holes into Ruth’s, not looking at anyone else. “You killed them and left them there, this is all your fault!”

“Ruth didn’t do this. She’s not the killer,” Kitty said calmly.

All eyes turned toward Kitty then, but Greg’s were the wildest and fiercest of all.

“But Ruth knows who did. Because she was the one who discovered Hank’s body,” Kitty told them.

Brandon held out both hands and shook his head as if to clear it. “Ugh, I’m so sick of this. We’re exhausted and this whole night has been crap. Just tell us what happened.”

“She’s right,” Ruth began, her voice and hands shaking as she looked from one to another with pleading in her features. “I found him,

I found Hank, but it was earlier, a lot earlier than I told anyone because I was going to the copy room to get more gloves, you know how we never seem to have enough gloves in the lab, and I knew there was another box in there so I thought, Ruth, I thought, you just take yourself down to that copy room and you get more and then we’ll be all set!”

For a moment her face regained its bright eagerness, but the response she received as she looked around extinguished it immediately.

“So...well...and then I was in the copy room,” she continued, seemingly trying to capture her train of thought again. “And there he was.”

Her voice broke and her lips trembled, and Kitty saw what might have been the first tears she had witnessed spill from Ruth’s eyes.

“He looked so broken,” Ruth whispered. “And I just knew it was an accident, I just knew it, he was such a sweet boy, no one would ever kill him on purpose, and I thought to myself, I thought, well, now, Ruth, if Hank and Dr. Wood love each other, then that’s a fine thing, that’s a fine thing indeed, because love is the most important thing in this world. And I know the rest of the world might not agree but I thought it should be celebrated, having someone to love, and so maybe what happened was that they’d had a fight, and there had been an accident, and that Hank wasn’t there on purpose, and if that horrible thing had happened already, then why stir it up? My mama always said if you stir

up cow pies, it makes a stink, so I thought, well, now, let's just leave it be because poor Dr. Wood already has his heart broken from losing Hank and now he's going to go to jail, too?"

Every face except Kitty's was stunned. Brandon's mouth was working soundlessly as if attempting to make sense come out, and his head moved slowly from left to right in disbelief.

"Ruth, are you saying you found Hank and covered it up because you wanted to keep Dr. Wood from getting into trouble?" Stella asked in a tiny voice.

Ruth nodded.

"For killing him?" Brandon asked in a much louder voice, still riddled with disbelief.

"I just thought...he was already dead..." Ruth allowed her voice to trail away.

"You thought he was my lover?" Greg demanded, his tone outraged.

Ruth gave a slight shrug to her shoulders.

"And you added the pansies, didn't you, Ruth? To misdirect everyone's attention to Stella?" Kitty asked.

"You did what?" Now it was Stella's turn to be outraged.

Ruth shrugged again, an apologetic and confused look on her face.

"So it wasn't Stella?" Bryan asked. Kitty could see him silently ruling out suspects in the small circle.

Kitty shook her head.

"It was you," she said.

Bryan's eyebrows shot up.

Kitty swiveled her head and said, "Greg."

Greg looked back at her, still outraged.

"Marty caught you embezzling. You're the risk taker, you like nice things you can't afford. Brandon tipped us off to just how much you're spending on your wardrobe alone. Marty found out about it, and he confronted you. What did he have to worry about, from a pencil-pushing administrator, right? But you pushed more than a pencil."

Greg's mouth was working, his lower jaw moving front and back. His face was flushed with rage.

"You hit him, and when you realized what you'd done, you shoved him in the nearest hiding place you could find: the copier."

Greg stared, the whites of his eyes showing all around.

"But then came Hank, right, Greg?" Kitty asked. "Was it while you were adding the rue flowers? Did you think maybe it would make you feel better, but also turn attention away from you when he was inevitably discovered? Hank must have been horrified. He didn't just find Marty's body, he found out what you'd been doing. And you killed him

for it.”

“I didn’t know about that other man, I swear it, I just thought it was a lover’s quarrel and it got out of hand and that I was helping, because all I ever want to do is help, and I...” Ruth stammered in a hoarse whisper.

“You killed Marty Ganguly,” Kitty said to Greg. “You killed Hank. And you let Ruth cover it up--Ruth, who pointed suspicion at Stella, and who you would have let take the fall for you not five minutes ago.”

Greg’s face had gone green. He looked ill, and was sweating heavily.

“It was an accident,” he told them in a hoarse voice.

“It was murder,” said Kitty.

The sound of footsteps coming down the hall distracted them all. Kitty peered into the lightening gloom and saw a figure emerge from the darkness.

Olive, the remaining crew member, rubbed sleep from her eyes. She looked chipper and well-rested.

“You guys having a meeting?” she asked, looking around the group. “What’d I miss?”