

# Chapter 17

In Chapter 17, titled "The Disappeared," Joe observes his daughter Sheridan expertly riding a sorrel gelding in the indoor arena of a guest ranch. Impressed by her skill and fluid movements, he notes her ability to guide the horse with subtle leg pressure rather than relying on the reins. The cold environment contrasts with the heated arena, and Sheridan's dedication to training the horses is evident as she prepares to finish her workday. Their warm exchange highlights Sheridan's pride in her role, though she admits feeling occasional guilt that her mother and sister would envy her job.

Joe visits Sheridan's small but tidy apartment above the arena, where she prepares a simple meal of tomato soup and grilled cheese. The setting reflects her independence, and Joe muses about the role reversal, recalling how he once cooked for her. The apartment's personal touches, like family photos, evoke nostalgia. Joe's brief inspection of the bathroom reveals his protective fatherly instincts, as he avoids snooping but wonders about Sheridan's personal life, particularly whether any men's items might be present.

Over lunch, Sheridan shares details about her life at the ranch, explaining her preference for the solitude of her apartment compared to the shared dormitories for most staff. The conversation shifts to her relationship with Lance Ramsey, the head wrangler, causing her to blush when Joe brings him up. Joe then steers the discussion toward Kate, a guest at the ranch, whom Sheridan describes as a reserved but passionate rider who cherished the ranch's freedom and natural beauty.

Sheridan recounts how Kate struggled with the transition from her high-pressure life in England to the ranch's slower pace, eventually embracing the disconnect from technology. Kate expressed a deep reluctance to return home, hinting at unresolved troubles. Joe probes for more details, asking if Kate mentioned any conflicts with staff

or guests, but Sheridan recalls only Kate's discomfort with the Youngbergs during a horseshoeing session. The chapter ends with Joe piecing together clues about Kate's mysterious disappearance, while Sheridan's observations provide subtle insights into the ranch's dynamics.

