

Chapter 8

Joe Pickett embarks on a 300-mile winter drive from Saddlestring to Saratoga, leaving his family behind with a sense of unease. He packs the Kate case file, a mystery he's been tasked to investigate, and bids farewell to his dog Daisy, aware his absence will be longer than she understands. The frigid morning landscape, with its frozen tires and snow-covered streets, mirrors the cold uncertainty of his mission. As he drives, Joe reflects on the gaps in the Kate disappearance case, particularly intrigued by what his daughter Sheridan might know, given her past horseback rides with Kate.

Three key concerns weigh on Joe's mind as he travels. First, the abrupt removal of Michael Williams and the DCI from the case by Governor Allen raises suspicions, as the official explanation of budget cuts feels inadequate. Second, Joe questions why he was chosen for the assignment, given Allen's apparent distrust of him and the availability of other law enforcement resources. Third, the unexplained disappearance of Saratoga game warden Steve Pollock adds another layer of mystery, especially since Pollock's absence hasn't been addressed within the agency, despite the desirability of his district.

The chapter delves into the intricacies of game warden politics, highlighting the unusual silence surrounding Pollock's departure. Joe speculates that Director Linda Greene-Dempsey's precarious position under Governor Allen may explain the lack of transparency. The absence of official notices about the open Saratoga district fuels Joe's curiosity, as he wonders if Pollock's exit is connected to the Kate case or merely coincidental. The bureaucratic tension underscores the challenges Joe faces in uncovering the truth.

During his treacherous winter drive, Joe encounters a reckless truck driver, a momentary hazard that underscores the perilous conditions of Wyoming winters. The incident briefly distracts him from his mission, but he quickly refocuses, embracing the

harsh environment as a reminder of his own resilience. The chapter closes with Joe's determination to press forward, despite the physical and metaphorical storms ahead, as he seeks answers in the enigmatic Kate case and the puzzling circumstances surrounding Pollock's disappearance.

