

AN APPLE FOR THE TEACHER

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) Father Jerome may introduce himself to Inspector Willis at the beginning of the story. 2) The story may be set in any town, village or community of your choice. 3) Dr. Witherby may play a larger role in the story. 4) The body of Louise Hardcore may have been cut in pieces which were strewn about the woods. 5) Change the ending – Lisa Hardcore hangs herself in the shed and leaves a suicide note admitting to killing her sister.

Part One - Rising Tension

Chapter One

CH 1/ Scene 1 – Lisa Hardcore carries her books and all of her teaching aids in a capacious carpet bag. She is the portrait of the respectable teacher. With her salt-and-pepper hair tied in a chignon at the nape of her neck, a tweed skirt and jacket, and a crisp white shirt to compliment the ensemble, she looks the part. Of course, her sensible shoes and the light make-up adorning her delicately featured face drive the point home. There is little doubt that you are in presence of a force to be reckoned with when you're eight years old and a little rambunctious at times.

CH 1/ Scene 2 – Master Lyndon O'Brian is such a boy. He comes from a well-to-do family in Scotland. He lives with his Aunt Louisa in Oxford. Lyndon's father, a Scottish landowner decided that his eldest son would be educated in Oxford – nowhere else. Lyndon himself does not care where he is educated as long as he can enjoy the freedom of playing with his friends in his aunt's garden and adjacent woods. Lyndon is an intelligent boy but not a very conscientious one. He will do his homework when all of his friends have gone home and there's nothing else to do. School work does not interest him in the least. Yet, Lyndon loves to read. His mind can travel to foreign countries with the flick of a page. He can take a trip to outer space when ever the story takes him across the cosmos.

CH 1/ Scene 3 – One afternoon, coming back from school through the woods at the back of his aunt's house, Lyndon trips and falls to the soggy ground. His first thought is for his clothes. They're all blotchy with dirt and mud now. His second thought is directed to the cause of his fall. He gets to his feet and turns around. He stares down for a moment at the root-like bone protruding awkwardly from the ground surface in disbelief. Lyndon stands there, frozen. His instincts tell him not to touch this "thing". Still horrified, he runs down the hill all the way home and into his aunt's arms.

CH 1/ Scene 4 – Mrs. Adele McClure, herself a Scottish woman, hushes her nephew. Seeing that he was not playing games nor attempting to sway her into a trap of some sort, she asks him what made him run home. Lyndon does not answer and only points to the woods behind him. He holds on tightly to his aunt's waist and does not even want to turn around. A few minutes later Adele finally manages to free herself from her nephew's embrace and, ignoring the state of his clothes, asks him what frightened him so.

CH 1/ Scene 5 – An hour later, Detective Inspector John Willis is sitting across the table from Adele McClure, having a cup of tea. She explains what her nephew must have seen when he tripped over the bone that was sticking out of the dirt near a tree. By this time the SOCO team is on site and endeavoring to un-earth the remains of who ever has been buried at the base of one of the trees in Mrs. McClure's property.

Chapter Two

CH 2/ Scene 1 – While on holidays in Oxford and taking an afternoon stroll along the trail that will get him back to his lodgings, Father Jerome notices the white and blue tape which now surrounds the scene of the incident. Curious as ever, Father Jerome makes his way down the wooded path until he comes close to the forensic team hard at work. One of the constables watching over the perimeter approaches the

Father, asking him to move along. Father Jerome is not one to be dissuaded easily from satisfying his curiosity.

CH 2/ Scene 2 – While chatting amicably with the constable and telling him that he lodges not far from Mrs. McClure's house, he finally obtains an explanation for the blue and white tape surrounding the site. He thanks the constable profusely, saying that if he's ever on vacation in Canada to come for a visit on Vancouver Island. The constable smiles at the thought. For him Canada is as far as the moon. He doesn't think he would ever have the money – unless he wins the lottery – to pay for a family holiday all the way to western Canada. Instead of going back to his lodgings, Father Jerome makes his way to Mrs. McClure's home. He knocks on the back door and is soon welcomed indoors.

CH 2/ Scene 3 – Mrs. McClure explains – in front of a cup of tea and a plate of biscuits – what happened to her nephew. Neither he nor she knows the person who's been interred in that shallow grave. She has lived at the McClure Manor all of her life and has never heard anyone mention a corpse or a person being lost in or near the woods at the back of her property. Lyndon, having heard the conversation between the Father and his aunt, comes down from his room and joins them for a bit of a chat with the Father from Canada.

CH 2/ Scene 4 – While they're talking, Father Jerome learns from Lyndon that his teacher, Miss Hardcore is sometimes talking about her sister. The sister is said to have disappeared one night after she had gone to the cinema with her fiancé. Lyndon does not know the name of the fiancé, but he knows where Miss Hardcore lives. He tells Father Jerome that if he wants, he will show him and introduce him to his teacher. Father tells Lyndon that he might very well take him up on his offer – in the morning. The next day being Saturday, Miss Hardcore may be home then.

CH 2/ Scene 5 – When the forensic team finally manages to expose the remains of the corpse in the woods, the ME, Dr. George Teasdale, is called on the scene. As soon as he sees the bones lying in a fetal position at the base of the tree, he tells the head of the SOCO team that he will need to contact a colleague of his to conduct an examination of the bones. He, himself, is not a forensic anthropologist and would not be able to do much with these bones.

Chapter Three

CH 3/ Scene 1 – As Father Jerome is about to leave the McClure's home, Detective Inspector Willis rings the doorbell. He is admitted indoors and is surprised to find a priest in a cassock come out of Mrs. McClure's kitchen. Lyndon, who is unable to keep quiet in circumstances such as these, jumps at the chance to tell the inspector that Father Jerome here is from Canada and that he, Lyndon, and the Father are going to see the sister of the corpse tomorrow.

CH 3/ Scene 2 – Baffled with this sudden revelation, Inspector Willis asks the Father for an explanation, which the latter is happy to give. The inspector tells Lyndon that it would not be wise for him to show up unannounced at Miss Hardcore's place. She might not appreciate being told that the corpse in the forest might be that of her sister. Inspector Willis tells both the Father and Lyndon not to go anywhere near the teacher.

CH 3/Scene 3 – Father Jerome is not going to listen to Inspector Willis's injunction. He will go and see Miss Hardcore in the morning – with or without Lyndon. When Father Jerome returns to his lodgings, he decides to have a chat with his landlady. Mrs. Lloyd, a buxom woman with a friendly attitude, sits down with Father Jerome while the latter has his tea. Mrs. Lloyd confirms that Miss Louise Hardcore, Lisa's sister vanished nearly twenty years ago and that her disappearance marked the community deeply. The police at the time questioned the fiancé, but there was no evidence of foul play.

CH 3/ Scene 4 – The next morning, Father Jerome decides to pay a visit to Miss Lisa Hardcore. Mrs. Lloyd told him where she lives. When he arrives at his destination, he notices Inspector Willis's car parked near the curb. Father Jerome does not want to ignite a confrontation that could possibly land him in hot water with the Bishop, who he is currently visiting. He decides to have a morning tea and scones at the café across the street from Miss Hardcore's house.

Part Two - Main Action

Chapter Four

CH 4/ Scene 1 – When the inspector leaves Miss Hardcore's house, Father Jerome decides to wait for another ten to fifteen minutes before knocking on the teacher's door. He is about to cross the busy street, when he observes the lady come out of her house. She has quite a large tote bag with her, the handles of which are looped over her forearm. Father Jerome decides to follow the lady to the market – he believes she's on her way to do some shopping. He's wrong!

CH 4/ Scene 2 – Five minutes into the walk, Father Jerome realizes that the woman is not going anywhere near the market, but has now veered off toward a patch of ground that is populated with several vegetable garden plots and tool sheds. Father Jerome shakes his head. He cannot follow Miss Hardcore down the path leading to what appears to be her patch of plowed dirt without being seen. He stays back and watches the lady's movements from the street alongside the garden. He sees Miss Hardcore enter one of the sheds and waits for her to come out. A half-an-hour later the woman still has not emerged from the rather large and well-kept shed. Father Jerome is not one to give up on anything, but this time, his presence has become too obvious for him to remain on watch.

CH 4/ Scene 3 – Meanwhile, Dr. Teasdale is working with his colleague, Dr. Witherby, an imminent forensic anthropologist and Oxford university professor. Dr. Witherby has ordered the remains and all surrounding dirt or vegetation to be brought to his lab. Five people are busy examining every piece of dirt, insect or animal remains that may have had a role to play in the putrefaction of the corpse. Dr. Witherby shows Dr. Teasdale that the young woman died from a hard blow to the head. It crushed her skull. The doctor also shows Teasdale the several fractures which the victim endured. These broken bones are indicative of the young woman having being maltreated over a span of years – since childhood probably. Dr. Witherby goes as far as to say that Louise Hardcore being killed, when she was, may have been a blessing in disguise. "That young lady has been severely beaten during her lifetime." Dr. Witherby also discovered a very curious item inside the victim's skull – a shriveled apple. If Louise had been a school mistress, one could have concluded that "it was an apple for the teacher!"

CH 4/ Scene 4 – Father Jerome is far from satisfied with this morning's futile exercise. He returns to the café – across the street from Miss Hardcore's house – and decides to have a chat with the owner. The rather thin and emaciated-looking woman is happy to take a break from her busy morning and to sit with Father Jerome. They chat for a little while until Father Jerome brings up the subject at the forefront of his mind – the body in the woods and the disappearance of Miss Hardcore's sister. The café owner, a lady by the name of Julia Sylvan, tells the Father that the sisters were always at odds. The younger one, Louise, was the happy one of the two. She always had a smile for everyone, whereas Lisa never could say boo to the neighbors even if her life depended on it. Even when Louise was in hospital a couple of times, Mrs. Sylvan went to see the poor child because Lisa would never go for a visit.

CH 4/ Scene 5 – While he's having lunch, still sitting at a table in the café and reading the Saturday paper, Father Jerome sees Lisa Hardcore come back from the veggie garden and perhaps the market, seeing that her tote bag seems laden with groceries. He decides it's time to give the woman a hand with her shopping. He crosses the street and catches up with Lisa Hardcore as she's about to step up to her door. He wants to help her, but she rebuffs his helpful advance and tells him that she does not need any help nor does she intend to go to church anytime soon. Father Jerome is used to this kind of rebuke. He does not insist, but as he turns away, he tells Lisa Hardcore that it would be about time for her to assist the police in their investigation of her sister's murder.

Chapter 5

CH 5/ Scene 1 – Stunned, Miss Hardcore stops on the top steps, turns around and tells the Father to come inside. Before he even crosses the threshold, Miss Hardcore asks him how he knows anything about her sister's disappearance. "Who are you?" she demands. Father Jerome tells her the truth. He is a stranger in town and he's met one of her students – the little boy who discovered what he presumes are

the remains of her sister Louise. Miss Hardcore tells him to come in and sits down with him in her living room. Lisa Hardcore tells him that the inspector was here to tell her the same thing. He told her that as soon as the forensic anthropologist has positively identified the lady, he will let her know.

CH 5/ Scene 2 – Yet, Father Jerome is only interested in obtaining the name of the boyfriend – the man who presumably was the last to see Louise alive on the day she disappeared. Lisa Hardcore is adamant: she will not reveal the name of the gentleman. He’s a friend of the family. If the inspector finds out that Louise was involved with someone, he will probably find out who the person was. But Lisa Hardcore herself will not reveal the man’s name.

CH 5/ Scene 3 – Father Jerome has no choice. He leaves Lisa Hardcore’s place and returns to his lodgings. He questions Mrs. Lloyd again. She is not sure – it’s such a long time ago – but she believes the young man who was taking Louise out back then was the butcher in the market. His name is Gerald Antoine. Mrs. Lloyd has bought her meat from him for years. He was only an apprentice when all this happened, but the police could not pin anything on him. They never found her body. According to the young man, Louise and he went to the cinema against her sister’s wishes, and when he accompanied her home, Lisa Hardcore opened the door to let Louise in. He never saw her again.

CH 5/ Scene 4 – So, according to Mrs. Lloyd, the young woman was fine – and alive – when she reached her home after the movie. When did Louise actually disappear; was it the same night, or later that week? However, no one recalls having seen the young woman after that night. Inspector Willis comes to the inn to interview Father Jerome on the Saturday afternoon. He has learned from Mrs. McClure that the Father has been nosing around. Father Jerome and Inspector Willis sit down, together with Mrs. Lloyd, to have a nice cup of tea. Father Jerome tells Inspector Willis what he found out – Lisa going to the community gardens and staying a long time in her shed. Mrs. Lloyd tells the inspector all about Gerald Antoine. In the end Inspector Willis asks Father Jerome to show him which shed in the community garden is owned by Lisa Hardcore.

CH 5/ Scene 5 – Happy to oblige, the inspector and the Father go to the garden and examine Lisa’s shed on the outside. It is locked and without a warrant – even if only a garden shed – the inspector cannot enter the premises. He decides to continue his investigation on his own and thanks Father Jerome for his assistance. Undaunted, Father Jerome decides to have a chat with Gerald Antoine at the market. The market shops are about to close. Gerald Antoine welcomes the Father warmly and sits down with him at the local pub where the two of them talk over a beer. Gerald is a good-natured fellow. He is not surprised that Father Jerome found out about his relationship with Louise. She was a fantastic girl, but her sister was better!

CH 5/ Scene 6 – It doesn’t take long for Father Jerome to realize that Gerald was possibly in love with Lisa Hardcore all along. He only took the little sister out to please Lisa. He never proposed to Lisa after what happened to Louise. He could not bring himself to let her know what he really felt. Everyone would have thought he killed Louise to get to Lisa. Father Jerome thinks it is still a possible conclusion to draw. Yet, today he has met Lisa and he’s convinced there is still some affection lingering between Gerald and Lisa.

CH 5/ Scene 7 – When Drs. Teasdale and Witherby submit their joint reports to the inspector, the latter could not be happier. Yes, Miss Louise Hardcore is in fact the lady whose bones Master Lyndon O’Brian found in the woods at the back of his aunt’s property. Louise was approximately eighteen years old when she died from blunt force trauma – a blow to the skull, which has been inflicted by the blunt edge of a meat cleaver. Yet, before he runs off and arrests Gerald Antoine for the murder of Louise Hardcore, Inspector Willis asks his sergeant to run a detailed background check on the victim, her sister and Gerald Antoine.

Part Three - Resolution

Chapter Six

CH 6/ Scene 1 – In the meantime, the inspector is granted a warrant allowing him to open the garden shed belonging to Miss Lisa Hardcore. Under strong protest, the school teacher opens the shed for the inspector who asked Father Jerome to accompany him. Inside, apart from the usual tools and garden implements, the forensic team finds an old wardrobe which contains a wedding dress, still in its original clothes bag, a suitcase filled with clothes and toilet accessories. They also find a shoebox containing not only a pair of shoes but a jewelry case. There are wedding bands inside the case and a pair of diamond earrings. Miss Lisa Hardcore offers no explanation other than these items were her sister's. She could not bring herself to part with them.

CH 6/ Scene 2 – Father Jerome is not convinced the items found in the shed were bought for the sister. He needs to find out from someone how tall Louise would have been when she died. (He doesn't want to ask Gerald. He doesn't want to let him know what they found in the shed.) Since Mrs. Lloyd is Father Jerome's source of information, he goes back to her to ask. Louise was a petite lady – no more than five-foot two inches, Mrs. Lloyd tells him. Father Jerome concludes that the dress in the wardrobe was made for a taller woman. Mrs. Lloyd is sure Louise was engaged to the butcher. Lisa never talked about it, no.

CH 6/ Scene 3 – When Inspector Willis receives the reports concerning Louise and Lisa Hardcore, and Gerald Antoine, he asks his sergeant to bring Gerald Antoine in for questioning. In the meantime, he sends an email to the Vancouver Island southern precinct. He wants to know if what he heard about the Father is true. By the time he gets his answer, Gerald Antoine is waiting to be interviewed. During their conversation, Gerald reveals that he has always been interested in Lisa hardcore – not Louise. He repeats to the inspector what he had said to Father Jerome: he only took the little sister out to please Lisa.

CH 6/ Scene 4 – At the issue of the interview, Inspector Willis is at loose ends. He is inclined to believe Gerald has committed the crime but there is one thing that bothers him: why not chopping the body off in little pieces and discarding it with the rest of the discarded butcher's meat? No one would have ever found the body that way. Maybe, as an apprentice at the time, Gerald didn't have the run of the butcher's shop as he does now. Having noted that Father Jerome is a pretty good judge of character and after receiving such glowing references from Vancouver Island, Inspector Willis decides to ask for Father Jerome's opinion.

CH 6/ Scene 5 – Father Jerome is only too happy to being asked. He tells the inspector that he does not believe Gerald to be the culprit. When the inspector shows the priest the forensic anthropologist's report and Dr. Witherby's note about the multiple healed fractures found on Louise's body, Father Jerome only nods. He reads the report for a few minutes in silence. When he raises his gaze to the inspector, he tells him that he should arrest Lisa Hardcore for the murder of her sister. The woman was jealous of her sister's beauty. On the night of the murder, Father Jerome believes that Gerald proposed to Louise. Perhaps he will not admit it today, but when he learns that Lisa is the guilty party, he will come clean, he is sure of it.

CH 6/ Scene 6 – Father Jerome was right. Gerald admits to having proposed to Louise. She was such a gorgeous young woman. Lisa is smarter, granted, but he never wanted "smarts" when he could have had "love" from Louise. He didn't kill Louise – "of course not" – he can't recall giving or lending a meat cleaver to Lisa, but those can be bought at any houseware store.

CH 6/ Scene 7 – Lisa is arrested for the crime. She is protesting her innocence all through the trial but gets convicted to life imprisonment. Father Jerome ends his holidays in company of Master Lyndon O'Brian. The boy promises to send him emails and one day to come for a visit. Father Jerome loves that idea.

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