

**If this story fails to call you to action,
you're fast asleep, in which case, I
hope you're somehow able to protect
yourself and family from the inevitable
consequences of doing nothing.**

—Frank

Chapter One

Welcome Home

Pull up a chair. I've been expecting you. Like the plaque on this dusty old wall above me says, you can call me Jake. It's what everyone has called me for the last 1,435 Earth years—everyone except my features editor, Shorty. She calls me Danny because she says I'm short and paunchy like Danny DeVito—she should talk.

I'm the senior reporter for Heavenly Press. Our readers tell us we're a unique publication because of our straight-to-the-point perspectives on important and disagreeable issues, and I have to agree—there's not much sugarcoating going on around this place.

Shorty has assigned me to a really juicy story—undoubtedly the biggest of my career—probably the biggest of any career, in or out of reporting. It centers around Frank Metz, kind of an oddball sort of fella whom some had gone so far as to peg as being somewhat mentally deranged. Frank was just recently received through the gates of the hereafter. Poor guy is a mess. He's still suffering from the shock of learning from

his guardian angel that he'd been murdered. Ooooh, that was ugly. By the way, guardian angels are a different sort than angels like me. I'm normally a nine-to-five angel—guardian angels work twenty-four-seven. But I'll tell ya, there's nothing normal about this story. It's a totally bizarre story which has required around-the-clock attention. The longer hours have been grueling, but it's all been worth it. You see, being around Frank is never boring, and quite often entertaining. Frank's a funny guy, but maybe that's just my warped angelic humor speaking.

Well anyhow, as you know, there are countless religious doctrines concerning the nature of salvation and damnation. Of those who believe that we earn one or the other through either our good deeds or transgressions, there are many who firmly believe that Frank, while in his mortal life, was busy making himself more worthy of damnation than salvation. But they, like most mortals, would be surprised to learn the true order of things—but I'm getting ahead of myself.

It was Shorty who first spotted Frank and suggested there might be more to him than what meets the eye. It was a keen observation, but even Shorty underestimated the importance of Frank's story and the huge impact he could have on all of humanity, which I started picking up on shortly after I began researching his life. It became even more evident the moment I started tracking him about a year and a half ago.

I asked Shorty why we're doing a story like this now instead of twenty or thirty years ago. Shorty said not many people back then would've recognized or believed the circumstances and attitudes described in Frank's story. Still, even today, not everybody is willing to discuss these issues in public, but they know they exist because they've been personally beat up by 'em. Nobody has been able to remain unscathed, and the harm and

pain being inflicted is growing in severity day by day. We know that's happening by the desperation we hear in the prayers.

I'll never forget my first look at Frank in action. He was partying with friends at a bar soon after being released from the workhouse. Here, check out this monitor screen on my desk and you'll be able to see and hear Frank the way I did when I first laid eyes on him. There, that's him now, mister animation—the bigmouth standing there in the blue shirt, into another one of his crazy stories. And here's the deal—there is one thing neither his fans nor foes can deny about Frank—he is one heck of a storyteller, albeit a bit crude, especially after a few beers . . .

“And so the chunky, bulldyke-looking, forty-something prosecutor for the State of Minnesota, Maureen Nolan, approached the jury. Dressed in a gray, baggy, men's-style business suit and sporting a close-cropped hair-do, she waddled back and forth in front of the twelve men and women without saying a word. Suddenly she stopped, spun around, pointed at me and said contemptuously, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, it should be obvious to you by the testimony you've heard over the last three days that Frank Metz hates women, and his confrontational style, if not stopped now, will carry over into society and be the end of all of us.’”

That man with the mustache, laughing, is Frank's good buddy, Phil, whom he hung out with off and on since childhood. Phil's with the rest of a handful of friends and acquaintances standing and seated around the dimly-lit bar in the lounge of the Thunderbird Hotel on an autumn Friday evening in suburban Minneapolis near the Mall of America. They had gathered at this outdated, wood-beamed remnant of the 60s, which

featured a fifteen-foot statue of an Indian chief outside the lobby entrance, to give Frank a welcome-home party.

“Sounds like she was pretty intent on putting your ass in jail,” Phil went on to say between sips and wiping his mustache dry.

“Yeah, and she got it,” Frank agreed. “Fifteen frickin’ months and a \$3000 fine. Thank God thirteen-and-a-half months and \$2500 were stayed, and fifteen days were erased for good behavior. Still, I got tagged with thirty days in the county workhouse, a \$500 fine, fifty hours of community service, and a year of probation.”

“Well, that’s what you get for harassing the assistant commissioner of human rights,” said Dan, whom Frank didn’t particularly care for but was one of Phil’s friends.

“I suppose you’re right,” Frank said sarcastically, “but unlike some people I know, Dan, there are those of us who have the guts to speak up and express our political dissent when our civil rights are being threatened.”

Dan knew Frank’s remark was directed at him, so to keep from showing his embarrassment, he tried sucking up while leaning his big frame up against the bar.

“What did you do with your kids while you were away?”

You see, Frank had been doing fulltime single parenting since his sons were two and five. His wife of ten years divorced him because, as she told the judge, “I don’t love him anymore.” She assumed the judge would automatically grant her custody of the kids because she was the mother—she was wrong. To his credit, the judge did what he thought best for the welfare of the children—a decision not based solely on gender. He awarded custody to Frank.