

Chapter 2

The chapter introduces Carol Schmidt, a 69-year-old widow living a quiet life in Encampment with her three-legged dog, Bridger. A hardworking and community-oriented woman, Carol spends her evenings waiting for Bridger to finish his nightly routine in the snow-covered backyard. The dog, a rescue brought home by her late husband Paul, is her sole companion since Paul's tragic death in a logging accident two years prior. Carol reflects on her grief, recalling Paul's final moments in the hospital, where his last word was Bridger's name, a detail she accepts without resentment.

As Carol waits for Bridger, she wears Paul's old coat, which still carries his scent, and reminisces about their life together. The cold night air brings an unfamiliar, unpleasant odor that triggers a repressed childhood memory, unsettling her. Her attention shifts when she notices a suspicious gray pickup truck with a camper shell driving erratically near the mill across the road. The truck's unusual behavior—moving without headlights and stopping abruptly—alarms her, especially when it hits a neighbor's dog and speeds away without helping.

Carol witnesses the incident clearly, noting the truck's license plate ends in "600" and overhearing the driver's harsh commands to leave the injured dog. The encounter leaves her shaken, her hands trembling as she tends to Bridger, who finally returns inside. The chapter builds tension as Carol, now disturbed by what she's seen, decides to call her neighbor, hinting at a deeper mystery or conflict tied to the suspicious men in the truck.

The chapter blends Carol's personal grief with a growing sense of unease, as the mundane routines of her life are interrupted by an ominous event. Her observations of the pickup and its occupants suggest a looming threat, while her emotional connection to Bridger and memories of Paul ground the narrative in her vulnerability. The juxtaposition of her quiet resilience and the sudden intrusion of danger sets the stage

for further developments in the story.

