

FATHER JEROME – Book 5

The Jewelry Box

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) The jewelry thief may be introduced earlier in the story. 2) The story may be set in any town, village or community of your choice. 3) Aunt Melanie may be in cahoots with the old man's heirs – the miser who owned the house where the jewelry box was hidden. 4) The grandparents may come up from Hawaii sooner, when they heard of their granddaughter's dilemma. 5) Isabelle friends may have a bigger role to play in the story. 6) Change the ending – Aunt Mildred murdered the jeweler herself.

Part One - Rising Tension

Chapter One

CH 1/Scene 1 – This morning, Father Jerome is waiting in the church for Isabelle Walton to show up. Isabelle lives with her Aunt Melanie in the village of Qualicum Beach on Vancouver Island, Canada. Although not large or of significance in the grand scheme of things, Father Jerome's parish is of great importance to him. He knows everyone by name and has baptized many. He loves the countryside, the beach, the wintry days even, because he feels he lives in the most beautiful place on earth. The coast is yet unspoiled and still void of the insidious tourist popularity that infects most resort towns in Western Canada.

CH 1/Scene 2 – Although only seven years' old, Isabelle is a very astute young lady. The day before, after Sunday mass, she requested to meet with Father Jerome at the church "to discuss a very important matter." When the Father asked her if she wanted to make a confession, Isabelle told him in no uncertain terms that she had no sin to confess and that she only wanted to discuss a private matter with him. On the Sunday evening, Father Jerome was still unsettled about the request and phoned Isabelle's aunt. He asked her if she was aware of her niece wanting to meet with him the next morning. "Yes," was the answer. "No," Aunt Melanie did not know what it was about.

CH 1/Scene 3 – Thus, Father Jerome is sitting on the front pew when he hears the little tip-tapping of Isabelle's shoes coming down the center aisle. He gets up and notices immediately that Isabelle is carrying a package. Curious but not wanting to appear so, Father Jerome asks Isabelle if she wants to go to his office to have their conversation. Isabelle nods and asks the Father if there is a safe in that office of his. Still not wanting to appear inquisitive, he says that yes and to follow him to his office.

CH 1/Scene 4 – As soon as Isabelle is sitting in the visitor's chair across from the Father's desk – the chair could have seated three kids of Isabelle's size easily – the little girl puts her package on the desk. She then tells the Father that she found the jewelry box in the old house by the grocer's shop. She was there apparently, visiting the place the previous Saturday. Isabelle then says that she and her friends agreed to ask the Father to keep the jewelry box for a while. Father Jerome agrees with the idea but asks to see the box and its content before he puts it in his safe. Isabelle takes the magnificent jewelry box out of its wrapping and hands it to the Father.

CH 1/Scene 5 – When Father Jerome opens the box, he gasps. It contains quite a few pieces of what appear to be very expensive jewelry, including a diamond necklace and pearl bracelet. The exquisite pendants and chains are the other items that retain his attention. He closes the box and asks Isabelle where the children found the box. Was it upstairs in the bedroom of the old house, or somewhere else? Isabelle shakes her head vigorously and tells him that they found the box in the basement behind a stack of old books and a couple of cartons.

Chapter Two

CH 2/Scene 1 – With no further ado, Father Jerome gets to his feet, takes the jewelry box and goes to the office wall behind which the safe is hidden. He opens it, pushes the golden chalice aside and places the

precious box beside it. He closes the safe and returns to his seat. He then takes a piece of paper and writes a receipt for Isabelle. He tells her to keep the receipt and not to give it to anyone. When she will want to get the box back, the only thing she would have to do is to show the receipt to who ever is minding the office at the time. When Isabelle asks if Father Jerome intends to go away, he replies that he takes mini-vacations sometimes and when that happens, Ms. Cecilia Robinson, his part-time housekeeper and secretary, comes to mind the office.

CH 2/Scene 2 – Isabelle seems okay with the arrangement and leaves the church to join her friends who are waiting for her by the gate. Father Jerome could not in all good conscience press the child for any more answers. He knew Isabelle since she was born and when her parents were killed in a plane crash two years ago; he took particular care to ensure Isabelle's wellbeing. This latest find is disturbing though. The old house in question has been boarded up only a few months back. Apparently the owner has passed away in Vancouver. His last will and testament is still in probate, which means the house will remain vacant for months yet.

CH 2/Scene 3 – Father Jerome goes back to his office as soon as he saw the children go down the path in the direction of the school. He opens the safe again, takes the jewelry box out and sits down at his desk. He then makes a list of all the items it contains. He photographs each piece then closes the box and replaces it in the safe. He is sure these pieces belong to someone, someone else than the old man who owned the house when he died. He was the miser par excellence and would not have spent a dime on such frivolities as jewelries. Armed of the list and of his cell phone, Father Jerome climbs behind the wheel of his Austin Martin Mini and drives to the South Vancouver Island Constabulary.

CH 2/Scene 4 – As soon as he arrives in the parking lot of the precinct, he notices his friend, Detective Inspector Robert Damien coming out of the back door. Father Jerome calls the inspector over and climbs out of his car. When he tells him what this is all about, Inspector Damien shakes his head and asks the Father why he didn't say anything to Isabelle's aunt. The Father replies that Isabelle came to him in total confidence. Besides, her aunt does not have a safe in her house. Inspector Damien tells the Father that he will be back in an hour and that he will see him in the village pub for lunch.

CH 2/Scene 5 – Father Jerome agrees and returns to Qualicum Beach and to the church to finish a letter (email these days) to the Bishop. *The poor dear always wants lengthy reports as if his bible wasn't a long enough book to read!* Before going back to the church's office, Father Jerome makes a detour to the rectory where he knows Cecilia is busy preparing lunch or baking cookies to refill the Sunday school jars. When he tells Cecilia that he will not have lunch at the rectory today, she does not sound too pleased. Father Jerome tells her to save a plate in the fridge, which he will warm up for dinner. Somewhat placated, Cecilia returns to her preparation while Father Jerome goes back to the church's office

Chapter Three

CH 3/Scene 1 – As soon as he passes the doorway, Father Jerome cannot ignore the chaos. His safe has been forced open and, of course, the jewelry box is gone. The Father is not a person who would swear at the mere inconveniences of life, but this is more than "inconvenient", it's darn right offensive. He stomps out of his office, takes his phone out of his pocket and punches Inspector Damien's number. Once he has the man on the line, Father Jerome tells him that he better come for lunch at the rectory instead – with the forensic team – because, the jewelry box is gone.

CH 3/Scene 2 – Inspector Damien doesn't believe what he's hearing. He can't believe the thief knew so quickly where the jewelry box was, unless, of course, he followed the kids to the church. When Damien arrives at the rectory, Cecilia is ready to serve him some soup and a chicken potpie. The smile on the inspector's face tells it all. He loves Cecilia's cooking. He sits down and tells Father Jerome that the forensic guys are already collecting evidence from his office and as soon as they're done they'll let them know.

CH 3/Scene 3 – After lunch, Inspector Damien and Father Jerome return to the office to find it in disarray still. There is fingerprint powder adorning every piece of furniture, door and even the walls around them. Father Jerome then sends an email to the inspector's phone with a photo of the list and the pictures of the

jewels he had taken that morning. The next thing to do is to go to the old house and see where the jewelry box was found. From Isabelle's explanation, it should not be too difficult to find. It isn't long before they arrive at the house to find a group of people standing by the front door. Inspector Damien tells Father Jerome to wait in the car until he has found out what's happening.

CH 3/Scene 4 – The grocer, a man by the name of Sylvan Dorset, comes to the car window to talk to the Father. Sylvan tells the priest that his delivery boy found a body in the basement and that he is surprised to see the Father here already. Father Jerome steps out of the car and asks Sylvan if he knows the deceased. Sylvan says that he hasn't been told who it is; his delivery boy has never seen the guy before.

Part Two - Main Action

Chapter Four

CH 4/Scene 1 – When Inspector Damien comes out of the house, he confirms that the body of a middle-aged man has been found in the basement. The man's face has been bashed in. He has been tortured, which probably means that he knew where the jewelry box had gone after Isabelle discovered it. Father Jerome wonders if he knows the dead man. He wants to see him to say a prayer for him. Knowing the priest as well as he does, Inspector Damien lets the Father into the house. As soon as he reaches the last step of the stairs leading to the basement, Father Jerome gasps and puts a hand to his mouth. He then kneels down by the body, says a short prayer and gets up. He turns to the inspector and tells him that the dead man is none other than the local jeweler.

CH 4/Scene 2 – What Simon Manfred was doing in that basement is a question that will need answer. How could he have known the jewelry box had been transported to the church, unless he had followed Isabelle that morning? Perhaps, he had not known the jewelry box's whereabouts and that's why he was beaten to death. Either way, the poor man is dead and the case is now a homicide. Inspector Damien calls Dr. Wilbert Daniels, the ME, to the scene and asks the forensic team to come down to the village to examine the next crime scene. When he hangs up from talking to the chief forensic officer, Inspector Damien shakes his head and asks Father Jerome if he would not mind coming with him to Isabelle's house. The children must be back from school by this time.

CH 4/ Scene 3 – Aunt Melanie Simons is quite surprised to see both Father Jerome and Inspector Damien at her front door. She immediately thinks that something is wrong with Isabelle. She has not come home yet. Inspector Damien does not take time to offer an explanation but asks the Father to stay with Aunt Melanie. Aunt Melanie invites the Father indoors and asks why he's here. When he finishes explaining the reason for his presence in her house, Aunt Melanie breaks down in sobs. She is very much afraid something has happened to her niece. She doesn't know anything about the jewelry box. However, when Father Jerome shows her the pictures of the items inside the box, Aunt Melanie doesn't hesitate to tell Father Jerome that most of it belonged to her sister – Isabelle's mother. The jewelry had been stolen a year or so before her death and never recovered.

CH 4/ Scene 4 – Everything points to a jewelry theft gone horribly wrong. When Inspector Damien and a couple of the constables find Isabelle, she is playing hide-and-seek with her friends in the neighborhood park. No harm done. Before Inspector Damien brings her home to her aunt, he explains what happened to her jewelry box. He then asks her if she knows that the jewelry belonged to her mother. With tears pearling at the rim of her eyes, Isabelle shakes her head. She then says that her mom never wore fancy jewelry except when she and Dad went out to a fancy place.

CH 4/ Scene 5 – Next stop for Inspector Damien is the jewelry shop. Manfred's daughter closes the store as soon as she learns of her father's death. Without a search warrant, Damien cannot search the store for evidence that the jewels were ever here. Yet, with Father Jerome's pictures now on his own phone, he asks Leanne Manfred if she recognizes any of the pieces. Yes, she does. Her father bought these pieces from Isabelle's mother a year before she died. Inspector Damien does not reveal the fact that maybe Isabelle's mother has committed insurance fraud by selling the jewelry to Manfred and then declaring them stolen to get the insurance money.

Chapter 5

CH 5/ Scene 1 – The only flaw in that scheme is that Manfred could not sell these pieces to anyone on the island or anyone in Canada for that matter, unless he wanted to be accused of fraud or of buying stolen property. So, it is likely that Manfred kept all of the items until such a time that someone blackmailed him for them. Maybe, the family of the owner of the old house was involved as well. This case has too many ramifications or twists and turns and too many ifs to be resolved soon.

CH 5/ Scene 2 – Father Jerome, in the meantime, returns to the church and to his office. The forensic guys have now collected all the evidence they needed so that the Father can use his desk again. He's glad no one has stolen the chalice. He would have hated to write that email to the Bishop. However, he now needs to finish his missive to the man. He opens his computer, logs in, and opens his internet browser. A thought comes across his mind. He logs into the e-bay site and search for any of the items that he has seen in the jewelry box. When he finds a pair of earrings – identical to the ones he photographed – he lifts his gaze to the ceiling and thanks the Lord for giving him that clue.

CH 5/ Scene 3 – An hour later, the inspector and his IT man have stopped the sales of all of the items posted on e-bay. They are searching for the person who intended to sell the stolen goods. No dice! They're getting lost through the internet maze without result. Inspector Damien phones Father Jerome and tells him that nothing can be done. The jewelry will not be sold at this point but they still don't know who murdered the jeweler or who took the jewelry box. When Father Jerome hangs up, he goes into the church and kneels before the altar. He would like to get another clue to this mystery.

CH 5/ Scene 4 – Isabelle is truly unhappy. She knows that her mother probably had good reasons for selling her jewelry, but she cannot understand why Aunt Melanie said she didn't know anything about the jewelry box. Isabelle is sure she has seen the box in her room some time ago. Isabelle does not want to confront her. Grown ups are very unpredictable and Isabelle does not want to irritate her aunt unnecessarily. Instead, she goes to her aunt's bedroom and phones Father Jerome. It's too late for her to go up to the church but says that she'll come and see him before going to school the next day.

CH 5/Scene 5 – Since Isabelle did not say why she wanted to talk to Father Jerome again, and she sounded uncomfortable on the phone, the priest decides to return to Aunt Melanie's place. He grabs a jar of Cecilia's cookies and makes his way to the aunt's house. Aunt Melanie is surprised, but accepts the cookies graciously. She invites the Father in for a cup of tea. Isabelle is apparently in bed at this hour. When he sits down, he notices that Aunt Melanie's laptop is opened on her desk. When the tea is served, Father Jerome maneuvers the conversation to the use of a laptop. He soon discovers that Aunt Melanie is an IT engineer. She works only part-time for a consultant in Victoria. Since looking after Isabelle she could only accept part-time work. "Not really enough to make ends meet sometimes," she confesses to the Father.

CH 5/Scene 6 – As soon as Father Jerome leaves Aunt Melanie's house, he phones Inspector Damien at home. The Father tells him that he would do well to run a background check on Melanie Simons. He also tells him that she's an IT professional in Victoria. Inspector Damien sees a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. But when Father Jerome tells him that Isabelle has something else to tell him, Inspector Damien is suddenly very worried about the little girl's safety.

Part Three - Resolution

Chapter Six

CH 6/ Scene 1 – In the morning, Father Jerome is waiting for Isabelle to come out of her house at the corner of the street. He is glad to see that nothing has happened to her overnight. He was very worried about her after hanging up from talking to Inspector Damien. When he asks her what she wanted to tell him, Isabelle says that maybe she should not say anything. If her aunt finds out that she talked she's going to be in big trouble. Father Jerome replies that whether she tells him or not, at this point, it makes no difference. Her aunt probably suspects that she knows something anyway.

CH 6/Scene 2 – Isabelle knows Father Jerome is right and decides to tell him that she saw the jewelry box in her aunt's bedroom some months ago. She's sure of it. No, she never opened it, but she only saw it once – after that she never saw it again until she found it in the old house. When the Father asks if she knew the jewelry box was in the basement, Isabelle shakes her head. Instead of driving Isabelle to school, Father Jerome goes to meet Isabelle's friends at their usual meeting place and tells the older boy that Isabelle won't be going to school this morning. Her aunt will send a "note" later. Satisfied that the kids will do what ever they've been told, Father Jerome drives Isabelle to the precinct.

CH 6/Scene 3 – Father Jerome stays with Isabelle at the precinct until the matter is resolved. Inspector Damien had received the forensic report by now. The fingerprints in the Father's office are those of Aunt Melanie. As for the murder, it seems that she had help. The forensic team found the prints of a known jewel thief on an old coal shovel that had been used to kill the jeweler. The thief has probably escaped with one of the jewelry pieces as payment for his services.

CH 6/Scene 4 – When Inspector Damien returns to the precinct he's followed by two officers who have Aunt Melanie in handcuffs. Isabelle's tears run down her cheeks now. Father Jerome could not feel sorrier for the little girl. She lost her parents dramatically only a couple of years ago and now her aunt is going to prison probably for a long time. Father Jerome, once again, asks for inspiration. He cannot stand the idea of such a beautiful girl going from foster home to foster home for the next ten years or so. *There has to be another way!*

CH 6/Scene 5 – While he obtained the blessing of the social services to have Isabelle stay with Cecilia for forty-eight hours, Father Jerome knows the arrangement is temporary and Isabelle will be facing the inevitable sooner rather than later. When he enters the kitchen of the rectory in the morning, he is surprised to find two older people sitting at the table and talking to Isabelle. The resemblance is unmistakable: Isabelle is the spitting image of her grandmother Walton. When the grandparents were contacted last night, they took an overnight flight from Hawaii and arrived in Victoria in the wee hours of the morning. Cecilia makes the introduction while putting another plate of Father Jerome's favorite bacon and eggs in front of him.

(###)