

THE EDITOR - Book 5

Pressed to Death

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) James Ingram, Lillian's fiancé may have a bigger role to play in the story. 4) Adrian Hansel, the publisher, may want to publish Abigail's diary to make light of the woman's hardship more than a century ago. 5) Perhaps change the ending – Daphne divulges where Lillian may be held before the IT officer finds out.

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. In her search for a new place in the US; she found Bridgeton, Oregon, to be the best suited to her taste. Located in North Portland on the Columbia River, Bridgeton is bordered by Hayden Island and the Jantzen Beach. The little houses perched on the river banks, the marina, the floating house boats, townhouses and bungalows provide the surroundings and backdrop Daphne was looking for.

CH 1/ Scene 2 – A few months after moving to Bridgeton, Daphne receives a call from Detective Lillian Keaston. Detective Keaston and her partner, Bill Adams, were in charge of a case weeks ago which saw Daphne listed as the prime suspect in the murder of a young photographer. Today however, it sounds as if Lillian needs some help. She asks Daphne if she could come over – she has something to show her. Daphne believes Lillian would not want to interrupt her day unless it was important.

CH 1/ Scene 3 – That afternoon, Lillian arrives at Daphne's place with a package. Daphne invites her in and asks her to take a seat in the living room. Lillian sits down and hands the package to Daphne, telling her to open it and to take a look at the book inside it. When Daphne takes the book out of its brown paper wrapping, she immediately notices the ornate leather cover and binding. This is no ordinary book. Before doing anything else with the precious volume, Daphne goes to her den and comes back with silk gloves. She slips her hands into them and tells Lillian that she would not want to transfer anymore oil from her skin to the book – it would damage it.

CH 1/ Scene 4 – Daphne then opens the book and immediately recognizes the calligraphic writing used by educated people centuries ago. She asks Lillian where she got the book. Lillian tells her that her aunt left it to her when she died a couple of weeks back. Daphne sits on the sofa besides Lillian. The editor tells Lillian that she should have the volume examined by someone who knows a lot more than she does about old books. Lillian agrees, but in the meantime she would like Daphne to read her aunt's letter. She hands it to her. When Daphne reads the few paragraphs she soon realizes that Lillian's aunt is asking her niece to solve a hundred-and-fifty-year old mystery. Apparently one of Lillian's ancestors was a witch.

CH 1/ Scene 5 – Daphne does not know what to say at first. She believes the book is not a fake or a replica. At first glance it contains an account of a young woman's life from the time she traveled from Salem, Massachusetts, across the continent, to settle in Chemeketa, Oregon a couple of years after her departure from Massachusetts. The Chemeketa Mission was renamed Salem in 1851 by the Town Trustees and by Reverend David Leslie in particular.

Chapter Two

CH 2/ Scene 1 – The book is probably Abigail Bradbury's diary. Daphne would have to read it to understand why Lillian's aunt thought Abigail was a witch. Daphne does not know where to begin. This is not your regular 'cold case' – it's a historical account. However, Lillian has some more to add to her aunt's letter. She tells Daphne that a couple of days ago, she and Bill Adams were called to a murder scene where Annie Bradbury had been brutally killed. When Daphne asks her if Annie Bradbury is any relation of hers or a descendant of Abigail's, Lillian says that Annie Bradbury was her cousin – her aunt's daughter.

CH 2/ Scene 2 – Given the fact that Lillian is related to the victim, she's been pulled from the investigation. And before she gives her book to her partner, Bill Adams, she wants to know if the book would help in any way. Daphne can't answer the question at this point. She asks Lillian how Annie was killed. Lillian says that it was something she had never seen before: Annie was buried under a pile of rocks. Daphne is curious. She does not want to tell Lillian that "pressing a witch to death" was the sort of sentence that was carried out in Salem, Massachusetts in the late seventeenth century. Several witches were sentenced to death at the time but some of them were never executed. Perhaps, Abigail's diary will shed some light on the reasons for which she moved across country one-hundred-and-sixty years ago.

CH 2/ Scene 3 – And if Abigail was in fact a descendant of the witches of Salem, MA, Annie has perhaps paid the price of her ancestors' crimes. Finding Annie's murderer will clear Lillian's family name. Daphne tells Lillian that she will read the book and contact a friend of hers in Washington, D.C. – "a man who knows a lot about books" – and ask him who he knows in Oregon who could offer some help in this sort of investigation.

CH 2/ Scene 4 – Lillian leaves the book with Daphne and both women promise to keep in touch with each other. Daphne, however, suggests that Lillian be vigilant – the murderer might think she's a witch too. Lillian understands what Daphne is saying. She has seen her share of senseless murders in her short career and now that she might be a target for that sort of craziness, she promises Daphne to be extra careful.

CH 2/ Scene 5 – Daphne's friend in Washington, D.C., a man by the name of Isaac Lyndon, cannot wait to see Lillian's book. Maybe it is the key that would unlock the mystery of the disappearance of those women who were never executed or those who were suspected but never apprehended. Perhaps the book will answer some of the questions Isaac has been asking himself for years. He decides to fly to Portland the following weekend.

Chapter Three

CH 3/ Scene 1 – The prospect of seeing Isaac again is putting a smile on Daphne's lips. However, she has to set the book aside and attend to her work. In the evening she reads the book. Some of the writing is difficult to read – the ink has faded with time – but once she got used to Abigail's use of the language, Daphne feels more comfortable with the process. At the end of the week, she is ready to present her summary of the book to Isaac.

CH 3/ Scene 2 – Friday night, Daphne is standing with Lillian at the airport's arrival gate. Isaac Lyndon is a small man with a hunched back. He walks with a cane but his face is the one of a happy-go-lucky guy. He's all smiles. Daphne gives him a warm hug and then introduces Lillian to him. Lillian shakes hand with the little man and thanks him for coming all this way to see an old book. Isaac lifts a frowning gaze to the young woman and tells her that her "old book" may very well reveal the answers to a centuries' old mystery. Many of the so-called witches were pioneers in their own rights. They were women of knowledge and perspicacity. In fact, if they were alive today many of them would be scientists or business tycoons.

CH 3/Scene 3 – After checking in at the local hotel, Isaac invites the ladies to have dinner with him. They both accept. Following a lovely meal, Daphne asks Isaac when he would like to see the book and hear her summary of Abigail's story. Isaac says that he would love to see the book and listen to Daphne's account, but first he wonders if it would be possible to visit the crime scene. Lillian hesitates but knows

that her partner wouldn't mind a helping hand in his investigation of Annie's murder. Lillian phones Bill Adams. He agrees to have Isaac visit the crime scene the next morning – as early as he can make it.

CH 3/ Scene 4 – Daphne was right to assume that Annie's murder was a ritual killing. Isaac confirms that Annie was “pressed to death”, which was a practice used to execute witches in the 1690s. What is curious about this particular murder, though, is the way the stones were not arranged as they used to be during an execution. Bill tells Isaac that the forensic guys believe the stones were dumped over the body. In fact, Bill has since found out that somebody, posing as the home owner, ordered a ton of stones to be dumped in the yard over the tarp. The murder was premeditated.

Part Two - Main Action

Chapter Four

CH 4/ Scene 1 – Upon returning to Daphne's home with Lillian, Isaac wants to sit down and examine Lillian's book for a while. Daphne puts him in the den with the volume and shuts the door. She gets some coffee going and sits at the kitchen table with Lillian. The young detective is grateful for Daphne's help. She tells Daphne that she didn't really know her cousin. Annie lived in Salem with her mom until she died. When she moved to Portland, Lillian could not offer her a room to stay. Lillian is living with her longtime boyfriend right now. But she and Annie found a small studio apartment in West Portland – where she was killed.

CH 4/ Scene 2 – Daphne feels sad for Lillian. Losing a loved-one, even a cousin you hardly knew, is always difficult. A few minutes later Isaac comes out of the den and joins the two women. He tells them that Daphne was right. This book is the diary of Abigail Bradbury. She came to Oregon to take refuge against the undying gossips and rumors that still lingered about the women in her family being witches. Abigail herself used a few herbal teas and potions against the usual ailments, but nothing extraordinary. However, what's intriguing about her diary is that it seems she knew David Leslie, one of the Town Trustees. He was raised in Salem, MA, actually. Abigail feared him most of all. Daphne has to agree with that surmise.

CH 4/ Scene 3 – Lillian returns to her precinct that Saturday to look into the descendants of Rev. Leslie. She finds out nothing out of the ordinary except for the fact that he and his wives (two successive marriages) were only survived by one Helen Leslie. After a couple of hours of searching through the town's records, Lillian finally locates Helen Leslie's descendant: a man by the name of John Abraham Leslie. John is married with two sons of his own, David and Simon. David is thirty-two years old and lives in Portland now. He goes to university in the city, according to his social media page.

CH 4/ Scene 4 – Wanting to finish his report on some other case he and Lillian started earlier that week, Bill Adams comes by the precinct where he finds Lillian ready to close shop. They chat for a bit before Lillian leaves the office. She goes down to the parking garage to get to her car. She'll be glad to go home. Annie's case is getting to her. For the past couple of nights – since showing the book to Daphne – she has recurring nightmares about Annie being “pressed to death”.

CH 4/ Scene 5 – Lillian is about to reach her car when someone grabs her from behind and wraps an arm around her neck. He then injects a powerful sedative into her upper arm. Lillian fights for a moment, but the man is much stronger than she is and overpowering him would be quite impossible for her. Hefty and muscular, the perp lifts Lillian into his arms and carries her unconscious body to his van. He puts her in the back, closes the door, jumps behind the wheel and drives out of the parking garage.

Chapter 5

CH 5/ Scene 1 – The next morning, Bill phones Daphne to see if she has heard from Lillian last night or this morning. Daphne can hear it in Bill's voice – the detective is worried about something. He tells Daphne that he was supposed to meet Lillian for breakfast after she picked her boyfriend up at the airport. He came in from Japan where he had been on a media assignment for the last two weeks. Bill tells Daphne that, if she doesn't mind, he'll bring James Ingram (Lillian's boyfriend) along to have a bit of a powwow about what Lillian has been doing in the last few days.

CH 5/ Scene 2 – Daphne knew Lillian was in some danger, but didn't imagine the killer would come after her so soon after killing Annie. Did she find out more about the killer, she wonders. When Isaac joins the three of them – James Ingram, Bill Adams and Daphne – at Daphne's place for breakfast, he tells them that the Leslie family was respected in these parts but not very well liked. In fact, when David Leslie forced the name of Salem onto the Trustees to be adopted as the name of the new town, most of them turned the suggestion down. Isaac goes on to explain that David Leslie was an intolerant preacher, the kind who would not shy away from using the cane on the school children. He was a vicious individual.

CH 5/ Scene 3 – Meanwhile, and when Lillian wakes up, she does not know where she is. She is bound and gagged in a room that resembles one of these SM places she heard about. From whips to chains to cuffs and collars, to hooks on the ceiling and walls, there is an array of instruments of torture in that place. Of course her kidnapper has taken her gun and emptied her jacket pockets. Her phone is lying on the table beside the chair on which she's tied. She hears it vibrate again. If only she could press the digit that would open the line, it would give the caller a GPS coordinate of her location. The phone stops vibrating.

CH 5/ Scene 4 – When her abductor comes in, he is carrying a tray with a piece of bread, a bowl of milk and a piece of cheese. He tells her that she needs to eat her last meal before her execution. With tears pearling at the rim of her eyes, Lillian shakes her head. The man rips the tape from her mouth and tries to put a piece of bread between her clenched teeth. Since she is not opening her mouth, he slaps her face a couple of times. Lillian's eyes are flaring with rage. She continues to keep her mouth closed. The man is impatient and since he now realizes that Lillian is not going to plead for mercy, he decides to untie her with the intention of throwing her on the bed to proceed with "the witch's execution".

CH 5/ Scene 5 – When Bill hears that the line on his cell phone is open, finally, he listens but does not say a word. Lillian is screaming now. Bill asks James to lend him his phone. By this time the journalist is getting frantic. Bill puts his hand over the young man's mouth and tells him to be absolutely quiet. If the guy who captured Lillian hears him, he'll kill her. James nods and hands his phone to Bill. He takes it and follows Daphne into her den. There Bill phones Captain Assor at home. He explains what's happening and asks if their IT officer could get on line and trace Lillian's phone location.

CH 5/ Scene 6 – A few minutes later, Bill receives a call from the IT officer who gives him Lillian's phone location. Bill tells James not to move an inch. If the perp senses that he could still do damage by killing his captive – hurting James – he won't hesitate. James nods resignedly. As soon as Bill leaves, Daphne tells James to come back to the kitchen to talk to Isaac while they wait for Bill's phone call.

Part Three - Resolution

Chapter Six

CH 6/ Scene 1 – Abigail's story is a very sad one. She married soon after she came to Oregon. Her husband became an alcoholic when Abigail lost their first child; he was born dead. She was soon accused by members of the local church – David Leslie's congregation – to have put a curse on her infant and that's why he died. She gave birth to a little girl a year later. Her husband left her then. He was afraid the child would grow up to be another witch. Abigail tried hiding from the vindictive congregation and moved to Portland where she worked as a servant in one of the farms. Abigail's daughter grew up free of the stigma of being called a witch and married well. Abigail died of influenza the winter after her grandson's birth. When Isaac closes the book, James inhales a deep breath. He shakes his head and tells Daphne that he will go home and wait for Lillian there.

CH 6/ Scene 2 – Daphne agrees it will probably be best. Lillian will want to go home as soon as she is released from the hospital after they check her over. Isaac looks up at Daphne when she comes back to the kitchen after seeing James to the door. He tells her that Abigail left a note on the last page of her diary. Did Daphne notice it? Daphne nods. She knows what Isaac is talking about. Abigail ended her diary with this note: "My husband's family will never forgive me for killing our son."

CH 6/ Scene 3 – Whether Abigail killed her infant son or whether the little boy died soon after his birth, no one will ever know. However, her husband's descendants might not have forgiven Abigail to this day. Who ever has abducted Lillian, the man is seeking vengeance for her great-grandmother's past deeds.

CH 6/ Scene 4 – Daphne and Isaac have to wait for another hour before Daphne's phone rings. She grabs it from the table and opens the line anxiously. Her wide smile tells Isaac that Lillian is okay – at least she's alive. Bill is on the line. He tells Daphne that Lillian was kidnapped by a guy called... Daphne interrupts him to say: Simon Leslie. Bill sounds surprised when he asks: "How did you know?" Daphne tells him that Lillian wrote an email to her on Saturday before leaving the precinct, giving Daphne the details of David Leslie's family tree. The brothers, David and Simon, each had a task to do. David had to kill Annie in the name of his great-grandfather, Rev. David Leslie; and his brother Simon had to kill Lillian as the last descendant of the Bradbury family.

CH 6/ Scene 5 – Isaac could not be more pleased when Lillian decides to give him her great-grandmother's diary. He promises to take great care of it and to give it for safe-keeping to the Smithsonian Museum as a testament of the hardship women who were thought to be witches suffered through the centuries.

CH 6/ Scene 6 – James and Lillian come to have dinner with Bill Adams, at Daphne's place the following weekend. James has an announcement to make: He and Lillian will be getting married next spring and then fly to Japan for their honeymoon.

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