

Chapter 4

Joe Pickett, still agitated after a tense meeting with Governor Allen, drives through Saddlestring on a harsh winter day, accompanied by his dog Daisy and a file labeled "Kate Shelford-Longden." The bleak weather mirrors his mood as he arrives at the Twelve Sleep County Library, where his wife Marybeth works. The couple's recent struggles weigh heavily on him, including the loss of their home to arson and the emotional toll of rebuilding their lives. Their temporary living situation in a rented condo, along with the challenges of boarding Marybeth's horses and adjusting to a smaller space, adds to their stress.

Marybeth and Joe discuss Joe's new assignment, which feels more like an ultimatum than an opportunity. The timing is poor, given their unstable living conditions and the lingering trauma of losing their home and possessions, including irreplaceable family mementos. Marybeth's concern is palpable, especially as Joe's past assignments have strained their marriage. The conversation shifts to their daughter Sheridan, who works at Silver Creek Ranch and has been vague about her future plans. Marybeth suspects Sheridan may be involved with someone, a possibility that unsettles Joe, who has always been protective of his daughters.

The chapter delves into the family's strained dynamics, particularly with Marybeth's mother, Missy, who has long disapproved of Joe and actively undermines their marriage. Missy's manipulative behavior and wealth contrast sharply with Joe's modest career as a game warden, reinforcing his feelings of inadequacy. Despite this, Marybeth remains steadfast in her support for Joe, though the tension with her mother lingers in the background. The family's resilience is tested as they navigate these personal and professional challenges.

Joe's work-related conflicts extend to their temporary home, where a neighbor complains about the animal carcasses in his truck, forcing him to compromise by

covering them. Amid these frustrations, the chapter highlights small moments of relief, such as the return of their dog Tube after the fire, dubbed "The Resurrection of the Tube." Yet, the overarching sense of instability and unresolved tensions—both within the family and with external forces—leaves Joe and Marybeth grappling with an uncertain future. The chapter closes with Joe preparing for his assignment in Saratoga, where he hopes to reconnect with Sheridan and gain clarity on her life choices.

