

detectives – and failing. ‘I hear you have found something. Maybe you could explain?’

He nods, eagerly. ‘Yes. So. Like I said on the phone. I’m a mud-larking guide. Professional. And I was out here this morning with my group and this young lad here’ – he points to a boy who looks about twelve years old – ‘he was poking about and opened up this bag.’ He points at a black bin bag sitting on some shingle. ‘I mean, rule number one of mud-larking is no touching, but this was just sitting there, like someone had just dropped it there, so I guess it was OK for him to open it.’

Although I know nothing of mud-larking rules, I throw the young boy a reassuring look and he appears relieved.

‘Anyway. I don’t know, I mean, I’m no forensics expert . . .’ Jason Mott smiles nervously at Saffron and I see him flush a little. ‘But I thought that they looked like they might be, you know, human bones.’

I pick my way across the shingle to the bag and pull it open slightly. Saffron follows and peers over my shoulder. The first thing we see is a human jawbone. I turn and glance at her. She nods; then she pulls on her gloves and unfurls some plastic sheeting.

‘Right,’ I say, standing up and looking at the group gathered on the mud. ‘We will need to clear this area. I would kindly ask for your cooperation.’

For a moment nobody moves. Then Jason Mott springs into action and manages to corral everyone off the beach and back up on to the riverside where they all stand and continue to gawp. I see a few smartphones appear and I call up. ‘Please. No filming. This is a very sensitive police matter. Thank you.’

The smartphones disappear.