

FATHER JEROME – Book 7

Rekindling an old flame

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 story may be set in any town, village or community of your choice. 2) Louis and Cecilia are happy to have found each other again after thirty years of absence. 3) Cecilia may wonder why Louis never tried to contact her in all these years. 4) Louis may not have wanted to divulge that he had been married and since widowed. 5) Clifford may have been the killer after all – when he found out that Daniela was his daughter. 6) Change the ending – Clifford Ramose (if he is the killer) stays in town to face the charge of murder.

Part One - Rising Tension

Chapter One

CH 1/Scene 1 – This morning Father Jerome is having breakfast, as usual, with Cecilia Robinson at the rectory of his parish church in Qualicum Beach, a small coastal village 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 – Cecilia is all-aflutter this morning. The village fete is only four days away and there is "so much to do yet". Father Jerome is used to his secretary-cum-housekeeper to be a bundle of nerves before any and all church events. In modern jargon, the dear woman is a "control freak". Everything has to be "just so" for the event to be a success. This time however, Father Jerome is also concerned about the organizing of the fete. A lot is riding on its success. In fact, the church's three-hundred-year old altar is crumbling with rot and the invasion of wood worms has not helped matters. The local carpenter has tried fixing the beautiful and very ornate table many times – to no avail. The cost of replacing it goes far beyond the money held in the church's fund.

CH 1/Scene 3 – To ensure the success of the fete, Father Jerome calls upon the chief of the Indian band residing on the northern coast of the island. Upon accepting the invitation, the chief and his band will have a dance to call on the good will of the Spirits to grant Father Jerome's wish during the fete. The Father also calls upon various attraction and booth owners from the fair due to open in a couple of weeks in Vancouver. Last, but not least, he requests the presence of a magician, an old friend of his who, upon his return from his last tour-of-duty in the Middle East, decided to put a smile on children's faces rather than tears in their eyes, such as he saw coursing down their cheeks in the land of everlasting wars and conflicts.

CH 1/Scene 4 – In order to keep law and order during the fete (and to justify his presence) Father Jerome invites Detective Inspector Damien to attend the fete. He also invites the town's mayor and his wife. Both are a little too snobbish for the Father's taste, but he is in no position to pass judgment on anyone's manner or attitude. He leaves that task to the "Man Upstairs". Besides, their money for the altar will be as good as anyone else's. As for Cecilia, as the week progresses, she is becoming more and more anxious. She drives every day from the church to her home, to the park where the fete will be held. She visits every lady in the village to ensure that every one of them brings "goodies" to the "Baker's Table" and to the outdoor café. Then she phones the booths' owners to ensure they have all they will need during the fete.

CH 1/Scene 5 – When the day finally arrives, Father Jerome could not be more pleased. The park is adorned of balloons, garlands, colorful stands and booths, and even a merry-go-round in its center to entertain the kiddies. Although not the person Father Jerome expected to see, the magician is there,

standing behind the “Magic Table” ready to put smiles upon the faces of everyone passing by. The café is ready to serve the “best coffee and cake” in town; the Baker’s Table is covered of irresistible baked goods as well as stuffed pastries, foreign breads and an array of fruit or cream pies. Father Jerome is glad he had ample to eat that morning; otherwise he would probably have made a pig of himself already.

Chapter Two

CH 2/Scene 1 – When the mayor and his wife step out of their chauffeured car, their daughter is holding her mother’s hand. She is a gorgeous child. The pride of her parents obviously. Only five years of age, Daniela is soon the focus of Cecilia’s attention. Both she and Father Jerome are on hand to welcome the mayor and his family. Cecilia asks Daniela what she would like to do first. Daniela looks up at her mother. Mrs. Lawson is quick to release her hand and say: “You choose, dear. There are many things to do. Go with Miss Robinson if you like.” Daniela wants to go for a ride on the horses of the merry-go-round first. Father Jerome, on the other hand, leads the mayor and his wife towards the café for some refreshment.

CH 2/Scene 2 – As they are walking toward the café, Mrs. Lawson tells her husband that she will check on their daughter first and join him at the café in a few minutes. She disappears in the crowd. Meanwhile, Daniela is having a ball on the merry-go-round. After her third ride, she tells Cecilia that she would like to see the magician. Cecilia agrees and leads the little girl to the “Magic Table”, holding her hand. When they near the table, Cecilia stops and puts a hand to her mouth. She does not believe her eyes. Daniela looks up at her and asks if she is okay. “Yes, yes, dear, I am fine,” she says, still looking at the man across the table. When she asks him how come Clifford is not here, the man says that Clifford asked him to fill in for him since he’s a bit under the weather today.

CH 2/Scene 3 – Cecilia does not believe a word of that story and she doesn’t believe Louis Ashton is here – right here, in front of her – after all these years. She thought he was missing-in-action in Kuwait. That’s what she had been told. Cecilia does not let her surprise and sorrow show while Daniela is watching Louis perform fantastic tricks for his audience, which has now grown from one to at least a dozen kids. Once Daniela has seen almost all of Louis’s magic tricks, she wants to go back to her mother. Cecilia gathers her mom and dad are at the outdoor café. The two of them make their way there, but not before Cecilia has made sure Louis would not leave without having a word with her.

CH 2/Scene 4 – As Cecilia and Daniela near the café, the little girl asks where her mom is – she is not sitting beside her dad. When the two of them reach the table, Daniela repeats the question, “Dad, where’s Mom?” Noticing his wife’s absence, as if for the first time, the mayor tells his daughter that she’s probably at the bakery shop or looking at the Indian artifacts. He really doesn’t know where his wife is, but does not want to alarm his daughter. He asks Father Jerome to show him and his daughter around the fairground. The Father agrees – he also finds it strange that Mrs. Lawson has not returned to the café after leaving so abruptly twenty minutes earlier. He asks the still troubled Cecilia to look for the lady on the other side of the park. That means she would have to pass by the Magic Table again.

CH 2/Scene 5 – Daniela is getting really anxious. Her mother’s absence is worrisome to her. She looks around her and begins crying. Father Jerome cannot help but feel that something has gone wrong with Mrs. Lawson. He then suggests that the mayor and his daughter go back to the café and wait for him. He will send one of the nuns who are serving tea and pies to the passers-by to see if Mrs. Lawson is in the ladies’ room or has fallen sick somewhere. The mayor agrees that he would not like for his daughter to find her mother sick or injured during the fete.

Chapter Three

CH 3/Scene 1 – When Sister Marie-Joseph returns from the park’s washroom saying that she could not find Mrs. Lawson anywhere, Father Jerome decides it’s time to call on his friend, Inspector Damien to organize a discreet search of the park and fair to locate Mrs. Lawson. Inspector Damien was in the middle of buying a new toy for his boy when he receives the call. He leaves his son with his mother and calls on his two constables to start searching for the mayor’s wife. Since the lady is well known in the village and neighboring town, she will be easy to spot in the crowd.

CH 3/Scene 2 – In the meantime, Cecilia makes her way back to the Magic Table to find Louis in the middle of one of his most intricate and intriguing performances. The children (and parents) love him. Cecilia cannot help but smile at the still handsome fellow. His gorgeous head of white hair suits him to a “T”. She even checks herself and secretly hopes she looks good enough for him yet. She remembers all the days they spent together as if they were yesterday. She remembers the dances, the dinner at the Vancouver restaurant before he left for Kuwait and she remembers their last kiss before he boarded his flight to Ottawa. The last time she saw him. Cecilia wipes her tears and approaches the table. She asks him if he has seen the mayor’s wife. Louis says that no, he has not seen her, but he was not really paying attention.

CH 3/Scene 3 – A few minutes later, Constable Rainer phones Inspector Damien. He has found Mrs. Lawson. She is dead. Inspector Damien goes to the site of the incident to confirm that his constable has actually found the body of Mrs. Lawson – and not of someone else – before he has to break the news to the mayor. The body is in fact that of Mrs. Lawson. She appears to have been slapped across the face with such force that her head has swung awkwardly to the side. The inspector phones Dr. Wilbert Daniels, the South Vancouver Island ME, and asks him to bring his vehicle to the back of the park, so not to disturb the people at the fete.

CH 3/Scene 4 – As soon as Father Jerome sees the inspector come out of the woods at the far end of the fair, he knows something is wrong. He is sitting with Daniela and the mayor at the café. Father Jerome does not hesitate: he takes Daniela’s hand and tells her that it would be a good idea to get a gift for her mom – just a surprise from the jewelry booth. Daniela agrees somewhat reluctantly at first but is encouraged by her father to follow Father Jerome. The Father and Daniela leave the café just in time before Inspector Damien sits down beside the mayor.

Part Two - Main Action

Chapter Four

CH 4/Scene 1 – Obviously Inspector Damien does not want to disclose what his constable discovered in the woods to the mayor until he asks the man to follow him. When he sees his wife’s broken neck, he turns away. It seems he can’t look at her. He then breaks down into short sobs. The inspector understands how the man must feel but is a little surprised by his reaction; *why wouldn’t he look at his wife?* He remains silent and then suggests that the mayor takes his daughter home. Wilbert Daniels arrives in the meantime and as soon as he sees the corpse, he tells the inspector that Mrs. Lawson’s neck has been twisted in such a way to break it.

CH 4/Scene 2 – Inspector Damien phones Father Jerome and tells him to get Daniela back to the parking lot where her father is waiting for her. The inspector confirms that Mrs. Lawson has been viciously attacked and has died of a broken neck. He does not want to speculate over the phone, but the perpetrator must have been extremely strong and well versed in the art of killing his victims swiftly. Father Jerome naturally does not say any of this to Daniela and escorts her back to the parking lot where her dad is waiting for her. Daniela can sense something is very wrong. She nestles her face against her father’s chest and starts crying as their car leaves the lot.

CH 4/ Scene 3 – Father Jerome only knows two people well versed in the art of killing their victims swiftly – and today these two are performing magic tricks for the kids of the parish. As the Father walks back to the fete, he recalls that Clifford was absent and that Louis had come to the fete instead. He strides to the Magic table to find no one attending it. Only a couple of children are playing with a pen filled with “invisible ink” that has been left on the table for them. He looks around him and then walks toward the merry-go-round. Same thing: he recognizes some of his parishioners and some of the children, but Louis is nowhere in sight. As he walks past one of the trailers, he notices Cecilia with her back turned to him. She is talking to Louis. They do not seem very happy. He stops and listens to the conversation.

CH 4/ Scene 4 – As the day draws to a close, Father Jerome, on the one hand, is very happy with the turn-out and he is sure the parish will have enough money to replace the altar before the summer is over. On the other hand, he is very sad. What happened to Mrs. Lawson was needless. He needs to straighten

a few things with Louis Ashton and Cecilia, for what he has heard behind the trailer is disturbing. When he questions Cecilia, she tells the Father that none of this is his business. In a nutshell, she knew Louis before he left for Kuwait and was told that he was missing in action. To see him at the fete was a shock – that's all! Cecilia adds that she had no idea he was going to be at the fete, and she did not know that Louis now lives in Prince George – north of Vancouver.

CH 4/ Scene 5 – During the following week, Father Jerome can finally set some money aside for the carpenter to build a new altar. But when Inspector Damien asks him to come to the South Island Precinct, he can tell trouble is afoot. Inspector Damien practically never calls him out. On the contrary, he frequently comes to the church to have a meal. He loves Cecilia's cooking. On the Tuesday morning, Father Jerome is sitting across from the inspector in one of the precinct's interview rooms.

Chapter 5

CH 5/ Scene 1 – Inspector Damien wants the Father to establish a time-line of events during the fete with him. Father Jerome tells the inspector that he would not be the right person to do this, since he was sitting with the mayor at the outdoor café until Mrs. Lawson's absence was noticed. He suggests interviewing Cecilia Robinson. When the inspector asks why he would need to do that, Father Jerome tells him that she was going around the fete with Daniela and would know where everyone was better than the Father would. Father Jerome then asks the inspector if he has looked into Mrs. Lawson's past. "Did she know any army man before marrying the mayor?" Inspector Damien says that he has not received all the reports yet, but she apparently knew a vet by the name of Clifford Ramose, an officer trained with the SEALS in the States.

CH 5/ Scene 2 – Father Damien nods. He tells the inspector that he invited Clifford to the fete to entertain the kids with his magic tricks. He further explains that Cecilia noted that Clifford was absent on the day of the fete and had been replaced by a friend of his, Louis Ashton. Louis was Cecilia's sweetheart apparently. Years ago they were to be married before the Desert Storm conflict started. Louis was listed as missing-in-action and Cecilia never looked at another man after that. However, Louis came back and now sometimes fills in for Clifford. Last Saturday was one of those times. "Why didn't Clifford show up at the fete? Did he meet with Elisa Lawson in the woods? If they did meet, why would Clifford kill his old flame?" are all questions that Inspector Damien is asking himself.

CH 5/ Scene 3 – Father Jerome cannot leave matters alone. He wants to help the inspector to find answers to his questions. So, he decides to travel to Campbell River, another town on the Vancouver Island Coast, where Clifford lives. Father Jerome's trusty Austin Mini will make the trip easily enough. Before leaving, the Father calls ahead. Clifford apparently left his rooming house last Sunday. The landlady does not know where he is. Deflated in his purpose, Father Jerome phones Louis Ashton in Prince George. Louis tells the Father that Clifford has asked him to tell no one about him leaving the island. He apparently had some business to take care of in Ottawa. Something to do with his pension. After that, Louis has no idea where the man will go. When Louis asks why the Father is trying to locate his friend, the Father explains the situation. At the end of Father Jerome's recital, Louis says that he'll come down to Qualicum Beach the following weekend. He needs to talk to Cecilia anyway.

CH 5/ Scene 4 – Even before Father Jerome has the opportunity to tell the inspector what he found out – Clifford leaving his lodgings – Inspector Damien says that he knew all about it. Clifford is now a "Wanted Man". He made top of the list of suspects in the murder of Mrs. Elisa Lawson. Louis Ashton is a close second. The fact is that Cecilia found the man away from the Magic Table and coming out of the woods before he and Cecilia had their little chat down memory lane. He is a "CSOR" (Canadian Special Operation Regiment), which means he could have killed Mrs. Lawson in the same way as Clifford may have done.

CH 5/Scene 5 – Yet, why would either man kill the lady? What happened after they came back from Kuwait? What could have been so bad that either man would resort to killing her as a vengeful act? Because, in Father Jerome's mind, that's all it was: an act of vengeance. Father Jerome is determined to find out what happened. He decides to question Cecilia again. When he goes to her place for a visit – around lunchtime the next day – he finds his secretary baking a storm as if preparing for another fete.

When he inquires why she is baking so many scones, muffins and cakes, Cecilia replies that she has to keep busy. She has cleaned the rectory yesterday; she has put all the accounts in order; she has cleaned her house this morning – not that much needed to be done in that regard – and now she was baking for the school bake-sale and for the church's tea party.... Father Jerome reminds her that all of these events will only occur in a week or so, to which Cecilia retorts that she'll bake some more if the ones in the oven right now go to waste. Father Jerome has known Cecilia for a long time. Seeing Louis again after thirty some odd years of absence has stirred unwanted desires or memories that she would have preferred to stay buried.

Part Three - Resolution

Chapter Six

CH 6/ Scene 1 – Father Jerome is on hand at the Victoria airport when Louis lands on the following Friday, and so is Inspector Damien. Louis knows why the detective is there. Father Jerome tells Louis that he wants him to stay at the rectory – and nowhere else – because the Father has actually been granted custody of the man. Father Jerome hopes that Louis will not betray his trust. Louis replies that he has no intention of going anywhere until this mess is cleaned-up.

CH 6/Scene 2 – The next morning, Cecilia is very surprised to find Louis cooking his own breakfast as she enters the kitchen of the rectory. She swings on her heels and is ready to leave when Father Jerome stops her. He tells her that for once, she is going to do what she is told. In this instance she will sit down with Louis, have breakfast with both Louis and the Father and they will then listen to Louis's story. If she wants to leave afterward, he will not stop her. Seeing that the Father is not messing about, Cecilia returns to the kitchen and sits at the table and puts her capacious bag on the chair beside her, thus ensuring that Louis would not sit anywhere close to her.

CH 6/Scene 3 – Once they have eaten breakfast, Father Jerome asks all of the questions Inspector Damien would have liked to pose if he were present that morning. Louis was demobilized after suffering a knee injury. He had a knee replacement and was then sent home. Not a man given to drinking or using drugs, he recovered from his injury at his mother's home in Prince George. When it came time to receive his pension there were a lot of red tape to go through, because Louis was initially listed as MIA. Ultimately, everything was straightened out with the mayor's help. Mr. Lawson was himself a Desert Storm veteran. He married late in life and anything he could do to help the vets in Western Canada, he did.

CH 6/Scene 4 – When asked how Clifford came into the picture, Louis tells Cecilia and Father Jerome that Elisa Lawson had an affair with Clifford as soon as he returned from Kuwait. She was just married then. He believes Daniela is Clifford's daughter. Louis further believes that Clifford was long gone by the start of the fete. He left on the Saturday apparently (not the Sunday as the Father was told initially). As soon as Louis mentioned that Clifford is probably taken refuge in Ottawa at his uncle's place – a retired colonel – Father Jerome gets up from the table and leaves the two love birds to re-kindle an old flame.

CH 6/Scene 5 – As soon as he arrives at the precinct, Father Jerome finds Inspector Damien in the middle of a heated conversation with the mayor. Mr. Lawson is demanding answers and wanting action. Father Jerome interrupts the quarrelsome exchange and tells the mayor to calm down; that he has probably found out who killed his wife and why. Somewhat appeased, the mayor is willing to wait in an interview room while Father Jerome explains to the inspector what may have happened.

CH 6/Scene 6 – When the Father comes to the end of his little narrative, Inspector Damien nods. He will arrest the mayor as soon as he finds the vet he had engaged to kill his adulterous wife. Since the mayor had so many connections in the military, it was easy for him to pay one of the vets to do the deed. These men are trained to kill and many are turning into dispassionate mercenaries when post-traumatic stress doesn't claim their mental wellbeing first.

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