

# FRANK

MAY 18, 1980

The scream ripped through him again.

He jerked upright in bed as the cold damp sheets slid away from his sweat-drenched body. Fumbling for the half-empty bourbon bottle on the bedside stand, he ignored the glass and raised the bottle to his lips. Warmth flowed around his internal core as the liquid glugged down his throat.

Cowlitz County Sheriff Frank McKenzie was not by nature a screaming man.

He had not screamed that night twenty-two months ago when he had returned from a fruitless search for a reported lost child and found his wife and ten-year-old son murdered. He had not screamed at the note stuffed in his son's hand lying on the table: *Now we're even*. He had not screamed when the killer was remanded to a psychiatric hospital.

Maybe all the screams just echoed in the empty caverns of his mind. He was never sure.

Empty mind. Empty heart. Empty life.

Frank hoisted the bottle again. Empty. He flung it across the room in a slivered crash against the far wall.

Sig, a mammoth-shouldered German shepherd, whined low in his throat and shoved a cold nose into Frank's shoulder. Sig had the best tracking nose in all of Washington State. He was also the most loyal friend and guard a man could have. But Sig had been up on the mountain that night with Frank, not in his usual place guarding Barbara and Jacob.

Frank flopped back on the pillow, a rip in its case. The stench of his own unwashed body and bed made even him wrinkle his nose. Sig inched his muzzle under his master's flaccid hand lying on the sheets. After a moment, the dog lifted gently, a persistent hint. Frank mechanically massaged the dog's ears and the back of his skull until they both dozed off.

When Frank awoke again, the shard of silver dawn had succumbed to the onslaught of morning. Sunlight stabbed his eyes. The clamor of the phone crashed in his ears.

Muttering profanities, he reached for the missing bottle.

Sig barked. A short, sharp demand.

"Sig, shut up!" Frank fumbled for the insistent phone. "Yeah!"

"I'm sorry to bother you this lovely morning..." The female dispatcher's voice clearly belied her words.

"Then don't!" Frank started to drop the phone back in its cradle. His glance slid over the dirty laundry hiding floor and chair. A framed 8 x 10 photograph of Jacob hugging Sig hung lopsided on the wall above the pile of glass.

"Frank McKenzie! Don't you dare hang up that phone!" Her tone penetrated his fog.

He brought the receiver back to his ear.

"And don't you swear at me either!" She took a deep breath. "Now.

Let's start this conversation again." At the sound of his muttering, her voice sharpened. "I don't care how big a hangover you have, you agreed to take those homeowners through the roadblocks up to Spirit Lake this morning at eight. You're late!"

Frank blinked at his watch. She was right. 8:05.

"Tell 'em I'll be there in half an hour." He slammed the receiver down, cutting off her reply.

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