

Chapter 19

Wylie Frye arrives at the Encampment lumber mill for his overnight shift in freezing temperatures, dressed for the cold. He ignores repeated calls from an unknown number before finally answering, only to be confronted by a gruff, familiar voice instructing him to obtain disposable "burner" phones to avoid traceable communication. The caller emphasizes secrecy, demanding Wylie reformat his current phone and prepare for another delivery run the following night. Wylie's attempt to negotiate higher pay is swiftly dismissed, leaving him uneasy about the escalating demands and the caller's ominous tone.

During the call, Wylie's ulterior motive is revealed: he wants extra money to purchase an expensive long-range rifle, the HAMR, which he obsesses over. The caller, however, refuses to renegotiate their agreement and insists on strict compliance with his instructions. Wylie's nervousness grows as the caller orders him to erase all traces of their communication and leave his old phone behind for inspection. The conversation ends abruptly, leaving Wylie sweating and anxious, sensing the danger of his involvement in whatever clandestine operation is unfolding.

After the call, Wylie is startled by the sudden appearance of Jeb Pryor, the mill owner, who overhears part of the conversation. Pryor confronts Wylie, demanding an explanation for the suspicious activity taking place at his mill. Wylie, caught off guard, denies any wrongdoing but is visibly shaken, his face flushed and body tense. Pryor's stern demeanor suggests he suspects Wylie is involved in something illicit, setting the stage for a tense confrontation.

The chapter underscores Wylie's precarious position as he balances his desire for personal gain with the growing risks of his secret dealings. His carelessness during the call and Pryor's unexpected appearance heighten the tension, foreshadowing potential consequences for Wylie's actions. The mysterious caller's authoritarian commands and

Pryor's suspicion create a sense of impending conflict, leaving Wylie trapped between two threatening forces. The chapter effectively builds suspense, hinting at darker developments ahead.

