

# Murder at Jamestown

Chapter Two: Down the Rabbit Hole

Jamestowne Colony, 1609

When his foot had finally set on dry land in August, he could never have imagined it would come to this.

To leave his home, aboard a leaky bucket of a vessel, and sail into the unknown, that had taken ignorance, he knew now. It was all well and good to imagine a better life--not a stretch to imagine, as his life in London had been marked by hunger and fever, streets filled with human offal and the constant threat of the press gangs behind every corner building waiting to snatch one into Naval service, whether he wills it or no. Better to set foot with eyes open and hands untied, he'd thought then, upon the unfettered planks of a sailing vessel, to risk death at the hands of wild natives in a foreign land at his own thought than to lose limb or worse in service of the Navy, who cared not if he lived or died,

and would likely never pay him either way. The Navy had no more coin than did the rest of them, only larger muskets.

Piracy was an option, naturally, but he had always been a free man, and he wanted to remain one, not risk prison in some god-forsaken colony, or death on the high seas. Pirates offered freedom of choice, of course, and a vote in the future of the crew, that was true. And he'd heard tell that on some ships, were he injured, he'd be entitled to a portion of the booty from raids, even were he unable to fight because of injuries he'd sustained while serving his ship. He knew that except in times of battle, the crew could overrule their captain and replace him with a more worthy one, a sailor more likely to lead them to riches and leisure. Piracy certainly had its appeals.

Piracy also, however, was constantly pursued by the Navy he hoped to avoid, and convicted pirates, the ones who avoided the noose, would often end up serving the very Navy they'd joined a band of brigands to avoid. More than that, the odds of becoming cannon fodder aboard a pirate ship were vastly higher than aboard a Naval vessel. And there was some belief that even time in port could lead to an ugly demise, if the rumors about the French Disease were true.

It seemed he had the choice of all manner of deaths, depending on where he turned, and few enough options of how to live. Better,

he thought, to roll Death's dice on the New World, the chance of a plot of land and the freedom to till the soil, to see something grow that he'd planted with his own hands, and to live or die from his own labor than to be the vassal of another master who used him as a pawn in some game.

So he'd thought then. He was vastly less certain as he stared down the morsels of food clutched in his hands, hiding in a corner of this stinking hut, hoping to devour it before another came along to snatch it from him. Perhaps with a vicious fight to win the prize, of what? A roasted rat?

This is what they had come to.

The winds near Bermuda had been far beyond anything he had ever imagined or experienced. They howled for hours, never ceasing, and branches of the trees like wet and angry fingers had lashed the rooftops. Sheets of rain, curtains of rain, walls of rain had pummeled them all, pinning them to the ground just as the wind attempted to lift and toss them aloft. The horror of those storms--not one, but three, in quick succession just weeks apart--had trapped them in Bermuda and prevented their anticipated arrival in the colony of Jamestowne.

Oh, the irony of spending weeks in a pirate port when he had chosen so nobly to avoid becoming a pirate.

How he longed now for the calm air that had come after the storms had blown through. One of the ships was destroyed, another so badly damaged that it could barely float, and they had remained on the island for weeks longer as repairs were made. They had left England with stores of food and necessary tools to start their lives over in the colony. When their largest ship sank under the weight of the storm winds, carrying the majority of their supplies to the bottom of the sea with it, they held fast to the knowledge that when they arrived in their new home, there would be fields planted with grain and the late summer harvest would be coming in, assuring them a winter in which to season themselves to the new climate before beginning their own crops the following spring.

The surviving three hundred, including himself, had sailed up the coast toward the land called Virginia, and the destructive power of the storm was clearly visible along every shoreline. He had never been much of a praying man, but he thanked God every morning that he was alive, and that soon the New World would offer him a new life.

The arrival had been so much different than they'd anticipated. Alighting on the shore, they kissed the sand, and immediately sought out the colonists, their hope being that they would discover fires in the hearths and a warm welcome of hot food. They instead found nothing

but hunger, want and warfare.

The colony itself was little more than a fort surrounding tents. From its construction, he could tell that relations with the natives were not amicable, as the trees felled to build the wall were set into the ground a scant hands-breadth apart, too snugly fit together for an arrow to come through. There had been obvious hostilities here, and the people inside the palisades had feared for their safety enough that they had done the burdensome work of cutting down whole trees and sinking them into the soil cheek by jowl to protect themselves.

And they hadn't done much of a job on it, either. These were gentlemen, not laborers. Or they had been. When he arrived inside the fort, none of the individuals he saw could much be described as gentlemen.

Their clothing was in rags. The ones who came out of their tents or huts, such as they were, staggered with hunger. They had hope in their eyes that the ship, which was meant to be three ships carrying not only food and provisions but also experienced leaders, held their salvation. It had none of those things. The ship's passengers, for their part, had equally anticipated arriving and discovering respite from their woes, and were sorely disappointed.

He had hoped for warmth and comfort in a securely built house.

He had imagined a hot bubbling stew hung over the fire, and a chance to clean his clothing and find relief in a soft breeze off the river. Instead, he learned that the crops had failed to bring harvest, and that the land was parched of rain. In fact, the settlers claimed it had scarce rained once since they arrived a year before, and the ones who had encountered natives reported that even the tribes were suffering hunger when there was no rainfall.

Everyone was hungry. And their hopes had not only been dashed when the ship arrived, but their paltry stores of dried grain, already far too little to feed the people who remained, would be vastly too little to feed an additional three hundred hungry colonists. They had grain to feed fifty through the winter, but there were more than six times that many in the fort now. All of them hungry or hurt.

Then there were the dead. After arriving in August and straining the confines of the fort, the newest colonists had learned of the unending threat posed by the Powhatan, the nearest native tribe: their chief, also called Powhatan, had threatened to kill any animal or man found outside the palisade walls. There was no grain inside, and they had eaten nearly all the livestock--to feed themselves, and because they could no longer feed the animals. They lived in terror of going outside the fort walls, but that was the only option for finding wild game, and so

each night, one or more of the men ventured forth to find food--and as often as not, failed to return. Murdered by wild natives outside, starving to death inside. He had found yet another way to die.

He, like many others, was subsisting on rats and mice, vermin found in their very homes, feasting on the meager supply of grain on which their lives depended. It was a sight better than some of the settlers, who had stooped to eating their own dogs, once the cattle and horses were consumed. There was so little that he cooked it as quickly as he could, over a small fire in his hut, which he stamped out soon after lest one of his neighbors arrive and hope to share--or worse, steal this hard-won meager meal and leave him with nothing. He had seen what happened to those who failed to find food for themselves.

Some of them were the dead, and some of those were right outside his door. Others were in their homes, uncared for, weak and calling out for help. Their bodies were wasted from illness, which had spread like a blazing fire through the tiny village, dysentery first and then the typhus, with its brutally high fever and near-certain death. There were far fewer than even the three hundred who arrived on his own ship left living, now. If they hadn't starved, lacking horses or dogs or rats or even shoe leather to feed themselves, they had succumbed to disease.

He could not be sure, but he knew he'd heard sounds in the night of violence, and not coming from outside the walls of the fort. Of attack

and butchery, of a man crying out in surprise and pain but suddenly cut short. He had smelled meat soon after, and he dared not leave the relative safety of his hut to investigate. Even inside the fort, there was little safety left.

As he licked every last morsel of grisly meat from his fingers, he thought of his own brother, dead these past three weeks, who had arrived on the first ship to Jamestown and sent word back home to him saying, "Come out." He had landed on these shores hoping to find him, but Francis was sick with fever already by then, weak and unable to speak. Francis' friend John was there to greet him when he arrived, but could offer little comfort. He couldn't even rely on his brother's flintlock and halberd to defend himself. Francis had lost both down a well, and left him alone and terrified in a land that was proving no better than the hellish London he had left, full of hope.

## Jamestown, Present Day

Kitty followed Stella at a rapid walk across the grass and into the museum. They didn't run, but Kitty could tell that the other woman wanted to. For her part, Kitty was still feeling the calm after the storm.

Her limbs were loose, her breathing was even. The stars in the night sky seemed especially crisp, and the soft hooting of the owl in the magnolia tree behind her echoed across the historic grounds.

The door stuck slightly as Stella pulled it open, and she gave it a sharp yank to pop the catch. Signs along the corridor indicated they were inside the Archaearium, the shiny new building constructed to house artifacts discovered by the crews each excavation season, but also for offices and labs dedicated to the preservation of the history of Jamestown. It was toward one of these labs that Stella and Kitty now walked.

She was very deliberate about the walking. Kitty wasn't an alarmist, and having been part of innumerable crews over the years as student, graduate assistant, professor and researcher, she knew that inexperience often encouraged young scientists to assume or infer far more than the data itself would support. Beyond that, and much too real to Kitty herself, she knew she wasn't exactly what she might appear from the outside. Knowing that appearances are deceiving, that we are all seeking to make wholeness from broken pieces sometimes so much that we believe we can make it so simply by force of will, Kitty went in as she usually did: with a grain of salt.

The lights overhead were bright and new, like everything in the building. Modern glass partitions formed the walls of rooms facing the corridor, and the labs were verging on a television studio set in their

crisp cleanliness. She and Stella turned to the left around a corner, and entered the first room off the hallway, pushing through a pair of double glass doors and finding themselves in a brightly-lit space with high ceilings that may as well have been an Apple store at the mall: every visible piece of furniture was white or chrome, and there were reflective surfaces throughout, either more glass or shiny countertops or chromed chairs. The entire space was positively suffused with light. There were no windows.

Arranged in a gridded pattern across the polished white terrazzo floor was a series of tables, identical to high school lab tables except these were topped with white formica and thick glass, and had blonde wood legs that were bolted to the floor. Each table included a rolling cart at the end which carried an aluminum computer monitor, along with complicated-looking equipment that appeared to be cameras on retractable stands. Kitty knew these were magnifying cameras wired directly into the computer monitors that could both zoom in and record any object on which they were focused, creating digital files in real time as scientists examined artifacts. When an intern at the Archaearium had recently dropped and damaged a 17th-century willow ware plate, the recording had allowed the curator to reassemble the pieces in far less time than it may have ordinarily taken, just by watching the replay in reverse slow motion. It was like the archaeological equivalent to having

the lid to the puzzle box when putting the puzzle together.

Most of the tables were bare. Along one wall, also white, were tall rolling carts that looked like they belonged in a bakery. They were simple aluminum frames, and along the side supports were narrow rails, many of which supported metal trays. These were large, about two feet by three feet each, and the surface of every tray was covered by a grey rubbery mat. Most of the trays held artifacts at various stages of analysis. On one was an assortment of dice, some covered in dirt or caked mud, others cleaned off; they were made of bone or clay or hammered metal, and in a range of sizes that indicated they had likely not come as a set. Another tray was all glass beads, some smaller than the eraser on the end of a pencil, and sorted according to color and material across the rubber mat, complete with small handwritten labels identifying the location at which they were uncovered. One tray was small ceramic pieces, clearly a plate or vessel in the process of being reconstructed, and accompanied by a small bottle of glue with a stoppered nozzle for applying it to very narrow segments. Dozens of these trays were tidily organized in racks that spanned the length of the wall, at least twenty feet across.

Kitty had been given a thorough tour when she first agreed to sign on as Guest Lecturer for the season, and was pleased to see that the Archaearium took their work very seriously. The lab was spotlessly clean, well-lit, and arranged with precision and accuracy. There were

sinks and drying racks against the back wall where researchers could clean finds over mesh grates to ensure that no data were lost, and even a flotation station in the corner, the equipment that had finally swayed Kitty to take a position as highly-visible as one at Jamestown when she had so recently been publicly removed from her university position for criminal trespassing.

She tried not to think about the trespassing she'd done less than an hour before. Criminal was such an unwieldy word. And trespass, what did that mean, really? Didn't we all trespass, in one way or another?

And also, a little corner of her mind insisted on thinking, was it criminal to trespass on the property of a multinational conglomerate that was dumping toxic pollutants into the river and threatening to fire or sue anyone who challenged them on it? There was criminal and then there was criminal, as far as Kitty was concerned.

Just thinking about it made her blood pressure begin to rise. Stop that, she hissed at the little corner of her mind. Hush up or the last hour will have been wasted. Now isn't the time to get worked up. I just got comfortable.

More comfortable, by far, to turn her attention to what the crew were all wired about. Certainly more likely to allow her to ride the high of relaxation and release she had worked so hard to achieve under the

flourescent glare of street lights at the office park tonight.

Kitty and Stella approached the center table, where Bryan Brown hunched over one of the aluminum trays, lined with a rubber mat as the others along the wall had been. On the tray itself was an assortment of objects, and next to it sat a paper bag labeled in black Sharpie, which appeared to have recently been opened. Bryan looked up at Kitty as she entered, and his round red face was coated in perspiration. His eyes had that look of anxiety she'd become accustomed to, but he held his mouth in a thin line that was confident in its concern.

Next to him stood two other members of the summer Field School crew. Ruth, her round apple body squeezed in behind Brown and looking eagerly over his shoulder, waved enthusiastically at Kitty when she and Stella entered, and looked for all the world like she was having the time of her life. This might as well have been the state fair and Ruth was running the dunk tank. Beside Ruth stood Brandon, an olive-skinned young man with a haughty expression. His hands were in his pockets and his eyebrows raised mockingly as he watched Dr. Brown's reaction to Kitty's arrival. Brandon tilted his head to one side and masked a smirk.

"What do you have, Dr. Brown?" Kitty asked him, using his title respectfully in an effort to diffuse a situation that seemed as though it could go either way. Archaeologists in the field were a laid-back bunch,

generally easy-going and phlegmatic--so laid-back they were horizontal, her dissertation advisor had once joked. They liked the outdoors, the fresh air and sunshine, and they liked sitting around a fire after sunset and maybe playing a little guitar while they relaxed with a beer after a hard day. Archaeologists in the lab, on the other hand, were greyhounds at the starting gate, pawing the ground and confused about why they couldn't get in on more action. While some, like Kitty, loved the extended focus that lab work required, the stereotype that most archaeologists not only sought the action and excitement of field work, but would stir up drama in the lab when they couldn't get out of doors was not far off the mark. Indiana Jones may not have wanted his co-eds to bat their eyes at him in class, but since he seemed to spend a tiny fraction of his time actually IN the classroom, it was hard to judge. His character swung from vines and raced ahead of enormous boulders, and a high proportion of individuals who were attracted to archaeology both expected and desired the same level of thrill in their everyday work. It seemed wise, then, for anyone who hoped to get a decent night's sleep to keep archaeologists occupied as often as possible, and to prevent them from being carried away before the data were in.

Kitty's fingers in her right pocket were still. She wasn't distracted by The Itch, and she wasn't using her work to distract her from it, either. Instead, here with the dark night surrounding the blinding whiteness of

this crisp laboratory like children reading under a blanket after bedtime, she was in her sweet spot.

Too bad it wouldn't last.

"Oh, Dr. CAMPbell," crowed Ruth before Kitty could do more than glance at the objects on the table. "Oh, Dr. Campbell, did you HEAR?"

"Obviously she heard, Ruth, or she wouldn't be in the lab," snapped Bryan, not looking at Ruth. With his eyes squeezed shut as tightly as he had them, he couldn't have looked at her even if he'd wanted to.

Brandon's smirk grew even wider. "Doc," he said. "Sup."

He did that particular upward jerk of the chin that the popular boys in high school seemed to have perfected when Kitty was still losing herself in the library stacks. There was something so casually aggressive about it, about the lazy way their eyes came half-closed and their lips pursed when they did it. And while Kitty had been known to shift her personality slightly, taking on mannerisms as necessary to get what she wanted--playing dumb when caught by police on private property, say, or working multisyllabic science-y sounding words in when trying to work her way around a bureaucratic roadblock--she'd never quite understood the appeal in the real world of the hyper-cool chin salute. She was quite certain that Brandon knew it and didn't care. He didn't

need to. His chiseled handsomeness and breezy demeanor made it clear Brandon had rarely, if ever, come up against a roadblock he couldn't charm or topple.

Looking back at Bryan and doing little more than blink to acknowledge Brandon's greeting, Kitty gave her attention to the objects in front of her.

The rubber on the tray existed to cushion and protect delicate artifacts as they were cleaned, labeled, accessioned and prepared for storage. Accessioning referred to the process by which artifacts were individually identified and cross-referenced with the excavation unit on the site where they'd been located, then catalogued for storage and future research. By carefully plotting the locations of each of many, many artifacts, trends would begin to emerge that would allow the researchers to make inferences about broader facts regarding the site. Those inferences could lead to larger revelations and discoveries.

Which meant that every artifact was important and relevant, no matter how small. As long as the location where an item was discovered was known and could be located on the map of the site, it didn't matter how tiny or seemingly inconsequential it appeared on the surface, it had scientific value and for that reason needed to be treated delicately and with respect.

By lining the trays with rubber mats, not only were the artifacts

protected from most damage, but the researchers and volunteers in the lab were constantly reminded that their work must be diligent and fastidious. Errors couldn't be allowed to enter into the data set, or the larger inferences that were built on the individual pieces of data could later be found faulty.

Kitty loved the detail of the work, and loved the way it all came together like building blocks. And because she was a good scientist, not because she was a fearful one, Kitty was obsessive about the details.

Which is why, when she looked down at the tray in front of Bryan Brown and saw he was holding what appeared to be a human tooth, the first thing she wanted to do was prove that he was wrong.

"Dr. Campbell," Ruth breathed, "it's a TOOTH."

"Oh my God," whispered Stella from behind Kitty's head. "Oh my God."

Frowning, Kitty looked back at Stella over her shoulder. The younger woman had straight black hair pulled back from her forehead, and Asian features. She wore a rock band tee shirt that had the neck cut off and was hanging off one shoulder, paired with black shorts and low top basketball sneakers, sort of an American-millennial-meets-Japanese-street-style look. Her ears were pierced multiple times, all along the outer ridge of cartilage, and she had another piercing in her nose. She was classically pretty, but at the moment, her face was a rictus of

horror.

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves," Kitty said calmly, still looking at Stella, who quickly recomposed her features into scholastic concern rather than fright night terror.

Kitty turned back to Bryan and said, "You're a liar, Brown."

The jaws of every student dropped wide open, Ruth and Stella in shock and Brandon in glee. Kitty expected him to laugh out loud. LOLZ, probably.

Bryan blinked at her twice. Across his face spread a slow, wide smile. The red in his cheeks began to fade, and he slowly straightened his body to standing.

"I'm a liar, Campbell," he said.

"What are you lying about, Brown?" Kitty asked him, her face deadpan serious.

"I'm lying about this being a tooth, Campbell," he replied, smiling even wider.

Ruth began looking around at the other two students, clearly confused.

"Wait, what..." she said. Brandon rolled his eyes and Stella rapidly shushed Ruth. Neither of them took their eyes off Kitty and Bryan.

"It's clearly a tooth, Brown. I can see the root and the crown from here. The coloration indicates the presence of enamel. So what

are you lying about?” Kitty continued quizzing the director.

“I’m lying that this is a human tooth, Campbell,” he told her. He was looking more relaxed than Kitty had seen him since she’d arrived at the field school.

“It appears to be a molar, from the shape of the crown. The most common large mammals who could have a tooth that size in this area are bears, deer and elk. A bear and an elk are far too large to have a tooth this size. The lingual crest is far too flat to be a deer tooth. See how it lacks the characteristic high pointed tip that a deer would display? This must be a human molar, then.”

Bryan sighed. “Yeah, I know. But thanks.”

He shook his head. Kitty reached over to a box on the table and began putting on a pair of thin latex gloves.

“OK, what was that?” Brandon asked. There was a note of humor in his voice, and it had an edge to it.

Kitty continued putting on the gloves, and answered him while she bent in to take a closer look at the object she and Director Brown had just positively identified as a human tooth, on the rubber mat between them.

“It’s an exercise we used to do in graduate school to prevent ourselves from running away with an idea before we had the data to back

it up. The goal is to prove yourself wrong rather than to prove yourself right.”

“It’s very effective in focusing the excited brain, as our advisor used to tell us,” Brown said.

“Well, that was VERY exciting,” Ruth said, clapping her hands together in front of her shining face. “It was just like being in a detective show!”

Stella snorted. Brandon smirked some more, but his eyebrows were narrowed and he watched Kitty very closely as she bent over the table.

Picking up the object in her gloved fingers, Kitty turned it over slowly. She reached toward the cart with the camera and adjusted the small lamp next to it, aiming it more directly at the tooth.

“There’s no wear,” Bryan told her, sounding more calm as he spoke. His face was interested and concerned, but he seemed content to back up and allow Kitty to handle the tooth.

“I noticed,” she said quietly, giving the tooth her full attention.

“What does that mean?” asked Ruth, lowering her voice in response to the attitude of Kitty and Bryan, and speaking in hushed tones as if she had been rebuked by a librarian.

“That it’s not old,” Brandon told her impatiently.

Ruth didn't appear to feel irritated by his rebuke. She let out a confused, "Ohhhh..."

Stella seemed to take pity on the older woman and said, "See the crown? The fat part that sticks up above the gums when it's in your mouth? If this were an older tooth, it would be way more worn down than that, like, almost flat. This one looks like it might have fallen out yesterday."

Everyone looked at her, and she blushed.

"I..I mean...I guess it might have?" She was realizing the implications of what she'd said, and clapped her hand over her mouth.

"Stella is right," Kitty said, moving back to her examination. "An ancient tooth, for example from a prehistoric population, would almost certainly show evidence of severe wear on the crown."

"Just because it's old?" Ruth asked. "My daddy's teeth weren't what they used to be by the time he went...but..."

"No, not because they're old," Brandon snapped.

This time Ruth did react. With her eyes closed, she said over her shoulder, "You know, where I come from, it's rude to be a smarty pants. If you know, you could just be gracious enough to share with the rest of the class."

Kitty looked directly at Brandon, almost challenging him to take

Ruth up on her offer.

"Most prehistoric populations ground their grain with stone mortars and pestles," he said in a bored tone. "The stone broke down gradually with the friction cause by grinding, and the broken bits were mixed in with the grain when it was consumed. Prehistoric teeth show heavy wear as the result of chewing food with rocks mixed in."

Kitty nodded. "A good answer. I've seen teeth so worn down that the dentin, the soft tender part inside the tooth, would have been completely exposed. Some of these populations must have lived in constant, excruciating dental pain. Like having an all-day root canal, without anaesthesia.

"This tooth doesn't show that. As Stella points out, it looks new and healthy, and shows no wear from eating grain mixed with ground stone."

"But then maybe it's from one of the colonists?" Stella asked, a note of hopefulness in her voice.

Bryan jumped in here. "The colonists, proportionally, mostly died from starvation during the early years of the settlement. This particular unit was located in the heart of the original village, some of the oldest ground at Jamestown. If this were the tooth of one of those colonists, we would see wear--not from ground stone, but from eating

shoe leather and cracking animal bones to access the marrow.

Plus, given the archaeological context, there would be evidence in the enamel of starvation, a lack of nutrition, and we don't see that. This enamel is even and healthy. Very healthy, I would say. This individual didn't subsist for part of his life on rats or dogs just to survive."

"Nasty," said Brandon, firmly.

"It was a hard time to be a colonist," Bryan concurred.

"It was a harder time to live in London," Kitty reminded them.

"Really?" asked Ruth in surprise. "But London was the biggest city in the world, Dr. Campbell!"

She looked embarrassed as she saw Kitty's eyes turned to her.

"I mean, I don't mean to tell you your business, Doctor," Ruth backpedaled. "It's just, London was cosmopolitan and advanced. And this was...I mean, it's the wilderness!"

She was blushing, out of apology or out of concern that she'd offended Kitty, or maybe both.

Kitty shook her head. "No, you're not wrong, Ruth. London was a huge, metropolitan area. And people came here for a better life."

"Yeah, to a crappy swamp filled with mosquitoes and salty water," Stella snorted.

"That's my point," Kitty explained as she worked to get the camera over the tooth and examine it under magnification on the computer

screen.

"This place is, from a settlement standpoint, a dump."

Nervous laughter from all around the table. Ruth looked like she couldn't quite tell if Kitty was joking.

"It's muddy, it's swampy, the water is brackish when the tide is up, they never could get a well that didn't get salty. And the mosquitoes are insane. This is such a crappy piece of land that the Native Americans didn't want it. The French and Spanish, who both had colonies in the New World by then, didn't want it. It wasn't even the land that these settlers were told to claim. They just got it because no one else was here and they were too chicken to fight for a better spot."

More laughter.

"Which should tell us," Bryan chimed in, "just how bad things were back in England to make the settlers willing to come here. Or how foolish and inexperienced they were."

"Probably both," Kitty concurred.

"Also," Bryan added, pointing to the side of the tooth, "notice how the tooth is shaped overall? Most humans have four cusps on their molars, four lumps where the shape of the tooth makes like a cloverleaf. This one has five, which is unusual."

"Oh, that's got a name, doesn't it, Doctor? Oh, I wish I could remember what it was--I think you mentioned it when we were at Lecture

last week,” Ruth said, scrunching up her face.

Bryan nodded. “It’s called the Cusp of Carabelli, and it’s much more common in Native American populations. So even if this were an ancient tooth, it’s unlikely it would have belonged to one of the colonists. Teeth are under the strongest genetic control in the human body, even more so than height or hair color, and the populations who came here with the Virginia Company simply wouldn’t have carried the gene.”

“But even if we can be sure it’s not one of the native tribes, can we rule out that it’s ancient? I mean, should we keep playing that game you two were doing?” asked Stella. “Like, how do we know this isn’t an artifact, right?”

“Ah,” Kitty breathed, looking at the screen.

All eyes pivoted to look at the image she’d captured.

In the center of the screen, clear as day, was a porcelain filling, the edges standing out against the enamel of the tooth as much whiter and more opaque than the organic material.

“I don’t think anyone would argue that the technology for amalgamated porcelain dental fillings was extant in the 17th century,” Kitty said quietly.

She stopped, then looked along the edge of the filling, and along the side of the tooth, where her finger had covered the enamel surface in its glove. Beneath her index finger, where the cusp rounded toward the

side of the crown, was an unmistakable drop of blood.

As Kitty pulled her hand away, a small amount of the sticky blood adhered to the glove.

Her eyes met Bryan’s, and the little man blanched.

“Still wet,” he whispered.

“Not a prehistoric tooth,” Kitty said quietly. “And the blood is still tacky.”

Bryan nodded slowly, holding eye contact with Kitty.

The students looked around at one another, Brandon with one eyebrow raised.

“What about the rest of this stuff?” he asked.

“Bunch of rocks, who cares? There’s a modern tooth with blood on it, Brandon! God!” exclaimed Stella.

Kitty set the tooth gently down on the rubber mat, taking care to leave the sticky surface facing the ceiling where the blood would remain undisturbed.

She picked up one of the objects on the tray. As Stella had pointed out, it did look like a rock. But Kitty noticed the surface was pitted and porous. She turned it over in her hands, and then placed it under the camera so she could see it more closely on the computer screen. She took care to engage the image capture feature, so their examination would be recorded to the hard drive.

“Look here,” Kitty indicated, pointing to a small linear mark on the object. She meant to call Bryan’s attention, but every eye in the room zeroed in on where she was pointing.

“What is that, like a cut on the rock?” Ruth asked. She was maneuvering her round body between the tall Brandon and Bryan on the other side, eager to get a look but not quite shoving the two apart to let her see.

“No,” said Bryan slowly. He adjusted the magnification on the computer monitor so it was increased. Zooming in on the object made the porousness even more obvious.

Kitty leaned in close, and then placed the object on her tongue, where it stuck when she pulled her hand away. Stella pulled back in surprise, a look of disgust on her face. Brandon nodded, his lips pursed outward.

“Kerf marks,” Bryan said. He sounded less alarmed than entranced.

“I am so sorry, I don’t understand,” Ruth told them, half apologetic and half accusatory.

“Kerf marks are when a blade cuts across bone. They show that the bones were butchered,” Brandon informed her. Kitty looked at him sharply, then nodded. She removed the object from her tongue.

“These aren’t rocks. They’re bone,” she told Ruth.

“You can tell that just by looking at it?” Ruth sounded awed.

“No, dummy,” Brandon said, finally giving up any pretense of respect for Ruth. “She stuck it to her tongue.”

Ruth looked daggers at him and started to open her mouth to retort before Bryan broke in, clearly wanting to divert her attention.

“Bone is porous, Ruth,” he said hurriedly. “That means it will adhere to a moist surface and stick. Licking an object is a field test to determine whether it’s bone or stone.”

“Dr. Campbell,” Ruth said slowly. “What kind of bones are they?”

Kitty twisted her mouth in a grimace. “That’s an excellent question, Ruth.”

“Do you mean, whose bones are they?” Stella’s voice rose to a fevered pitch.

“Oh, now, Stella. Don’t let’s jump to conclusions!” Ruth admonished. But her face was nervous all the same.

“Are you kidding me, lady?” Stella nearly screamed. Her face was white and her eyes were round and panicked. “That’s a human tooth. And it’s got blood on it and we found it today with a bunch of bones! What do YOU think this is?”

“You guys are missing the obvious question. And it’s way more interesting,” said Brandon, a note of superiority in his voice.

Kitty looked at him again, thinking that as much as she’d believed

she had the measure of this young man, perhaps she had underestimated him.

“If it’s a human bone, like Stella totally thinks it is,” he continued, seeming to enjoy the sight of Stella on the verge of tears, “the what are those cut marks doing there?”

Silence in the room. Kitty, feeling like she had suddenly become a parent, exchanged a wordless look with Bryan across the table that she was sure the others could see but hoped they wouldn’t interpret. The thing was, Brandon might not be wrong.

“What does he mean, Dr. Campbell?” Stella asked, bordering on hysterics.

Kitty hesitated, still looking at Bryan. They seemed to come to a decision together.

“We need to determine the age of these bones. Nothing about them makes me think they belong to the tooth, or rather, that the bones and the tooth belong together.”

“But?” asked Ruth, narrowing her eyes and seeming to ask the question despite herself.

“But the kerf marks indicate that this bone was butchered. Which could just mean it was eaten in a colonial stew pot.”

“Or it could mean that someONE was put in a colonial stew pot, eh, Doc?” Brandon said. His smirkiness was decidedly reduced.

“At least, we hope it was colonial,” Bryan said under his breath. Stella screamed.