

Chapter 14

In Chapter 14, "The Disappeared," Joe investigates the mysterious absence of Steve Pollock, a former state game warden, by visiting Pollock's house. After navigating a snowdrift, Joe attempts to enter the locked garage and house, opting to force his way in discreetly to avoid bureaucratic delays. He questions his own motives, wondering if Pollock's disappearance could be linked to Kate Shelford-Longden's case, though the connection seems tenuous. Joe's actions reflect his determination to uncover the truth, even as he acknowledges the lack of clear justification for his investigation.

Inside Pollock's truck, Joe notes its unusually neat condition, contrasting it with the typical clutter of game warden vehicles. He searches for clues, reviewing Pollock's citation book but finding only routine violations. The absence of personal and professional materials puzzles Joe, suggesting someone may have tampered with the truck. This discovery deepens the mystery, leaving Joe to wonder whether Pollock cleaned it out himself or if someone else had been there before him.

Entering the house, Joe observes signs of a hasty departure, such as empty dresser drawers and spoiled food in the fridge. The home's sparse and orderly state aligns with Pollock's solitary lifestyle, but the missing agency-issued weapons and selective packing raise red flags. Joe methodically searches each room, noting details that imply Pollock left unexpectedly, possibly under duress or with a specific purpose in mind. The chapter builds tension as Joe pieces together fragments of Pollock's life, searching for answers.

The chapter underscores Joe's growing suspicion that Pollock's disappearance is more than a simple resignation or personal decision. The lack of evidence linking Pollock to Kate's case frustrates Joe, yet he remains compelled to explore every angle. His unauthorized investigation risks backlash from his superiors, but his instincts drive him forward. The chapter ends with Joe's unresolved questions, setting the stage for

further revelations about Pollock's fate and its potential connection to the larger mystery.

