

THE EDITOR

A Daphne Taylor Mystery

Plot Summary - Chapter by Chapter Breakdown

Notes: We have left several details of this story vague, so you can give them a personal touch. You can tailor this outline in several of the following ways to make it unique, without changing the main plot. 1) Daphne Taylor could be much younger and a magazine editor instead of a literary editor. 2) The story may be set in any town, village or community of your choice. 3) Detective Stanton and Daphne (if younger) may be involved romantically. 4) The SWAT team arrives just in time before her organs are harvested. 5) Change the ending – Daphne Taylor is found at the airport (instead of the farm).

Part One - Rising Tension

Chapter One

CH 1/ Scene 1 – Daphne Taylor lives a quiet life. She is retired but still working. Perhaps it was an odd concept some years ago, but for Daphne it had been her plan all along. She bowed to the exigencies of her bosses for too many years. Now, however, she is free to work at her own pace, doing what she loves best: editing and writing books. From her apartment's exceptional vista, she can watch the fickle ocean moods, the sandy beach bathing in the sun or soaking in the pouring rain, and the people going about their own lives.

CH 1/ Scene 2 – Daphne could be qualified as a modern recluse. However, she is never short on excuses to going out every day for a stroll along the beachfront or to the market or even to have a cappuccino at the corner café. Rain or shine, Daphne is out there early every morning. Today, she decides to take a longer walk along the promenade bordering the beach. The promenade is punctuated with ageing maple trees, which shade the grass lawn extending down to the beach. On her way to the shop, she notices a man sitting down, his back leaning against the tree trunk behind him. He is reading a book. She pays no mind to him, continues her leisurely stroll toward the shops and spends some time at the local grocer.

CH 1/ Scene 3 – On her way home and as she walks past the man again, Daphne notices that he has not moved from the position in which she first saw him. The book is still on his lap. His head is still bent down as if reading the page under his eyes. His hand is still not turning the pages. He looks so immobile that Daphne decides to stop and have a chat with him. Perhaps he is ill. She drops her tote bag on the grass beside the fellow, and crouches down to speak to him. He still does not move – of course he will not move – he is dead, or so Daphne presumes at first glance.

CH 1/ Scene 4 – Taking in a breath, Daphne does not want to alert the families already stretching their towels on the patch of grass near the tree and preparing to run into the breaking waves. She takes her cell phone out of her pocket and punches 911. She tells the woman on the line that she will need an ambulance and police assistance. She does not give much more information to the dispatch lady, other than her location and the main reason for her call – a man is dead at the foot of a tree on the promenade.

CH 1/ Scene 5 – When the police officers arrive on the scene and Detective Michael Stanton pulls Daphne aside and away from the scene, she wants to tell him what she has observed, but the detective does not want to listen to her. He suggests for her to go back to her place with her groceries, have a nice cup of tea and leave the investigation to him and the officers now in charge of this case. Stanton's patronizing attitude does not sit well with Daphne. Nevertheless, she gives him her address, phone numbers and tells him that she'll be expecting his call. She has a statement to make.

Chapter Two

CH 2/ Scene 1 – Daphne returns home, puts her groceries away and sits down at her desk, which faces the beach and, as it happens, the maple tree under which she found the dead fellow. As Detective Stanton suggested, Daphne has a cup of tea in front of her computer – an old but trusty system she is not

yet prepared to replace – and opens a new “case file”. As an editor, Daphne Taylor has had contact with many hard-done-by individuals. From abused mothers and children, to ladies of the night, to hardened criminals speaking to her from their prison cells to doctors and psychiatrists recounting their stories or giving their manuscripts to edit, Daphne has practically heard and read about them all.

CH 2/ Scene 2 – Daphne is still in the middle of writing her statement when the doorbell rings. She knows Detective Stanton is at the door. She lets him in and invites him to share a cupper with her. Before sitting down on the sofa of the living room, he walks to the bay window. He smiles when he notices that he can observe the stretch of beach, promenade and, in this instance, the crime scene from where he is standing. He asks Daphne if she saw anything out of the ordinary happening on the beach before she left her apartment this morning. No, is the answer. Daphne points out that although the bay window affords her a view of the beach and ocean beyond, she is rarely sitting at her desk to watch people – she is working more often than not.

CH 2/ Scene 3 – Michael Stanton returns to the precinct with Daphne’s statement in his pocket. He has established the fact that she has never seen the victim before that day. She does not know anyone by the name of Henri Montclair and has no idea how he happened to be sitting under the tree. Detective Stanton has never involved anyone other than police officers or informants in his investigations, apart, of course, from the ME or other specialists. But this time, his instincts tell him he will need to involve “The Editor” in the case.

CH 2/ Scene 4 – Dr. Riddle, the local ME, is waiting for Stanton. Dr. Riddle has examined the body at the scene and has determined that Henri Montclair did not die where *the editor* found him, but somewhere else. Dr. Riddle determined that the poor fellow bled out from his liver and kidneys being removed from his body prematurely. Stanton is disgusted. He has dealt with addicts dying from an overdose, with murdered victims who had been shot during a gang war or other, and even with victims of domestic abuse or pornography, and from the slave trade of women and children, but illegal organ harvesting is a first for him.

CH 2/ Scene 5 – The following day, once the yellow tape has been removed from around the scene of the incident, Daphne returns to the promenade and examines the area surrounding the tree and nearby lawn. From her apartment window, she did not see any forensic team traipsing about the site. She therefore concludes the crime – if crime there were – occurred someplace else. As she rounds the tree on all fours, Detective Stanton joins her. Startled, Daphne turns to him. “What are you doing here?” is the question they ask each other.

Chapter Three

CH 3/ Scene 1 – Daphne stands up and smiles. In her late sixties, she is still a very attractive woman. Stanton cracks up laughing. Daphne finally answers that she found traces of blood on the tree bark. She believes the man did not die in that spot. She tells Stanton that if he had died from a wound of any sort, he would have bled on the ground until his heart stopped, which is not the case in this instance. Stanton has to admit *the editor* is not your run-of-the-mill old lady. It’s either that or she’s read a lot of detective novels. Daphne does not stop there in her description of the events that must have taken place prior to the man being placed under the tree.

CH 3/ Scene 2 – The patch of grass where Henri Montclair was sitting is matted, which means he was placed under the tree hours before being discovered – possibly during the night. Moreover, Daphne shows Stanton what she found stuck in the dirt at the base of the tree – a keycard. It’s the keycard of a hotel located in a street ending at the promenade. The hotel is about two blocks away from where Henri was found. Stanton can’t believe he missed it. He even wonders if Daphne is not hiding something from him. It seems to him that she knows more than she is willing to admit.

CH 3/Scene 3 – Stanton is becoming suspicious and Daphne knows it. She tells Stanton to go about his investigation without her. She has other things to do than searching for clues for him. She walks away without another word. From her apartment, she observes Stanton continuing to search for clues around the tree until he finally makes his way to the hotel.

CH 3/ Scene 4 – Daphne makes a note of her findings in her “case file” and return to working on her latest book editing. An hour or so later, Stanton is at the door of her building. It’s nearly lunchtime. Daphne is ready for him. She knew he would have come back. She invites him in. When he sees the small dining table set for two with salmon on toasts, salad and mineral water near at hand, Stanton is ready to take his leave, believing Daphne is expecting company for lunch.

Part Two - Main Action

Chapter Four

CH 4/ Scene 1 – She laughs and tells him to take a seat and to stop fussing. They start eating while Stanton tells Daphne that the hotel keycard was a vital clue in the investigation. When Daphne asks the detective if he is going to tell her what Henri Montclair died of, Stanton hesitates. He normally cannot discuss an open case with a material witness. Yet, if Daphne promises to be quiet, and not to talk to anyone about the case, he’s willing to let her have some answers to her questions. Daphne agrees. Who’s she going to tell anyway?

CH 4/ Scene 2 – Stanton then reveals that the ME has determined the cause of death being organ harvesting. Daphne puts a hand to her mouth and gasps in disbelief. Like Stanton, the editor has come across quite a few crimes; organ harvesting being one of the cruelest there is. The victims are generally alive when the organs are harvested. Kidneys are the most common and perhaps the cheapest to acquire. If the harvesting is performed by a licensed surgeon, under anesthesia, the victim has some chance of survival. If not, death is a certainty.

CH 4/ Scene 3 – Stanton further reveals that a room in the hotel was used to extract the organs. That room is now the actual scene of the crime. After lunch, Daphne tells Stanton that the name ‘Montclair’ might be a clue in itself. Stanton is doubtful. It’s a common name. Yet, and once again, Daphne seems to hide something from the detective. “She knows more than she is letting on,” Stanton says to his sergeant when he gets back to the precinct. He decides to run a background check on the editor. He would hate to be caught with his pants down if she turns out to be an accomplice to the crime.

CH 4/ Scene 4 – While Stanton is getting his knickers in a knot about the old editor, Daphne goes back to the promenade that afternoon. She had found the keycard where it could not have been easily seen. Apart from being green as the lawn it was covered with dirt. She now wonders if it was the only clue left behind by the criminal or by his or her accomplice. Maybe someone had been forced into this awful scheme and wanted the police to catch who ever is doing this. As for a motive; it’s probably the oldest one in the world – money – that has geared the criminals into such despicable action.

CH 4/ Scene 5 – As Daphne walks back and forth across the lawn near the promenade at the back of the maple tree, where the body was found, someone is observing her. The woman sits on a bench nearby and continues watching her. When she sees that Daphne is about to leave the site and continue on her way toward the stores, the woman gets up and catches up with her. She steps in front of the editor and asks her if she found anything else of interest.

Chapter 5

CH 5/ Scene 1 – Daphne stops dead in her tracks and replies that she has no idea what the lady is talking about. The woman then introduces herself as Sergeant Laurelville. She says she works with the detective in this case and she is wondering if Daphne would not mind having coffee with her. Daphne is not happy with this sudden encounter. She senses something is wrong with this picture. However she does not show her qualms. She accepts the sergeant’s invitation and turns her cell phone on to “record” in her pocket. In short, Daphne smells a rat.

CH 5/ Scene 2 – Sgt. Laurelville buys their coffees from the barista at the café’s counter while Daphne surreptitiously dials Detective Stanton’s number. She takes a snap shot of Laurelville and sends it to the detective. She then asks him if Laurelville is his sergeant. Before she could hear the answer, the sergeant comes back to the table and sits down. She asks who Daphne talked to, which question confirms

Daphne's suspicions. Laurelville is no sergeant and she, Daphne, has fallen in a nasty trap. Daphne is very vague when she answers. She says it was just her son calling to confirm that Daphne will be at home when he'll come by her place that night. Laurelville titters and tells Daphne that she knows her son does not live in the city. By this time, Daphne does not know how to get out of the snare. She knows Laurelville has a gun in the shoulder holster hidden under her jacket. Daphne now suspects Laurelville is waiting for someone or something, otherwise why would they be sitting here having coffee?

CH 5/ Scene 3 – The two women talk about the weather and Daphne's discovery of the body casually. Daphne refrains from talking about the keycard she found the day before and about the item she found today. She has it hidden at the bottom of her handbag. Yet, she knows Laurelville must have seen her picking it up and putting it in the bag. When she finishes her coffee, Daphne gets up and goes to the bathroom. While in the toilet stall, Daphne writes a message to "anyone who reads this". When she leaves the toilet, Laurelville is waiting for her, pointing a gun in her face.

CH 5/ Scene 4 – A few minutes later, Laurelville is forcing Daphne into an SUV which is picking the two women up from the curb. However, the barista – a young woman who knows Daphne for a couple of years – has observed the woman forcing Daphne into the vehicle. Recalling that Daphne went to the restroom before leaving the café, the barista goes and check the toilet stalls. Lying precariously on the edge of the partition between two stall is a Swiss Army knife and a note. The note tells the person reading it to call Detective Michael Stanton at the city precinct and to give him the knife.

CH 5/ Scene 5 – The barista calls the detective from her cell phone and tells him about the Swiss Army knife. She also explains about the woman forcing Daphne into a SUV. No, she did not see the license plate. Yes, she will be waiting for the detective. When Stanton arrives at the café, he asks the barista to describe the woman and the events that preceded the kidnapping.

CH 5/ Scene 6 – Since Daphne lives alone and there is no family to contact in case the kidnapers want to exchange the editor's life for something the police might have, Stanton installs a twenty-four-hour surveillance camera in her apartment and opens a line to Daphne's cell phone. Since Daphne's cell phone is equipped with a GPS locator, Stanton hopes to find her before the abductors realize it.

CH 5/ Scene 7 – Three hours later, finally the detective hears from his sergeant – James Hancock. He's found Daphne's phone – thrown in a ditch outside of town. The road in question leads to a village north of the city. Stanton doesn't have much choice – he has to follow the lead. He has to find Daphne before anything else happens to her. As he is about to head out of the precinct, he gets a text message from Laurelville. Daphne's kidneys and liver will be removed tonight unless she gets a ransom of five million dollars delivered as unaccompanied luggage at the airport with a ticket (to Mexico City) and baggage stub waiting for her at the Trans-Continental airline counter.

Part Three - Resolution

Chapter Six

CH 6/ Scene 1 – Stanton has to snigger silently. How will Laurelville verify if the money has been paid when she asked it to be placed in an unaccompanied luggage? Maybe all she wants is a free pass out of town. There is no way to trace the call – she used a burner phone. Stanton is sweating bullets now. He has involved a civilian in his investigation and look what happened: the editor is going to be eliminated. She's seen too much, knows too much and would probably recognize Laurelville anywhere.

CH 6/ Scene 2 – The precinct captain authorizes the purchase of a one-way ticket to Mexico City and the release of five million of counterfeit money from the evidence locker. The counterfeiters are now in jail; that case has been closed for years; so even if the money happens to be lost, it wouldn't much matter. In any case, the captain calls his Mexican counterpart to let him know about the money being sent to Mexico by mistake. When he hangs up, he calls Stanton in his office. The captain is unhappy to say the least. Stanton knows this affair will mean at least suspension for him, if not dismissal, in case the editor dies.

CH 6/ Scene 3 – Fortunately, thanks to Daphne’s cell phone together with several other clues the forensic team has found in the hotel room, Stanton and Sergeant Hancock are able to locate the farm where Daphne is possibly held. He has the choice of either driving to the farm now and with the SWAT team’s assistance burst through the door and arrest everyone in sight before they kill his favorite editor. Alternatively, he can wait for Laurelville at the airport and arrest her there *before* she would have alerted her accomplices at the farm that she’s safe and going to Mexico as planned. Both plans are risky. Stanton does not choose. He puts both plans into execution.

CH 6/ Scene 4 – When he reaches the farm with the SWAT team, he finds Daphne lying on a table in a makeshift operating theater. She is unconscious. He calls the nearest ambulance and has the editor transported to the General Hospital in the city. When Daphne wakes up, she is furious. She gets up, gets dressed and marches out of the hospital – not waiting for Stanton to come and visit her that night. No one knew about Daphne’s aversion of hospitals. She will not go to the hospital under any circumstance.

CH 6/ Scene 5 – On the way home she asks the cab driver to stop by the liquor store where she buys herself a bottle of her favorite wine. When she gets to her apartment, she opens the wine, has a sip and goes to take a shower. She is in her bathrobe when Stanton is at the door. Daphne is really too angry with him to let him in. Nevertheless, she invites him to come up. When he arrives, he takes one look at her and realizes that her face is bruised and she’s sporting a nasty black eye. She won’t talk about it. She offers him a glass of wine and tells him that she will never help him again.

CH 6/ Scene 6 – That’s all Stanton wanted to hear – apart from details regarding her abduction. The detective is very sorry for what happened, but he tells her that if she had not snooped around and found the hotel keycard they would probably be a long way from arresting the organ traffickers. Daphne is glad to have been able to help, but is adamant about one thing: she will not put her nose where it does not belong anymore. Stanton doubts that very much.

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