

Chapter 25

Sheriff Neal expresses frustration over a newspaper photo depicting him with a blow-up sex doll, which has made him and his department appear foolish. Joe Pickett and Nate Romanowski, present in Neal's office, are eager to leave after giving their statements. Neal discusses the legal fallout involving Les McKnight, who was injured by Joe's daughter during a raid. McKnight may sue the department, but Neal hopes to negotiate a settlement by dropping assault charges in exchange for dismissing the lawsuit. Joe remains wary of the messy legal proceedings, recognizing McKnight's plausible self-defense claim.

Outside Neal's office, Joe notices a line of men waiting for construction jobs at the Buckbrush wind farm headquarters. Neal explains the economic benefits of the project, though Nate scoffs at the idea. Joe shifts the conversation to Kate's disappearance, but Neal dismisses the topic, suggesting Joe should also move on. Meanwhile, Joe reflects on the recent surge in hospital admissions, including McKnight, Joshua Teubner (who suffered a gunshot wound), and an elderly woman injured in a car accident, reinforcing the idea that trouble seems to follow him.

Joe receives a call from Jeb Pryor, the owner of a local lumber mill, who hints at having important information. Before Pryor can elaborate, the call drops. Shortly after, Steve Pollock, a former game warden, reaches out, agreeing to meet Joe in Cheyenne to discuss undisclosed events in Saratoga. Pollock is hesitant but agrees to a private conversation at a pub, insisting Joe come alone. Nate, wary of Cheyenne due to his past experiences, offers to investigate Pryor's concerns and keep an eye on Joe's daughter, Sheridan, while Joe is away.

Joe and Nate part ways, with Nate heading to the Wolf to switch vehicles and pursue his own leads, possibly related to Kate's case or his conspiracy theories. Joe warns Nate against further violent interrogations, but Nate's noncommittal response

suggests he may not comply. The chapter ends with Joe preparing to drive to Cheyenne, uncertain of what Pollock will reveal but determined to uncover the truth behind the chaos in Saratoga.

