

Chapter 20

The chapter opens with Joe and his team, including Eli Jarrett and Sheriff Neal, racing on snowmobiles through a snowy meadow toward a dense forest as daylight fades. Jarrett leads aggressively, leaving the others struggling to keep up. Joe and Nate follow closely, navigating the treacherous terrain by staying in Jarrett's pre-groomed track. One deputy veers off and gets stuck in deep snow, forcing another to stop and assist. Joe suspects Jarrett may be deliberately trying to lose the group, but the sheriff had warned of this possibility earlier. The forest becomes increasingly claustrophobic, with trees so tightly packed that maneuvering off the path seems impossible.

As the group enters the forest, Jarrett suddenly slows, and Joe nearly collides with him. They stop near a clearing, where Jarrett points toward a hidden cabin in the distance. Joe detects the faint scent of wood smoke, suggesting someone might be inside. He advises waiting for Sheriff Neal, who arrives shortly with the rest of the team. Neal organizes a plan to approach the cabin cautiously, emphasizing safety and avoiding a confrontation unless necessary. He assigns roles, including positioning a deputy at the rear to prevent escape, and warns Jarrett not to flee. The team prepares their weapons, tension mounting as they gear up for a potential confrontation.

Neal orders the group to advance, with Joe now leading the charge since Jarrett is ordered to stay behind. The snowmobiles roar through the forest, their headlights illuminating the narrow path. Nate confirms the team is still together as they approach the cabin. The structure suddenly comes into view—a small, dark building surrounded by a moonlit clearing. The scene is tense, with the team poised for action, though the cabin's interior remains shrouded in mystery.

The chapter builds toward a climactic moment as the team prepares to confront whoever may be inside the cabin. The sheriff's careful planning contrasts with the deputies' eagerness for a confrontation, highlighting the stakes of the mission. Joe's

anxiety is palpable, his dry mouth reflecting the gravity of the situation. The abrupt ending leaves readers anticipating the next chapter, where the team's approach to the cabin will likely unfold into a dramatic encounter. The atmosphere is thick with suspense, blending the harsh winter setting with the urgency of their mission.

