

HAWKE'S POINT



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CHAPTER 1

The cold rain suited Jonas Hawke's mood. He didn't like large gatherings, and he especially hated funerals.

"Everyone hates funerals," Emma reminded him. "Have you ever heard anyone say they liked going to a funeral?"

"Undertakers, maybe."

"You're giving the eulogy, for heaven's sake."

"Only because I couldn't say no."

"Stop it. He was your partner for twenty-five years."

Jonas frowned as he buttoned his white shirt and tied a full Windsor in his gray speckled tie, both remnants of his four decades as a lawyer. The tie was a little too wide to be fashionable, but no one in Beacon Junction was likely to know that. Folks might notice, though, that the shirt collar was too big, exposing the loose skin on his neck.

Jonas wasn't vain, but he couldn't help being aware of how time had treated him. In his prime, he cut an imposing figure, with huge hands and clear blue eyes that could be either charming or intimidating, depending on his mood. When he was thirty, Jonas stood six feet, two inches tall and weighed close to two hundred pounds, a hard man to miss and even harder to ignore. He was well liked, despite a natural shyness at odds with his professional demeanor.

He was also well respected—both for what he'd accomplished and for all he would have accomplished if it hadn't been for the accident, which had set him to drinking more and doing less. For a while, people believed he would get over it and go back to being who he was. Eventually, he did recover somewhat, gradually emerging from the fortress he'd built around himself. But never completely, and now, at seventy-three, his appearance matched his retreat from life. His curved spine and shabby posture meant the top of his almost bald head was little more than six feet from the ground, and his one hundred seventy pounds hung loosely from his bones. One of those blue eyes was glazed over with a milky cataract, and his once-powerful hands were marked with arthritic lumps.

Emma helped him with his jacket, and he realized she was ready, just waiting on him. It had always been the other way around when they were younger.

"You look great," he told her, and she did, neatly dressed in a dark blue Chanel suit that she hadn't worn in five years, not since Jonas had argued that case before the Vermont Supreme Court. "Dynamite," he added, rediscovering a word he had once used regularly to describe her.

"A little tight in the hips," she said.

"No, really. Dynamite."

She smiled. "You look good, too. We'd best be going. You got your speech?"

He patted his pocket as he followed her out the door.

It was still raining, though not hard, when Emma and Jonas entered the white clapboard church and took a program from an usher in the vestibule. The chapel was filling from the back, as it always did on unhappy occasions, but Jonas and Emma had been assigned seats in the second pew, behind the immediate family. As they walked up to it, Jonas caught sight of their son, Nathan, and they nodded to each other. Emma was staring straight ahead and didn't see him.

The crowd murmured in whispers, as the relatives, friends, and business associates of Franklin C. Hargrave waited for the minister to begin. A couple hundred people were there, not bad considering Beacon Junction's population of 5,871. The firm of Hawke and Hargrave was a prestigious one; Jonas and Frank had known most of the town and many people in the neighboring communities.

The minister, a dour thirty-year-old, welcomed the mourners with the expected words from Ecclesiastes and then asked them to join in singing "Amazing Grace." Reverend Simms had only been in town two years and hadn't really known Frank except to say hello. That had prompted the request for Jonas to give the eulogy. As Jonas waited for his turn to speak, he began remembering all the good times he'd had with Frank, from the arguments over baseball to the deep discussions about law and morality and life.

Jonas felt the urge for a little whiskey and waited a few seconds for it to pass. He knew it would. He had quit drinking after his heart attack at sixty-eight. The doctor told him he'd have to if he wanted to see sixty-nine. Jonas had thought about it a good while before deciding that drinking wasn't all it was cracked up to be anyway. It sure hadn't helped him accept what had happened, and by that time, it wasn't even helping him forget. So he quit. It wasn't easy, but like most decisions Jonas made, once he had his mind set, he simply went ahead and did it.

Remembering his heart attack made Jonas think that Frank, who was ten years younger, had died out of turn. Frank had always been healthy, a jogger who could explain the difference between saturated fats and trans fats—and did so frequently whether you wanted him to or not. His heart trouble hadn't come until six months ago, long after Jonas's, and then, after Frank had open heart surgery, the doctors told him he'd be fine if he took care of himself. He did, but complications ensued

anyway, and after a second round of surgery to insert stents, an infection developed, ending in his death a week ago. There'd been a hint of less than stellar work by the doctors, but nothing had come of it.

Jonas looked up at Reverend Simms, who was droning on about the mysterious ways of our Lord and assuring the family that Frank was destined for Heaven. Jonas hoped his own remarks wouldn't be so boring. He'd written them all out, a big change from his courtroom days when he would deliver inspired summaries from brief notes, ad-libbing and adapting, based on the message he got from reading the jurors' faces. With that on his mind, he made his way to the pulpit after the minister finally took his seat.

"Frank Hargrave," Jonas began, "was the best lawyer in the state of Vermont. I was proud to be his partner. He could have been anything he wanted to be, and some of you may know that there was a time when he considered going into politics. He was actually courted by both political parties."

Jonas glanced up at the audience, trying to find a pair of eyes he could meet. Ed Riley, the chairman of the Board of Selectmen, was staring out a window. Angela Dixon, a clerk at the dry cleaner's on Hunt Street, was studying her nails. Even Nathan seemed to have other things on his mind.

Jonas made a decision. He folded the text of his speech, stuck it in his breast pocket, and looked directly at Frank's family.

"Frank Hargrave was my partner for almost a quarter of a century, but I won't remember him as a partner," he began anew, his voice taking on a muscular timbre that demanded attention. "I'll remember him as a friend. As a kind, honest, caring man who had a positive impact on everyone he encountered."

Jonas paused and shook his head from side to side in a gesture of familiarity that he knew would strike home with his audience.

"You know, life is fleeting, and it's so easy to get caught up in day-to-day struggles and lose sight of what really matters. We identify people too much by their profession, their accomplishments, their financial status. I could certainly give a eulogy that highlighted Frank's résumé, but that would miss the point. I'd rather talk about his humanity, how much he cared about others and acted on those feelings, his integrity, his moral fiber, his ability to reach out and help those around him. What I'll remember most is how he cared for people and how he was able to touch so many lives in so many meaningful ways. I always envied that ability to connect with others."

As Jonas continued, his eyes swept the pews, instinctively reading the expressions and body language of the congregants. Now he saw Riley smile in agreement. Sarah Moore, the firm's longtime secretary, wiped away a tear. Harry Piles, who owned the grocery on Main, gave him a look of encouragement. Jonas caught Emma's eye and got a slight, almost imperceptible nod from her.

"Frank was able to combine the strength of iron with the softness of velvet. You never felt like he would judge you harshly if you made a mistake and let him down. I know that from personal experience.

"But you didn't have to be a friend or even an acquaintance to benefit from Frank's kindness," he said, his inflection getting softer but his voice still reaching the back pews. "Few of you knew it—he wasn't the kind of person to talk about it—but every Thursday Frank drove to Brattleboro to volunteer at the Social Service Family Court, representing young children who had no one else, kids who were abused or abandoned and needed someone to speak up for them."

Jonas took a sip of water. It was a habit he had acquired in court, using the pause for effect, but today he did it because his mouth really was dry. He could feel the eyes of the congregation

staring at him as he swallowed. He looked again at Frank's family in the front row. Nancy, Frank's wife, hung on every word. One of her hands held a tissue and the other held the hand of her son, Michael. Nancy's daughter, Molly, leaned her head on the shoulder of her husband.

"Frank represented these frightened and forsaken kids and helped guide them through the maze of our social services system, even keeping tabs on some of them long after they were out of the system. It was anything but easy and it took a huge toll, but he never once considered giving it up."

Jonas told a few more stories about Frank, the words coming from his heart, his voice rising and falling, his hold on the mourners increasing with every sentence. If he'd been speaking to a jury, they'd have decided in his client's favor without leaving the jury box. At one point, he glanced at Emma and recognized a look of awe on her face. He knew he was showing her something she hadn't seen from him in quite a while.

"I remember one night in particular," Jonas said, surprising even himself that he was going to tell this story but not pausing to consider whether it was a good idea. "It was more than twenty years ago, a time of great personal difficulty for me, a time when I was being stubborn and ignoring Frank's counsel about a case I was working on, one I should have let him handle because it hit a little too close to home."

Jonas paused briefly to catch Emma's eye again, noting her concern and smiling ever so slightly to reassure her.

"Frank did what he could to get me to do the right thing, but when he realized I wasn't going to listen to him, he didn't walk away. No, he did everything he could to support me, and he tried to prevent my mistake from hurting me or anyone else. Later, when it was all over, I tried to thank him. He shook it off as though it were nothing, but I knew better. I was a lucky man to have known Frank Hargrave. I know you feel the same way. His memory will always be a blessing."

As Jonas walked down from the pulpit, there was a quiet murmuring. He went over to Nancy and kissed her on the cheek, and she squeezed his hand tightly, too emotional to say anything. Molly and Michael stood up to shake hands. Molly added a hug.

Reverend Simms let the mourners have a moment to digest Jonas's words before asking if anyone else wanted to speak. There was silence for a few seconds, but then Betty Brown, a ninety-three-year-old neighbor, rose with the help of a walker and told how every morning Frank would pick up her newspaper from the end of her driveway and deliver it to her front door. "Just knowing he'd done it made me feel so much better. Like I hadn't been forgotten."

Sanford Tyler, a carpenter, told about the time he'd been out of work and Frank had hired him to put in a room full of custom-built bookshelves. Two months later, when he came round to tell Frank he'd gotten a job, Frank tried to make light of the fact that the bookshelves were still half empty. "I knew better," Tyler said. "He didn't need the shelves, but he knew I needed the work."

Kathleen Belton came next, describing how Frank took time out of his busy practice to represent her at a foreclosure hearing, then sent her a bill demanding payment in the form of two apple pies. "He told me no one could make them like I could."

Ed Riley told how Frank had often been a voice of reason and compromise at town meetings. And Mark Stratton, Frank's nephew, remembered how once when he was a teenager and had been in the kitchen watching his Aunt Nancy cook, he'd looked at the olive oil and asked what "extra virgin" was. Without missing a beat, Frank had said, "It's when she brings her sister."

So many people lined up to share their memories that the service went close to two hours before Reverend Simms returned to the lectern to lead the closing prayers.

Jonas and Emma's exit from the church was slow as dozens of mourners stopped to shake Jonas's hand, each complimenting him on the eulogy, most saying how moved they were or how well he had captured how important Frank was to everyone. Nathan gave his mother a kiss and his father a warm handshake.

It was no longer raining when they stepped outside. "You were wonderful," Emma told him as soon as they were alone. He smiled tightly, fighting to control himself. He could see that she was, too. She kissed his cheek and said she'd see him later. Jonas was going on to the cemetery for the burial, but Emma had volunteered to help set up for the reception at Molly's house, and she had to hitch a ride with one of the other volunteers.

Jonas's Explorer was already in line behind the hearse, and one of the funeral parlor attendants held the door open as Jonas climbed in. He was pleased that Emma was going over to the reception. It would give him some time alone to collect himself.

Jonas was enough of a performer, however rusty, to know the eulogy had played well with the crowd, but he gave most of the credit to Frank. He had been an unusual person who would be fondly remembered and sorely missed by a lot of people. Jonas might be pleased with himself for having found the words to capture what was special about Frank, but he could take no credit for what made Frank special.

He was glad that so many others had also spoken. They made it clear how many lives had been touched by Frank, how much good he had done for others. But it also made Jonas wonder about his own funeral. What would they say about him? There had been a time when he, too, had been more outgoing, more willing to get involved. Not like Frank, though. Frank was something else, with an uncanny ability to touch so many people.

The drive to the cemetery took less than fifteen minutes. Jonas parked, walked to the hearse, and joined the other pallbearers. The coffin was already on a cart with wheels, making his job mostly ceremonial. He helped guide it to where the fresh grave had been dug. The wet ground was covered with a tarpaulin for the mourners.

The minister recited the final prayers and words of solace, while Nancy, Michael, and Molly stood stoically. Finally, Molly put a single white rose on the coffin, and the family walked slowly to the limousine.

Jonas lingered by the grave after the others had gone. He finally noticed the gravediggers standing off to the side, waiting for him to leave so they could finish their work. He got annoyed at their seeming impatience and then realized they just had a job to do.

He walked slowly to the Explorer and climbed in. He sat for a while before starting the engine and then took the long way over to Molly's house.



The house was crowded, and it had that mix of solemnity and awkwardness that always defines such occasions. People were there to pay their respects and to console the loved ones, but inevitably the side conversations drifted into the irrelevant and even irreverent, as people exchanged greetings and news with those they hadn't seen in a while.

Jonas entered determined to be sociable, and he got an opportunity when he saw Michael standing by himself off to one side. Michael had grown up in Beacon Junction, but Jonas knew he had never felt very comfortable in the small town environment. After graduating from the DePaul University a year ago, he'd found a job and stayed in Chicago.