

Chapter 5

In Chapter 5, "The Disappeared," Joe Pickett settles into his temporary office at the Department of Transportation building, a cramped space he shares uneasily with highway department staff due to interagency tensions. Despite the logistical challenges, Joe sets up his workspace with borrowed furniture and personal supplies, reflecting the bureaucratic hurdles of state agencies. His focus shifts to the case of Kate Shelford-Longden, a missing British woman, as he begins reviewing a thick file containing incident reports, interviews, and media clippings. Joe deliberately avoids the official DCI report initially, opting instead to piece together Kate's story independently.

Joe organizes the file into four categories: correspondence, statements, photos, and newspaper clippings, creating a timeline of Kate's last known activities. The oldest document is a detailed guest manifest from Silver Creek Ranch, where Kate stayed in July. The manifest reveals her personal details, preferences, and humorous remarks, painting her as a well-traveled, affluent professional seeking a fresh start. Joe notes her British terminology and the exclusive resorts she's visited, highlighting her global lifestyle. The document also lists staff liaisons, including cryptic initials that intrigue Joe, particularly "SP2," which he suspects might refer to his daughter Sheridan.

The newspaper clippings, mostly from UK outlets, provide a vivid contrast to American journalism with their lively tone and dramatic headlines. The first article, from the Daily Mail, reports Kate's disappearance after she failed to return from her Wyoming vacation. It reveals her prominence as the managing director of a successful PR firm and notes the concern of her colleagues when she missed her flight home. The article hints at her professional and personal background, including her ex-husband's role in their company, Athena, setting the stage for deeper investigation into her life and the circumstances of her disappearance.

As Joe delves deeper, he pieces together Kate's personality through her witty responses on the ranch manifest and the media's portrayal of her. Her request to "meet a real cowboy" and her celebration of a "New Lease on Life" suggest she was seeking adventure or reinvention. Joe's methodical approach—avoiding preconceptions from the DCI report—underscores his dedication to uncovering the truth. The chapter ends with Joe poised to cross-reference his findings, hinting at a complex case that intertwines Kate's high-profile life with the rugged setting of Wyoming.

