

Murder at Jamestown

Prologue: Jamestowne Colony, 1608

“Ach, for God’s sake, John! I cannae go back wi’out it, y’know that,” he yelled back over his shoulder. The man was leaning perilously over the edge of a small well, the opening in the ground defined by a circle of crude stones dry-stacked together and only narrowly holding the man’s weight.

“Francis, yer not findin’ it, an’ Wingfield’s on the warpath,” his companion replied. “Best leave it go, man.”

His soft Scots burr revealed more than a hint of exasperation.

Francis leaned ever deeper into the maw of the well, a narrow opening that gaped below him. One arm outstretched, the other reaching behind him and held fast at the wrist by the man called John, who braced his feet against the bottom row of stones and leaned back to support Francis’ weight. John’s human ballast allowed Francis to lean nearly his entire body into the well. A sheen of sweat poured down each man’s

face, the linen collar framing John’s beard soaked through and wilting from the heavy air.

Gripped firmly in the fist reaching toward the surface of the water, Francis held his halberd, standard issue for any English soldier in the New World. Measuring approximately six feet from tip to end, the halberd consisted of a long smooth pole roughly an inch in diameter, topped with a weapon head, metal blade on one side and a pointed spike on the reverse. It was intended for heavy soldiering, for hacking and stabbing. Except in the case of Francis Davies, the spike had been curved into a crude hook, and he was stabbing it at the water in desperation.

John Evans, for his part, was growing weary of the effort.

“Francis, man,” he said, struggling to adjust his grip around the other man’s wrist and forearm, “Yer hand, it’s slippin’ and all.”

“Nearly, I’ve nearly...” came the voice out of the well, a slight echo as it bounced off the shallow waters.

“Yeh must be near gone ill from that wretched smell,” John told him, turning his own head away and wrinkling his nose.

“How could yeh smell aught over the stench of yer own beard, eh?” grunted Francis, edging slightly further into the well with his artificially-lengthened arm.

The air in the well was heavy and still. The water was shallow, and the two men could easily see the rocky bottom of the hand-dug water source from where they stood. Water was hard to come by in Jamestown settlement, despite the proximity of the river. Because they lived at the confluence of the river and the ocean, their waterway had a tidal flow, and was often too salty and silted to be drinkable. The groundwater appeared to suffer from similar pollution, and this was the twelfth well that had been dug since their ship had landed on solid ground earlier that year. Every other attempt to draw water from the earth had turned up dry, or worse, brackish and foul, tainted with salt and leaving an unnatural feel to the tongue. Both men had watched their fellow travelers sicken from drinking it, even as new wells were dug in various parts of the settlement. The constant search for fresh water seemed never ending.

When the ship had first landed following their months-long ocean voyage, they were overjoyed. Having backtracked up and down the coast for weeks, firm ground tantalizingly close and yet occupied by enemies or natives--or both--and thus impossible for them to land upon, they had finally discovered this empty stretch of lush riverfront landscape. They never questioned why it was that the French or the Spanish or the native tribes hadn't settled this particular stretch. And

while it wasn't the parcel dictated in their charter, the document from London Company commissioning them giving them with claiming part of this wilderness and establishing a colony, it was uninhabited and rich with green life.

It took them little enough time to discover how very different that life was in the New World than in the England from which they had come. Every breath was drawn as if through sodden wool, the moisture in the atmosphere so heavy that it made it difficult to fill their lungs. The coastline boasted a near-constant breeze, but even here on the river, a scant few paces from shore the closeness of the vegetation and the thickness of the air was stifling. And the insects! Never in their lives could they have imagined that every inch of exposed flesh would be covered with biting, stinging, ravaging attackers. Their wool and linen garments had begun to quickly degrade in the unrelenting humidity, and yet they refused to clothe themselves in less--not only out of modesty and propriety, but as a failing effort to prevent the itching, oozing sores that the insect bites brought.

The biting was worst near the embankment. Surrounding the settlement, which consisted of a rudimentary fort, a wooden church, and a few small buildings, was a deep ditch that was all but invisible from the edge of the River James, the wide waterway named in honor

of their King James I. It was between the river and this ditch that their captain had determined they would build their colony--a surprising decision, as the air was far less foul along the coast, some forty miles east of them. The embankment itself wasn't specifically a part of the river, but rather was a swampy, ill-favored stretch of muck that dipped ten feet deep and sharply back up on the opposite side. Reeds and grasses filled the ditch between the two ridges and made the thick black mud between a hidden death trap. The stench of rotting vegetation and small animals who had been caught in the shallow murk was overpowering, worse even than the rotten egg scent of the well water.

Neither odor, though, was as bad as the miasma of death that hung over the colony. Batting away the cloud of biting flies that surrounded his face as he held fast to Francis' arm, John turned his face away from the well and worked to fill his lungs with fresher air.

Murder at Jamestown

Chapter One: Begin at the Beginning

“Dr. Brown?” asked the young woman standing waist-deep in an irregular, long ditch carved from red soil under a steamy sun. She shielded her face with her hand to block the setting sun while squinting up from where she stood, looking at a man carrying a clipboard and wearing a harassed expression.

“What is it, Stella?” the man responded, not looking at her and allowing some irritation to creep into his voice.

“It’s that I think we’re done? With excavating this furrow?” Her voice had the particular upturned lilt at the end that indicated an individual under the age of 25. She was slender and petite, with her straight black hair swept up to the top of her head in a messy knot. The short sleeves of her tee shirt were rolled to the tops of her shoulders, and her khaki shorts were coated with a layer of soil that extended down her legs and into the socks protruding from the tops of her work boots.

The hand that wasn’t blocking the bright sun from her dark eyes was curled into a fist around the wooden handle of a short metal trowel, the fist resting on her cocked hip.

“Wait, what?” The man looked around rapidly, not really taking in the girl called Stella, but glancing up and down at the ground. The level on which he stood was even with Stella’s knees

“It’s cool, I’ll just take this over to the screens, but I thought you’d want to record it?” she said, her face twisted in a way that made it clear she would have rolled her eyes if the sun wasn’t in them.

“Well, yes, obviously,” Brown snapped at her waspishly. “I’ll record it, Stella, just sift it.”

“Hey, Stella, is that the last of it?” Kitty Campbell approached from the opposite side of the trench and looked down at Stella, her hands in her pockets. As usual in the field, Kitty was dressed for comfort over style: a button-front camp-style shirt, made from some kind of space-age fabric that was breathable and kept the mosquitoes away; and a pair of utility shorts; and sturdy leather boots. She was covered in vastly less dust and dirt than Stella, and her expression was vastly less irked than Dr. Brown.

“Hey, Doc!” Stella said cheerfully. “Yeah, I’m just taking it to the screens.”

“You got my samples for the floats, though, right?” Kitty asked her chummily, looking with some interest into the bucket Stella was placing on the edge of the trench before climbing out herself.

“Did you get the samples, Stella?” Brown barked at her. “The samples for Dr. Campbell?” He was sweating. They were all sweating, but he was really sweating. Kitty looked more closely at him and saw that he was surreptitiously wiping his forehead on the shoulder of his shirt when he thought the others had looked away. She watched him wryly before turning back to Stella.

“Yeah, I’ll do that right now?” Stella said, addressing Kitty rather than Brown. She finished climbing out of the trench before picking up the bucket and carefully carrying it over to the far side of the open area behind them, where stakes sunk into the ground in a rough circle indicated a work space set aside from the rest of the land and buildings. Yellow caution tape was strung loosely between each stake, making the circle stand out like a bulls-eye.

“How you holding up, Bryan?” Kitty asked Brown. Her right hand fiddled with something in the pocket of her shorts.

“Fine, fine, you know,” he told her, and much of his aggressive manner disappeared. “I just...you know, it’s all so...”

Kitty smiled kindly. “It’s a lot, right?”

“Do you think they know?” he asked her, lowering his voice.

“What, that this is the first time you’ve led a field school? Or that you’re completely freaking out and barely keeping it together?” Kitty’s voice was lowered to a conspiratorial whisper.

Brown closed his eyes and held up both hands, palms out, one still holding the clipboard. “You don’t have to DO that,” he said, his voice strained.

Kitty tried not to laugh. “I’m teasing you, lighten up.”

Bryan opened his eyes and looked at her, a pinched look across his face.

Kitty sighed. “OK, so what’s your plan for today?”

Bryan tucked the clipboard under one arm and pinched the bridge of his nose, sniffing in hard as he did so. Kitty blinked rapidly and waited him out. She knew from the past two weeks here that it would be a few minutes before Bryan felt confident enough that he’d fought down the tears for him to continue the conversation. Kitty was certain she’d never worked with a field school director before who cried as often as this one did.

“Um...” Bryan began, his face getting even pinker under the red-gold stubble on his round cheeks. His voice was pitched slightly higher than it had been before, and he cleared his throat before continuing.

“I thought Stella would be working this trench a little longer, but she’s finished it up, so that leaves her free. I guess...I’ll...” He began rapidly flipping back and forth through the pages on his clipboard.

Kitty took a deep breath and launched into a speech that she had delivered more than once in the past fourteen days. It was like an old song that got stuck in her head every time she and Bryan had one of these meetings. Which was approximately every two hours, it seemed.

“Bryan, this is an exceptional field school...”

Before she could really get her steam going, he cut her off.

“You think I don’t know that?” His voice was raised and strained. His cheeks, already pink, developed two very red spots at the center. They puffed out slightly as he continued, “Don’t worry about adding any extra pressure, Kitty!” His eyes were wide and the whites showed all around in a ring, the lids pink-limned from his recent bout of emotion.

“Easy, there, cowboy,” Kitty told him, a slight edge to her voice. “No one here is mad at you. Don’t take it out on me.” She looked at him mock sternly. “My point is, as it has been every time we talk about this, that these kids are really well-trained. They applied over a year ago to be here, from top-tier schools around the country. They came here on their own dime, some of them aren’t even getting school credit, and they beat out hundreds of other candidates. I’m not

convinced Brandon didn’t ACTUALLY beat some of them to get them out of the way, you know what I’m saying?”

Brown managed a tragic half smile at this, while wiping the pooling sweat off his brow with the shoulder of his shirt.

“So say it with me, Bryan: they WANT to be here, and they’re the cream of the crop. You don’t have to worry that they won’t get the work done.”

Bryan made a strangled noise in his throat. “I’m more worried something will go horribly wrong while I’m supposed to be watching! I can’t keep an eye on all of them all the time, they’re like squirrels, running all over the place!”

At this, Kitty did roll her eyes. “Now you’re just getting hysterical. You’re a double PhD, you’ve published and lectured and held two post-doctoral positions. You’ve run lab experiments that I can hardly even describe. Your dissertation was one of the most widely-cited at the last American Association of Archaeology conference. You think they fought to be here? You’re an archaeology ninja who does chemistry experiments for FUN.

“You’re just not a great manager.”

She shrugged a little at this, and Bryan nodded in clear agreement with this statement.

“It’s just...keeping track of it all, who’s where and what they’re

supposed to be doing, and all the logs and the charts and the maps and....”

“How is that any different from running a lab experiment?” she asked him, sincerely confused about why he struggled with humans when he was so comfortable with explosives and dangerous compounds.

“Because flasks and beakers don’t MOVE!” he said with exasperation. “You put it down, it STAYS PUT. These people... I just can’t keep track of them, and then I have to have all the data, but THEY have the data, and I can’t find them, and Kitty! Maybe I’m no good at this.”

His face was dejected.

“Sure, yeah, I hear you,” she told him. “It’s tough keeping up with people. They need to trust and respect you, Bryan, know that you feel confidently in charge, and then you won’t have to chase them so much. The rest of it, that’s the core of why we’re here, the data. But that’s just paperwork, Bryan. And what’s paperwork?”

She looked at him encouragingly.

“Paperwork is the bureaucratic backbone on which science is built,” he said, sounding calmer and somewhat mollified.

Kitty nodded encouragingly. “That. Is. Right!”

“OK, OK, so...I’ll just...” Brown went back to referring to his notes again.

Kitty pulled her phone out of her pocket and pulled up a notes app. She read off: “You’ve got Stella finishing up the trenching, and Brandon is with Hank doing the sifting, right?”

Brown nodded, sweat dripping onto his paperwork. Good thing he writes in pencil, Kitty thought. She wondered when his birthday was, and if he would find a gift of waterproof note paper offensive. It wasn’t uncommon for work in the field. Maybe he wouldn’t even get the hint.

“Yeah, they’re, uh...” Brown shook his head. He shook his head. “I mean, I’ve put Brandon on every crew I can think of, with every other crew member I can pair him with.”

He looked deep into Kitty’s face, almost desperate in his supplication. “He’s a really smart kid, maybe too smart, he’s always questioning me and talking back, and he’s not always wrong, is the thing. Plus, he does great work. But, Kitty...”

Kitty nodded and let out a small snort. “But he’s a real douche,” she finished for him.

Brown shook his head, wide-eyed. “I mean, he’s a serious piece of work, that’s not my imagination! He terrorizes people, you must have seen it. Everyone hates him! Did you see Olive after spending ONE day with him? I thought she was going to have a nervous breakdown, I’ve never seen someone so rattled.”

This seemed rich to Kitty, given what she was witnessing in Bryan's face right this minute.

"Part of running a crew, Bryan," Kitty told him sternly, "is understanding that you will ALWAYS have that one guy, or girl, who is just a jerk, who doesn't want to follow instructions, who thinks he's smarter than the crew lead, and who can't seem to get along with anyone else."

She shrugged slightly, her phone held carelessly in one hand while the other was still in her pocket. Her fingers were moving under the fabric, fiddling with something tucked away inside.

"Wouldn't it be great if he was just struck by lightning?" Bryan mused, his eyes half closed as he said it.

Kitty snorted again, more loudly this time. "Careful what you say out loud there, Director. I have a feeling that kid knows people. "Oh, wait, it's not a feeling," she went on, sarcastically. "He tells us every chance he gets that he Knows People." Around her phone, two fingers made air quotes to indicate that Brandon loved to use this exact phrase. Pompously, Kitty thought. For a kid in his 20s, he sure was a peacock.

The two archaeologists both laughed at her tiny impersonation, and the tension finally eased a bit.

"Alright, so who does that leave?" she asked aloud, referring back to her phone. "You've got Olive in the field lab, cataloging, right?"

Bryan nodded. "She needed to recover."

"So then this week that just leaves..."

They looked at one another.

Together, they both said, "Ruth."

Kitty nodded. Bryan shook his head.

"She's not that bad, Bryan. She's harmless!"

Brown, two inches than Kitty even in thick-soled field boots, looked up at her in astonishment.

"Not that bad? Bite your tongue, Kitty Campbell. She's a menace."

He looked afraid.

Kitty did laugh at that, almost a giggle. "You keep telling me that, and I just don't see it! Besides, she pays attention to the lectures, the woman remembers everything you ever tell her, and she really knows her stuff. So what if she's a little long-winded?"

"You don't know. You didn't grow up with a mother like mine, that woman might SEEM sweet as honey on the outside, but she is manipulative, conniving, dishonest..."

Kitty was giggling uncontrollably now. "She's a sweet old lady who wants to go back to school and get her degree. And to be here, she must have some chops."

Now it was Brown's turn to snort. "Yeah, karate chops."

Kitty stared at him in disapproving astonishment. "Ruth? The

woman is five foot nothing and shaped like an apple!”

“I don’t mean physical chops,” Brown said with sad finality, “but you mark my words. She will take one of us down, and don’t you doubt it.”

Kitty’s eye was distracted by a flash of color behind Bryan’s shoulder.

Where they stood was a wide plaza of hard-packed Southern red clay soil. Directly behind Brown by about forty feet was a large wooden building with a steeple, a reconstruction of the original church built on the site in 1607 when the first settlers of Jamestown colony had arrived by ship from England. Little did they know how often that church would be used their first year in Virginia, as nearly 80% of them died from starvation, drought and disease.

To Kitty’s right stretched a broad undulating plain of green grass for about eight hundred yards, ending in a modern steel-and-glass structure that housed the new Jamestown museum, sitting regally beneath the arching branches of a centuries-old live oak. The museum was run as a joint project between the National Park Service and the privately funded Jamestowne Foundation, and attracted thousands of visitors to the site every year. To Kitty’s left was a gentle slope downward toward the James River, running muddy and swift this time of year.

Behind her, Kitty could hear the sounds of the crew chatting and work-

ing the wooden

sifting screens that were arranged behind the yellow plastic caution tape that roped this part of the site off from the public areas. The site was open, a National Park, but the excavations weren’t. The field school where Bryan Brown was Director and where Kitty was spending her summer as Guest Lecturer was funded by both organizations, and had access to the grounds, but the cost was that they had to work around the tourists. Sections of the Jamestown colony, then, were roped off each summer during dig season, and the work was rotated based not only on the research goals of the archaeologists but also in order to allow visitors to see various parts of the site each year. Working at Jamestown was prestigious and competitive and very much like doing archaeology in a fishbowl. There was no privacy, and someone was always watching.

Kitty narrowed her eyes behind her sunglasses to identify what had caught her attention. It was a short, round woman in an olive green fishing hat. She was wearing a large-scale floral printed tee shirt and pleated cornflower blue culottes. Her feet were shod in deck sneakers with short socks, the kind that had the little fluffy ball hanging out the back. She was pink in the face and appeared to be in a very big hurry. Her perfectly curled short hair was in a style that was likely unchanged since the late 80s, and while she appeared to be moving at top speed, her hair didn’t budge, even in the light breeze.

Brown looked at Kitty's expression, not fully hidden behind her eyewear, and asked, "She's coming up right behind me, isn't she?"

Kitty's right hand twitched inside her pocket again.

Kitty tried not to look at Bryan, knowing that his face must read like a man being walked to the gallows. Instead, she called out to the woman, pulling her hand out of her pocket in order to wave.

"Hi, there, Ruth!"

"I swear, you need an oar to get through that accent of hers," Brown muttered, just quietly enough that Kitty heard but it didn't carry to the newcomer, who probably wouldn't have heard it over her own excitement, anyway.

"Oh, Dr. CAMPbell, oh, I am so excited to see you this evening," Ruth exhaled as she arrived. Her voice was youthful and high, and Brown wasn't exaggerating: her accent was thickly Southern in an almost stereotypical way. She placed one hand on Bryan's shoulder for balance, and pulled out a floral embroidered handkerchief from her pocket to wipe her neck with as she spoke.

Brown closed his eyes and blanched. He looked to Kitty as though he might be praying for mercy. Or death. It was hard to tell.

"Why is that, Ruth?" Kitty asked her, amused.

"Oh, well, it's just the flotation is almost ready, isn't that right? I mean, I am SO excited."

She was positively breathless, her eyes guileless and bright..

"Well, that's what Dr. Brown and I were just discussing, actually, Ruth," Kitty told her, attempting to defer to Bryan, who seemed to be biting his tongue, literally.

"Well, it's just that I've heard you talk about it, of course, at Friday Lecture, naturally, but this is the first time I've ever done anything like that," Ruth went on.

Kitty nodded. She didn't bother trying to speak.

"Now, I HAVE used those big fifty gallon drums before, of course, when I was younger, not the plastic kind like you have, Dr. Campbell, and not blue, of course, these were metal drums, you know. But the same size!"

Brown let out a barely audible groan. He didn't open his eyes.

"See, what you have to understand is that when I was younger, we lived in Georgia, and so we ate a lot of barbecue. And I just loved barbecue, I mean, I still do, maybe a little too much!"

She laughed, high and girlish, and gestured toward her rounded waistline. Kitty stood with raised eyebrows, amused.

"So my daddy and our neighbor, now he was our neighbor at our first house, not at our second, that's the one I was telling you about yesterday, you remember, I told you that story about taking the kids over to see the house where I grew up and how they loved it. Well, not

that house, this was the one where we lived when I was real little, before that. So this neighbor, he and my daddy liked to make their own barbecue, and it wasn't anything small, not a pork butt, I mean, they weren't amateurs, even though that means 'for the love of,' which is why they did it!" She let out a small laugh.

"When they did barbecue, they did the whole hog. Did you know that's where they get the expression, whole hog? Isn't that funny?"

Ruth paused for an instant for breath, then plunged on.

"Now, I always thought my daddy should be a chef, I really did, we used to all tell him that all the time, but he just loved being an accountant, so we just let him go on and do that! Now, they would use these fifty gallon drums for the barbecue, see, and what they would do is--"

"Ruth, could I ask you to go check on Stella for me, please?"

Bryan interrupted suddenly and emphatically.

Ruth, to her credit, appeared unruffled. "Why, of course you can, Dr. Brown! Is she alright? Does she need help? You know I'm happy to help anywhere you need me!"

She looked around eagerly, still mopping her neck from the heat.

"I wonder if she's having some kind of trouble," Kitty told the woman, picking up on Bryan's cue. "She left a little while ago with the last of the soil samples from the agricultural furrow and was going to

make sure we separated out some sections for the flotation. I thought she'd be back by now, but maybe you can go check on her? We can't do the float demonstration tomorrow without those samples."

Kitty made an exaggeratedly disappointed face.

"Well, I will just head on over to the screens then," Ruth said firmly, her hand dropping to her side from where it had sat on Brown's shoulder the whole time. The other hastily stuffed the handkerchief in her pocket. Her face was enormously concerned, her eyes narrowed as she looked over to the screening area. Walking like a woman who has been given a sense of purpose, they heard her say over her shoulder, "I think I can see her from here. Stella! STELLA!"

Ruth was waving and talking loudly to Stella as she moved away.

Kitty put her hand back in her right pocket, then snatched it out again. Taking a deep breath in, she began walking down the length of the excavated furrow toward the museum, gesturing to Bryan to follow her.

"Come on, Director," she said to Brown, who followed along behind her on the opposite side of the trench, almost like he was a small tow barge being tugged along in Kitty's wake. "It's getting late, and they'll all be cleaning up soon to head off...wherever it is they go after dark. And you look like you could use a drink."

They arrived at the end of the trench, and Kitty turned to meet

Brown as he walked dully over the ground, putting her arm around his shoulders as the red clay soil transitioned to grass. Bryan nodded wordlessly, the look on his face one of fatigue and gratitude.

The setting sun bounced off the glass walls of the museum as they headed inside.

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The woman's face was illuminated by only the dashboard lights, and the occasional bright halogen flash of a utility pole on the street outside. She made a right turn out of the Jamestown complex, away from the museum. Her speedometer registered one mile an hour under the limit, cruising but not concerning. Below the radar, literally.

Both sides of the street were lined with small homes, built in the Forties or Fifties, the vast majority of them converted into offices sometime in the last three decades. A real estate agent. An insurance salesman. An attorney.

She made a wry mental note of the last one. Just in case.

Stop light. Waiting. Trying not to tap her thumbs on the steering wheel, trying not to notice the seconds ticking past.

The itch was just under her skin. It had been building all day.

On an impulse, she jerked the steering wheel to the right and

turned the car around the corner. To her left was a well-lit gas station, the pumps deserted. The streets were all quiet in the dark. She made another right at the stop sign on the corner. Cruised down the block.

A third stop sign. Another right turn. Back where she started, just one block behind.

She sat, letting the car idle.

She could go back. She could turn left, retrace her steps, ease the car silently into the parking spot she'd vacated a few minutes ago. Return to the museum. A couple of them were still there, the others had gone home. No one would know.

So easy. So easy.

Or she could go right, that tiny itch whispered to her. Wouldn't it feel so good to turn right? To get closer? To find one, and to satisfy the craving? So, so much better.

Left. Or right.

Her hand lingered on the blinker lever, floated above it, just touching the hard plastic, her skin almost kissing it.

She took a shuddering breath in. When she let it out, it was a strangled sigh.

She turned right.

Past the accountant and the passport photo agent. Along the side of the four-lane road, the buildings began to grow, spreading out

along the curb like pizza dough, flat and stretched and shapeless. Strip malls and office parks swept past her, and her eyes began to sweep parking lots.

The decision had been made, and now she sought her target.

That one was too brightly lit. The next was too close to the road. Even with the small number of cars she'd seen out here with her, she didn't want to take chances. This was an area almost exclusively in use during business hours, with the white collar cottage industries alongside the tourist park for Jamestown, at night almost deserted. But not completely. And there was no use attracting prying eyes.

There. A small office park, just four buildings, two of them perpendicular to the road and the other two faced it, but with a substantial setback.

She slowed and angled the car into the parking lot. Slowly, she pulled into a shadowed space on the left side of the building furthest from the road. Two U-Haul moving vans were parked next to her, and shielded her car from view; she assumed they'd been stored there for the night, and liked the sense of protection they afforded her.

She didn't notice the lights on her cell phone illuminating in the center console as she closed the door to the car.

This particular development had the air of the early 90s around

it, and was built along the lines of most business architecture of the time: taupe-and-brown color scheme on a two-story building. Six suites upstairs, three on the right and three on the left of a central staircase that folded back on itself at the landing. Same arrangement on the lower level. Non-descript brown wood signs with cream lettering indicating the name of each business were attached to the taupe walls by every door.

She headed for the stairs.

Now, some might think that a back door would be best. But on the off-chance that someone were to spot her, how exactly was she going to explain that she was parked behind a moving truck, wandering at the back of a closed office building, in the dark of night, alone? Better, instead, to choose an upper floor unit, and head for the front door, one where there was some argument that she had dropped an item earlier in the day--a pair of sunglasses, maybe, or a house key--and had come to look.

She paused at the landing. Her hand was on the railing, and involuntarily she gripped the lumber tightly, so tightly that her knuckles whitened in the buzzing light from the dated fixture above her head. A moth bumped helplessly against the glass.

Pressing her lips into a thin line, she peeled her fingers away

from the wood. She shook both her hands out, like an athlete preparing to run the 400-yard dash. Her head rolled side to side on her neck, and her eyes were closed.

She could already taste the release. The sweep of endorphins, the immediate satisfaction of this incessant demand. She could keep it at bay, usually for weeks at a time, once for a few months. But it always came back, first quietly, something that could be ignored. And then it would gain strength, and it seemed that the longer she ignored it, the more incessant the whispering would become until it was an itch, a physical itch that she could never find, tormenting her, insisting. Always insisting.

She could shake her fingers all night, but the restlessness wasn't going to go away. One more half-flight of stairs and she would be free, or if not free, at least she would have a reprieve.

She wasn't going back.

Up the last half flight. She felt around in her pockets, affecting an air of searching the ground with her eyes but in reality pulling out the tools she kept hidden until the itch was too strong to ignore.

Standing near the door to the office, she continued to search the ground with her eyes while her expert fingers inserted the small flat blade of narrow aluminum into the door lock. She pressed, then passed

her other hand over her face as though confused or concerned. She was neither.

When the hand came back down, she drew a smaller tool from her pocket, and finally turning her back to the street, slipped this second aluminum blade into the lock. She didn't need to look, this part was just muscle memory. She counted slowly in her head, sensing the tension between the demand, the itch, and the anticipation of the release.

Her hands moved in tandem, seeking, seeking the spot where the lock would give way. She could picture the innards of the mechanism, the tumblers lined up and waiting for her to find their secret, to expose the combination that would remove the obstacle between her and whatever lay in the room beyond. She was always digging to find the answers to secrets.

One second. Another. A car went past behind her, but at least traveling the speed limit, if not faster. Not looking at her. Or for her.

Two more seconds, and then she felt it. That silent, musical click when the last tumbler slid away and the lock surrendered to her.

She let out a gasp, then a sigh. Her hand tucked inside her sleeve, she leaned down on the handle and eased the door inward. She never crossed the threshold--that wasn't what she needed, it wasn't the

insides that mattered. It was defeating the lock.

From there, she worked quickly, moving on to the second door, then the third. After each she paused to see if the itch was satisfied, if she'd done enough. At every one, she leaned on the handle, eased open the door, and felt the cool air blowing past the crack to caress her face. Like a secret whispered in her ear, the answer to a question she was asking and asking, finally revealed. On the sixth one, her hands were still and she knew the itch was gone.

Closing the final door gently, the urge at last satisfied, she wiped down the lock and handle as she had all the others. She turned back to the stairs and walked down them, not hurried. She carried the air of a disappointed searcher, someone who had failed to find what they were looking for. She didn't glance back at the door.

In the shadow of the moving van, Dr. Kitty Campbell opened the unlocked door of her car, cradled herself in the driver's seat, and pulled slowly out of the parking space. She headed back the way she had come.

Twenty minutes later, she pulled back into the Jamestown parking lot outside the museum. Tucked away inside her was her knowledge of where she had been and how she had spent the past hour. She had satisfied the itch, felt the secret brush past her face in the cool air escaping from those darkened rooms, and had come back with yet another

secret of her own.

She looked through the windshield into the illuminated parking lot and was startled and surprised to discover Stella on the sidewalk, looking anxious.

As she parked the car and got out, Stella ran over. "Dr. Campbell, I was worried you'd left already and you weren't answering your phone..."

"What's going on, Stella?" Kitty asked, her voice concerned, but her muscles still loose with the release of her night's activities.

Earlier in the day, her brain had been working overtime to engage with the other crew members while a part of her was listening to the siren song of her itch. Archaeology was a puzzle that could always distract her for a while. It was the same digging, digging that helped her satisfy the urge to pick a lock and see what was so valuable that it was hidden inside. It was the same kind of hunt for secrets. Now that the urge was satisfied, she found herself relaxed and not entirely focused on Stella's words.

"Dr. Brown needs you in the museum lab," Stella told her, the look on the girl's face worried. "He says...well, in the soil samples from today. There was a tooth."

"OK..." Kitty nodded, a little confused. Finding a human tooth wasn't uncommon in archaeological samples, and certainly in a context

like Jamestown, where there had been such an extreme circumstance of death and disease, it would be logical to expect some manner of human remains to occur in a large percentage of the excavation.

“No, I mean one with a filling in it,” Stella explained, eyes wide.

Kitty narrowed her own eyes and looked hard at the girl. All thoughts of where she had been earlier that night were gone, and suddenly she was tense and alert. Her focus shifted entirely to what Stella was telling her.

“You’re saying he found a modern human tooth, here at the site?”

Stella nodded.

“But, Dr. Campbell...”

Kitty waited for her.

“It still had blood on it.”