

FATHER JEROME – Book 4

The Mechanic

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 owner of the tanker trucks may be more involved in the murder case. 2) The story may be set in any town, village or community of your choice. 3) Inspector Damien or his constable may have a bigger role to play. 4) Mr. Summerville, Black Bear's father may have a larger role to play in the story. 5) JJ's mother may have enticed her son to murder Mildred. 6) Change the ending – JJ's mother is the one who murdered Mildred.

Part One - Rising Tension

Chapter One

CH 1/Scene 1 – This morning, Father Jerome is driving his Austin Martin Mini to 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 – The Austin Mini is more than a mode of transport for Father Jerome, it's the one item among his worldly possessions, in which he takes some pride. He will not let it go over the appointed date for its tune-up; he will wash it with care and even give it a good coat of wax occasionally. This morning, however, he has some concerns. The Mini is not behaving as it should. It doesn't seem to run smoothly. Father Jerome's concerns intensify when, suddenly, the car coughs a couple of times, putters for a bit and finally stops. Father Jerome cannot allow himself to be angry; he just lifts his gaze to the ceiling of the car and demands a silent explanation from God.

CH 1/Scene 3 – When Father Jerome steps out of the car, raises the hood and examines the old thing's innards, he is definitely at a loss to know what's wrong with the poor beast. Another vehicle pulls alongside the Mini a few minutes later. The driver, Alfonse Roper, the local gardener, asks the Father if he needs a lift to the garage. As soon as Alfonse drops Father Jerome off at the mechanic's shop, he leaves the good Father to his own device. Alfonse is sure Mildred Garnet, the mechanic, will help him.

CH 1/Scene 4 – Father Jerome enters the garage, calling Mildred's name. There are two cars parked over the pits and another waiting in front of the side door. When he doesn't get an answer, he makes his way to the office where, he supposes, Mildred is busy with her paperwork. When he sees that the office is empty, he retraces his steps to the cars parked over the pits. He walks between the two vehicles and crouches to see if Mildred is under either car. She is, but she is lying down and not moving. "Oh, dear God!" Father Jerome utters quietly while standing up. He crosses himself and walks out of the garage.

CH 1/Scene 5 – The good Father looks both ways before crossing the street to the neighborhood pub. He intends to call the police as soon as he gets someone to move the car from over Mildred's unconscious body. As he enters the pub, he spots Inspector Robert Damien having breakfast and reading the morning paper. Father Jerome spares his words and demands that the inspector follow him across the street. When the inspector is about to argue, Father Jerome bends down to his ear and tells him, "there's a body in one of Mildred's pits."

Chapter Two

CH 2/Scene 1 – With a jerk, Inspector Damien drops his fork on the plate and gets up from his chair. "Let's go," he says to the Father. The latter precedes him to the garage, stands between the two cars and points to Mildred. The dear woman has not moved. She is as pale as she was the first time Father Jerome saw her. When Inspector Damien asks the Father if he has called an ambulance yet, "No" is the

answer. Inspector Damien nods and takes his phone out of his pocket. He calls the constabulary and tells his constable to get an ambulance to the garage as soon as possible.

CH 2/Scene 2 – Once the car has been moved away from the pit, Father Jerome jumps down and takes Mildred's hand. The inspector is asking if he can get a heartbeat. "No" is the answer. And before the inspector could order the Father to step out of the pit, the priest kneels beside Mildred and administers her last rights. Meanwhile, Inspector Damien calls the ME and cancels the ambulance. Dr. Wilbert Daniels, the regional Medical Examiner, arrives soon afterward.

CH 2/Scene 3 – Once the scene has been cordoned off and the Inspector has returned to the pub to finish what is now a nuked breakfast, he sits down with Father Jerome to ask him a few questions. Father Jerome is more concerned about Mildred's death and the cause of it than he is about the inspector's questions. The inspector knows the Father for a good many years now – since middle school actually – and respects the man's acumen. Although the two men do not agree or see eye-to-eye on a few issues, their mutual respect has remained uncontested over the years.

CH 2/Scene 4 – "What's bothering you, Father?" the inspector asks at long last. Father Jerome then tells the inspector that he finds it odd that Mildred should change the oil of a car herself. These days she leaves this task to her apprentice, a young Indian boy by the name of Black Bear. And the fact that Black Bear is nowhere around at the moment is troubling. Although Father Jerome is convinced that the boy would not hurt a fly, he would have preferred seeing him in the garage when he, himself, arrived on the premises.

CH 2/Scene 5 – Father Jerome explains that his car is still parked on the side of the road a couple of miles back and that he came to the garage intending to ask Mildred or Black Bear to tow him to town if she could not fix the "old thing" on the spot. He adds that Mildred practically never works alone. On Sundays she usually closes shop unless there's a fair in town and people might need her help or tow-truck.

Chapter Three

CH 3/Scene 1 – Still pensive and unsettled, Father Jerome leaves the pub but not before asking the publican, John Simmons, to give him a lift back to his car. He then calls the nearest garage to Qualicum Beach. When the man arrives with his tow truck, before he prepares the Austin Mini for towing, he takes a look at the engine. He checks a few things and then asks Father Jerome to turn on the ignition. The Mini roars into life much to the Father's surprise. The mechanic explains that Father Jerome is not the first person to experience such a break-down. He tells the Father that there must be something wrong with the gasoline. Perhaps it is laced with water or some other liquid, which would stall any engine as soon as it reaches it.

CH 3/Scene 2 – This is turning out to be a bigger problem than Father Jerome ever expected. If someone is tampering with the fuel deliveries throughout Vancouver Island, he might have to return to riding his bicycle, which he hasn't done since he first came to Qualicum Beach all those years ago. And what about Mildred? How and why did she die? Was it a heart attack perhaps? She was not in the best of health and surely didn't care for exercises or "healthy diets". She was simply living the good life – without excess – but worked too hard.

CH 3/Scene 3 – As for Inspector Damien, he was drowning in paperwork. Mildred's sudden death was adding another dimension to this new fuel tampering problem. The reports were flooding in. All spoke of gasoline laced with water probably. The inspector was about to launch an investigation with the help of the local labs, to determine what was wrong with the fuel, when Dr. Wilbert Daniels came in with his preliminary autopsy report. Mildred Garnet died from a blow to the back of her head, probably administered by the wrench found at the scene. Wilbert estimates the time of death to be between 5:00 and 7:00 a.m. that morning.

CH 3/Scene 4 – Inspector Damien is far from happy. Black Bear's absence is worrying. Of course, if the boy witnessed Mildred's bashing, he's probably on the run by now and will not be located for days if not

weeks. On the other hand, if he only came to work as usual and found Mildred dead, he might have gone back to the Elder to ask his advice. Inspector Damien needs to find out what happened to Black Bear before he does anything else. He phones the band's Elder and is soon told that no one has seen the boy since he left his home that morning. Given the circumstances, the Elder will organize a group of men to track him down.

Part Two - Main Action

Chapter Four

CH 4/Scene 1 – Since his car could not possibly run the way it is – with spoiled gasoline – Father Jerome let the mechanic from Victoria tow his prize-and-joy to his garage. In the meantime, he phones Inspector Damien to get an update on the case. The latter tells the Father that as soon as he's located Black Bear, he'll let him know. Until then, there's very little he can do. The person who bashed Mildred's head in is probably in the wind by now.

CH 4/Scene 2 – Father Jerome believes that the two cases may be linked. Mildred must have found out something about the gasoline – perhaps who laced it with that foreign substance and where it was done – and was killed to shut her up. After his car had been emptied of the offensive fuel and refilled with another type of gasoline, Father Jerome made his way back to the church. He felt that the only way he could help Inspector Damien was to find Black Bear. He could not possibly delve any further into the gasoline tampering problem – that sort of mystery is best handled by the corporate and lab experts.

CH 4/ Scene 3 – As soon as he drives to the back of the church, Father Jerome notices that his garage door is ajar. He is sure he locked it this morning before leaving. He steps out of the car, raises the door and, to his utmost amazement, finds Black Bear curled up in the back corner of the garage. He goes over to him and crouches beside the boy. He is badly hurt but alive. Father Jerome calls 911, requests an ambulance and then phones Inspector Damien. Ten minutes later the inspector is at the Father's side. The EMT's take the boy away. They can't tell if he will survive.

CH 4/ Scene 4 – Dumbfounded, Father Jerome walks back to the rectory with Inspector Damien. The Father invites his friend in for a cup of tea and maybe a chat about the case. During their conversation, the inspector tells the Father that he has received a number of reports regarding the spoiled fuel. One of these reports has retained his attention. Coincidentally, it was sent to him by none other than the church secretary, Cecilia Robinson. She apparently saw the tanker truck which delivered the spoiled fuel to the station in the nearby village. She is sure that she never saw it before. It didn't have any oil company logo on its side, such as every other delivery truck has.

CH 4/ Scene 5 – Finding this very interesting, Father Jerome seems more concerned about identifying the person who could have clobbered Mildred and Black Bear – and why – than anything else related to the distribution of fraudulent fuel. As soon as the inspector leaves the vicarage and Father Jerome to his tergiversations, the Father calls the hospital to inquire about Black Bear's status. He is told that the boy is stable but unconscious. More than that the doctors cannot tell him since he's not a family member. Grunting his disapproval as soon as he hangs up, Father Jerome takes his car and goes to visit the Elder. He has no doubt the inspector would have informed him of his son's injuries and subsequent hospitalization.

Chapter 5

CH 5/ Scene 1 – The Elder – a man by the name of Louis Summerville (a.k.a. Brown Elk) – is welcoming the Father warmly. He is glad that his son has been found. When asked if Black Bear talked about the spoiled fuel with his father, Mr. Summerville tells Father Jerome that he spoke briefly of a strange occurrence. The regular delivery truck was apparently in the shop for repair so the oil company sent this other, unmarked truck instead. Black Bear also witnessed a conversation between Ms. Mildred and the delivery driver. However he didn't quite hear what they said. All that Black Bear heard her say was that she would, and then the man left.

CH 5/ Scene 2 – When she received the first complaint about the fuel, Mildred apparently phoned the oil company. They told her that their regular truck had been hi-jacked and replaced. Mildred was furious. She should have been told immediately. Now her tanks were full of bad fuel. From this account Father Jerome and Mr. Summerville conclude that Mildred was ready to make waves for the fraudsters and got killed for it, and Black Bear was injured for the same reason.

CH 5/ Scene 3 – However, when Father Jerome returns to the church, he is not quite satisfied with that explanation. He knows Inspector Damien is probably ready to nab the truck driver, or close to do so, but to his way of thinking, there were more than one man involved in this scheme. Cecilia saw the truck delivering fuel to another station – how many trucks are there? What is this scheme all about? What is the fraudster hoping to accomplish? To Father Jerome this sounds more like a sabotage or boycott of some sort. It's not money driven. How can these guys hope to obtain payment for laced fuel?

CH 5/ Scene 4 – Nevertheless, whether the authorities will deal with a fraudulent scheme or sabotage, what concerns the Father most of all is to find out who killed Mildred. Generally a sabotage of this kind generates a whole lot of resentment, but nothing that would drive anyone to killing any of the parties involved. In truth, the best way to achieve change through sabotage is to be as discreet and circumspect as possible. Murdering someone will attract too much negative attention against the protestors. Therefore, there has to be some outsider involved in Mildred's murder.

CH 5/Scene 5 – Within days of finding the owner of the tanker trucks – a disgruntled man who didn't see his contracts with the local oil company renewed for another three years – Inspector Damien is able to close the "spoiled fuel case". However, the parties he's arrested and questioned have nothing to do with Mildred's murder. The owner of the tanker trucks claims he never saw the woman after making his delivery. He doesn't recall what their conversation was about.

CH 5/Scene 6 – When Dr. Wilbert Daniels delivers his final autopsy report, he is happy to tell the inspector that the forensic team was able to identify the fingerprints on the wrench that was used to kill Mildred. Apart from Mildred's own and Black Bear's prints, there was a third set belonging to someone else. When Inspector Damien phones Father Jerome with the news, the latter has to sit down. He truly cannot believe it. The man in question is not only mild-mannered but not inclined to brutality at all.

Part Three - Resolution

Chapter Six

CH 6/ Scene 1 – Father Jerome is far from happy. There is no way his favorite organist and choir master could be the murderer. He can't accept the proposal. He tells Inspector Damien that he will talk to Julian Jasper (nicknamed "JJ") before the inspector arrests him. Inspector Damien gives the Father two hours to interview JJ himself; after that the organist will have to be arrested.

CH 6/Scene 2 – When Father Jerome arrives at JJ's place, he notices the bouquet of black roses standing in a vase in the front window. He finds it strange, but decides not to say anything. JJ opens the door to Father Jerome and welcomes the priest indoors. JJ's mother, an elderly woman, is offering to brew some tea. Father Jerome accepts and starts interviewing JJ as soon as the tea is served.

CH 6/Scene 3 – Father Jerome soon learns that JJ was sweet on Mildred for a couple of years now and would have wanted to propose to her if she had not rejected him every time he attempted to do so. He tells Father Jerome that he's teaching music at the school in Victoria and since he has a good job he does not see why Mildred would refuse to marry him. Father Jerome asks if JJ thinks she loved him. He shrugs his shoulders and says, "What's that got to do with anything?" Immediately, Father Jerome understands the problem. JJ wanted to marry Mildred to get out of the house. He was fond of her but probably did not love her and could not stand her rejections.

CH 6/Scene 4 – When Father Jerome asks JJ if he hurt Mildred, the man nods. "I had to teach her respect for her superiors, like Mom taught me!" Father Jerome had absolutely no idea JJ was suffering from any sort of psychosis. He returns to the constabulary where Inspector Damien tells him that in fact,

JJ was interned for three years in the Vancouver asylum after he killed his cat with a wrench at the age of twelve. He is still under supervision apparently. When the Father asks the inspector if there was any mention of black roses in the psychiatric reports, Damien is surprised because, “Yes, JJ had tendencies of asking to be given black roses when people visited him at the hospital”.

CH 6/Scene 5 – The next day after JJ’s arrest, Father Jerome goes to visit Black Bear at the hospital. The latter confirms that he found JJ in the garage when he arrived for work on the fateful morning. JJ and Mildred had a heated argument about marriage. JJ then grabbed the wrench out of Mildred’s hand and hit her with it. When Black Bea tried to get the wrench away from him, JJ swung it at his head. Black Bear lost consciousness for a minute and then decided to run across the field to the church where he collapsed. When Father Jerome tells him that he should have called the police, Black Bear replies that he didn’t want to get JJ in trouble – “he might get angry again”.

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