

Chapter 15

In Chapter 15, "The Disappeared," Joe, the protagonist, visits Silver Creek Ranch to investigate the mysterious disappearance of a guest named Kate. He meets Mark Gordon, the ranch's general manager, who expresses frustration over the unresolved case but cooperates despite his busy schedule. Gordon's office, though modest, is part of a sprawling, luxurious ranch designed to blend seamlessly into the rugged Wyoming landscape. The ranch boasts high-end amenities like an indoor riding arena and shooting range, catering to an elite clientele. Despite its grandeur, the ranch faces logistical challenges due to its remote location and harsh winter weather.

Gordon, a seasoned hospitality professional, emphasizes the ranch's unique appeal to the ultra-wealthy, offering a "cowboy fantasy" with luxury accommodations. He highlights the meticulous attention to guest preferences, including extensive pre-arrival questionnaires and strict privacy measures like nondisclosure agreements for staff. The ranch employs over 200 staff for just 90 guests, ensuring unparalleled service. Gordon proudly mentions hosting celebrities and political figures, underscoring the ranch's exclusivity. However, the disappearance of Kate has cast a shadow over the ranch's reputation, complicating its otherwise flawless operation.

The chapter reveals tensions between Joe and Gordon, particularly when Joe learns that Governor Allen's chief of staff, Hanlon, had previously contacted Gordon about Kate's case—a detail Hanlon had withheld from Joe. This raises suspicions about the governor's involvement. Gordon also mentions the ranch's significant economic impact on the local community, including charitable initiatives like hosting inner-city kids. Despite these positives, the unresolved disappearance remains a pressing concern, disrupting the ranch's carefully curated image.

Joe's investigation uncovers the ranch's dual nature: a world-class retreat grappling with the challenges of its remote setting and the fallout from Kate's vanishing.

Gordon's pride in the ranch's success is tempered by his anxiety over the unresolved mystery. The chapter ends with Gordon hinting at the broader implications of the case, leaving Joe—and the reader—eager to uncover the truth behind Kate's disappearance and its connection to the ranch's powerful patrons.

