

JOE PICKETT

Episode 101: "A Monster at the Gate"

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EXT. WYOMING VALLEY - DAWN

A LONE ROAD cuts a valley between majestic snow-capped mountains. This is Saddlestring, Wyoming, "Where the Pavement Ends and the West Begins." It is green and lush and seems barely touched by man.

A DARK-GREEN PICKUP TRUCK covers the distance swiftly through the mountains out toward the PLAINS.

INT. JOE'S TRUCK - MOUNTAIN RIDGE - DAWN

Inside the truck, local Game Warden JOE PICKETT (mid-30s, rugged and warm, the kind of guy you wish was your father) sips his morning coffee as he drives, keeping an eye on the elk fence that lines the valley road.

Riding shotgun is the closest thing Joe has to a partner, his faithful dog MAXINE (white lab, loves treats and adventure) who leans into the windshield with her paws on the dashboard.

Joe finds what he's looking for: A HUGE, DOWNED SECTION OF FENCE. Inside the fenced-in ranch, a LARGE GANG OF ELK help themselves to bales of hay.

JOE PICKETT
(to Maxine)
Looks like we've found our
troublemakers.

He pulls the truck to a stop.

EXT. ERWICH RANCH - MORNING

Joe gets out of the truck, letting Maxine jump out after him.

He grabs a box of tools out of the back and approaches the downed fence. Joe points to a spot on the ground for Maxine to "stay." She dutifully obeys.

Joe treads cautiously toward the elk, careful not to scatter them as Maxine remains glued to her spot. A few of the elk take a skittish step backward as Joe nears, but ONE MASSIVE BULL ELK with an enormous 5-point rack stands his ground. Joe takes one slow step after another.

JOE PICKETT
Hey big guy.

Joe stops, now almost nose to nose with this majestic animal. They share a silent knowing look between them, as backlit clouds of breath rise from their nostrils.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)

I'm sorry to have to run you outta here. Hope you at least got a belly full.

Joe and the bull elk hold each other's gaze for one more long beat before the elk goes back to the hay for a few last bites, knowing the jig is up.

Joe looks toward Maxine.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)

Ready Maxine?

She crouches forward, so excited. Joe belts out a quick, loud whistle. Maxine explodes toward the elk and barks as she circles the herd, driving them back off the ranch and out onto the plains across the road.

Joe surveys the damage -- the earth shredded into mud, elk dung all over, broken fences, bales of hay torn apart and eaten. DALE ERWICH (60s, salt of the Earth) approaches from the ranch house, impressed with the odd display he just witnessed.

DALE ERWICH

You the new Vern Dunnegan?

JOE PICKETT

I am. Joe Pickett. These elk really did a number on your ranch, didn't they?

DALE ERWICH

They sure did.

JOE PICKETT

I brought my tools. I'll get this fence fixed right up.

DALE ERWICH

I appreciate it. And say, Vern and I go way back. In a situation like this, he would have found a way to get the state to pay for the damage.

JOE PICKETT

The law doesn't change just because there's a new Game Warden.

DALE ERWICH

Wait, that's the law?

JOE PICKETT
 Officially, the state owns the elk.
 So, the game commission is liable
 for any damage they do.

DALE ERWICH
 Huh. Vern, that old slippery
 sonofabitch, always acted like he
 was doing me some big favor.

Joe chuckles good-naturedly.

JOE PICKETT
 Sounds like Vern.

Dale chuckles at his own gullibility.

DALE ERWICH
 Yeah, alright. Why don't you go get
 to work on that fence.

A DISTANT SHOT echoes through the valley. Followed by a *FWAP*.
 Joe freezes, listens intently.

DALE ERWICH (CONT'D)
 (re: the shots)
 Target shooting?

Joe seems alarmed.

JOE PICKETT
 No. That bullet hit flesh.

Joe nods, his heartbeat rising.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)
 I'll have to come back. Maxine.

Joe steps to his truck as Maxine races to his side.

DALE ERWICH
 (attempting humor)
 Don't go get yourself killed now
 before you finish my fence.

Joe attempts a grin as he gets into his truck.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - MORNING - SOON AFTER

Joe's truck tears through knee-high Wyoming sagebrush,
 hammering up the side of a mountain.

INT. JOE'S TRUCK - MOUNTAIN RIDGE - SOON AFTER

Inside the truck, Joe drives as fast as he can without losing control of the wheel. There are no established roads this high up.

JOE PICKETT
(to Maxine)
Get ready.

Joe tops the hill and quickly sizes up the situation: three large buck mule deer are dead. Their throats have been cut to bleed them, but they haven't been opened up yet.

OTE KEELEY (30s, bearded, barrel-chested Southerner) straddles the largest of the bucks, holding a dripping knife. His rifle is propped up about 50 feet away from him.

OTE KEELEY
Oh, fuck me.

Joe positions his truck between Ote and the rifle. Joe leaves Maxine in the truck as he approaches Ote and the downed deer.

JOE PICKETT
Please drop the knife.

Reluctantly, Ote Keeley tosses the knife into the grass. (Joe sees no reason to draw his revolver. He rarely does as he's a notoriously bad pistol shot at any range.)

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)
You're about four months early for deer season, you know.

Ote sighs.

OTE KEELEY
Meat for the pot, Warden. Just meat for the pot. Some of us got a family to feed.

Joe squats over the nearest and largest buck deer and runs his fingers over the soft velvet that still covers the antlers.

JOE PICKETT
Seems to me you didn't have to kill the only trophies in the herd just to fill your freezer.

Ote shuffles from one foot to the other, sheepish.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)

Then again, there's quite a black market for antlers in velvet. I'd say a haul like this could fetch you a couple grand.

OTE KEELEY

I wouldn't know about all that.

JOE PICKETT

Either way, I'm going to have to write you up. Ote Keeley, isn't it?

Ote is genuinely surprised. His face flushes red.

OTE KEELEY

You're kidding me, right?

Joe pulls out his ticket pad and flips it open.

JOE PICKETT

No, I'm not kidding.

Ote unexpectedly grins.

OTE KEELEY

Hey-I know you. You're the brand new game warden, ain't ya?

Joe nods and begins to fill out the citation.

OTE KEELEY (CONT'D)

I heard about you. You're the bonehead who arrested the governor of Wyoming for fishing without a license, right?

Joe can feel his neck getting hot.

JOE PICKETT

I didn't know he was the governor.

Joe immediately wishes he hadn't said anything. Ote laughs.

OTE KEELEY

Didn't know he was the governor! I read about that in the paper. 'Rookie Game Warden Arrests Governor Budd.'

Ote turns serious.

OTE KEELEY (CONT'D)

Hey, you're not really going to ticket me, are you?

(MORE)

OTE KEELEY (CONT'D)

I'm a professional hunting outfitter. I can't feed my family if my outfitter's license gets pulled. I'm not kidding. I'm sure we can work this out.

Joe looks up at Ote.

JOE PICKETT

I'm not kidding, either. Now give me your driver's license.

Joe catches Ote glancing toward where he had left his rifle.

OTE KEELEY

I got two kids and one on the way. How my gonna support them?

JOE PICKETT

Not like this.

OTE KEELEY

There's more animals in Wyoming than people. These critters won't be missed by anyone. What the hell could this possibly matter?

The comment touches a nerve with Joe.

JOE PICKETT

Did you know these bucks that you just killed are new papas?

OTE KEELEY

Now, how the hell would I know that?

Joe snaps at him.

JOE PICKETT

Because it's March.

Joe looks at the downed bull elk.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)

For 23 million years, those elk and their ancestors have roamed these plains. *23 million years*. You know how long people been here?

OTE KEELEY

I dunno. Ten million?

Joe looks at him. *Seriously?*

JOE PICKETT

14 *thousand*. That's it. Used to be a fair fight back then. They could run like hell, but we had tools and worked in packs. Then we went and built ourselves guns and scopes. Thermal imaging and exploding bullets. In 14 thousand years, we've inherited the Earth.

Ote looks unmoved by the lecture.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)

All they ever got is me. Hardly seems fair.

Joe looks back at Ote.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)

I figure, the least I can do is make sure nobody shoots 'em when they're having their babies. Give their young enough time to stand on their own. Figured that's kind of the least we can do for them, don't you think?

Joe continues to write the ticket. Ote spits.

OTE KEELEY

Vern Dunnegan wouldn't have pulled this shit.

Joe hides his surprise about what Ote said about his predecessor and mentor.

JOE PICKETT

Yeah, well I'm not Vern Dunnegan.

OTE KEELEY

(bitterly)

You sure as hell ain't.

Ote pulls his wallet out of his jeans and holds it out for Joe. As Joe reaches for it, OTE GRABS JOE'S ARM AND JERKS IT PAST HIM, THROWING JOE OFF BALANCE. OTE HAS JOE'S REVOLVER OUT OF THE HOLSTER BEFORE HE CAN RECOVER.

For a brief second, Joe Pickett and Ote Keeley stare at each other in genuine surprise. Then Ote raises the pistol and aims it squarely at Joe's face.

OTE KEELEY (CONT'D)

Uh-oh, look what just happened.

Ote is almost in awe. Joe tries to keep his face from showing his fear.

JOE PICKETT

I would suggest you give that back.

Joe moves to take the pistol back, but Ote smoothly cocks the hammer, stopping him dead.

OTE KEELEY

Whoa ho ho. Looky here. Looky, looky here.

JOE PICKETT

Give it back and we'll call it even.

Ote wraps his other hand around the grip, steadying his aim.

OTE KEELEY

(more to himself)

Now we're in really, *really* fucking deep. Ain't we?

JOE PICKETT

Ote, give me the gun.

OTE KEELEY

Seems too late now, don't it. Boy Scout like you never let this set. Turning a gun on a federal agent? Nah. I give you the gun and they lock me up for a long, long time. On the other hand...

Ote jabs the gun making Joe flinch.

OTE KEELEY (CONT'D)

If the new game warden was found out in the middle of nowhere, dead from his own gun. Might start to look a lot like things maybe weren't going so hot in the new town. How 'bout that story? Things been a little rough lately? Financial hardships and the like? How's the wife liking this place?

Joe tries steel himself as he speaks.

JOE PICKETT

Your deer. The blood. They'd notice that.

OTE KEELEY

You meet our local cops? Not exactly the gosh-darned CSI, are they?

JOE PICKETT

That's a lot of blood to not notice.

A tense moment as they both consider their next move.

OTE KEELEY

How about you don't write me the ticket, and I let you walk away.

Joe thinks it over.

JOE PICKETT

No. I'm still gonna write you the ticket. But I won't tell anyone you took my gun if you don't.

OTE KEELEY

You stupid? You'd rather die than not write me a ticket?

JOE PICKETT

No. Would you rather have a murder rap than get a ticket for hunting out of season?

After a tense beat -- Ote sighs heavily, and theatrically spins the weapon around butt-first. Joe takes it.

OTE KEELEY

You dumb sonofabitch, why wouldn't you just lie to me and then write the ticket anyway?

JOE PICKETT

Didn't really occur to me.

Joe holsters his revolver. He braces himself against the pickup and writes out a ticket in shaking scrawl as Ote looks on with a bemused expression.

TITLE CARD: JOE PICKETT

EXT. PICKETT HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Joe approaches the front door of his family's charming, government-owned, two-bedroom cottage as the sun gets low.

MARYBETH PICKETT (O.C.)
How was your day?

Joe looks back toward the horse stables for his wife, confused.

MARYBETH PICKETT (O.C.) (CONT'D)
Up here.

He looks up to find MARYBETH PICKETT (30s, seven months pregnant, easy intelligence, gorgeous in a casual way) patching a hole on the roof of the stables.

The sun behind her makes her look like an angel. If there's anything as beautiful as Marybeth, Joe hasn't seen it.

JOE PICKETT
You shouldn't be up there, should you?

MARYBETH PICKETT
I'm fine. We have a leak in the roof that's driving the new mare insane. She literally kicked her way through the damn wall!

Joe chuckles.

MARYBETH PICKETT (CONT'D)
Took me half the day to track her down and bring her back. Pain in the ass.

Joe leans on the rail of the horse pen and looks over the new mare, glistening in the late sun as Marybeth makes her way to the ladder.

MARYBETH PICKETT (CONT'D)
She's feisty and stubborn. Thinks she knows best and doesn't need anyone telling her any different. She's going to be perfect for you.

He smiles.

JOE PICKETT
Sounds like a pretty smart horse.

MARYBETH PICKETT
Too smart for her own good.

She smiles at Joe as she approaches. Despite ten years of marriage, the chemistry is still very much alive. But in that time, she's also learned to spot when something's wrong.

MARYBETH PICKETT (CONT'D)

You doing okay?

He pulls her close and smells her hair.

JOE PICKETT

I am now.

MARYBETH PICKETT

Rough day at work?

JOE PICKETT

Something like that.

Maxine barks at them as a child yells at another child inside. They share a knowing smile - their moments together are usually short lived.

MARYBETH PICKETT

Looks like Maxine's ready for her walk.

She kisses Joe's forehead with a twinkle in her eye.

MARYBETH PICKETT (CONT'D)

And sounds like the girls could use help with their soup.

JOE PICKETT

("shit")

They're making soup?

Marybeth shoots him a mischievous grin and takes the dog.

MARYBETH PICKETT

Good luck with that.

Joe steels himself before entering the house.

INT. PICKETT HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Inside, Joe finds the house looks like a tornado hit it. There is food and flour and spilled "ingredients" everywhere.

SHERIDAN PICKETT (9, glasses, an introverted third grader with a big brain) stirs stuff into a big pot on the stove. Her little sister LUCY (6, knows how to play cute when she wants something), wearing a vintage apron longer than her legs, drops a handful of something into the pot.

SHERIDAN PICKETT

Stop it! You can't just throw stuff into the pot.

LUCY PICKETT
That's what you're doing.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
But it's my soup.

LUCY PICKETT
It's both of ours.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
No it's not.

JOE PICKETT
Whoa whoa whoa. Slow it down.
Whatcha guys doing?

LUCY PICKETT
Making soup.

Joe inspects. Smells pretty bad.

JOE PICKETT
What kind of soup is that?

SHERIDAN PICKETT
I'm calling it "lotsa stuff" soup.

JOE PICKETT
Aah.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
Here, have a taste.

LUCY PICKETT
(not convincing)
It's *really* good.

Sheridan ladles some up to Joe's mouth. Both girls look on eagerly. Joe hesitates a moment, then goes for it. He smiles through the bitter taste.

JOE PICKETT
Hey, that's better than it smells.

Joe notices an EMPTY BOTTLE on the counter. Looks at it.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)
This is the dog's joint medicine.
You didn't put that into the soup,
did you?

LUCY PICKETT
Oops.

SHERIDAN PICKETT

Lucy!

LUCY PICKETT

I didn't know.

SHERIDAN PICKETT

You ruined my whole soup!

Sheridan goes after her little sister. Lucy is smart enough to run like hell. They tear off, shouting and slamming doors.

Joe rubs his temples, pours himself a glass of water, and tries to gargle the dog medicine taste out of his mouth.

Marybeth finishes a phone call as she reenters the house.

MARYBETH PICKETT

Okay Mom, calm down. It's going to be alright. I'll talk to Joe right now. Bye.

Joe looks at her, trying to read the situation. She approaches him, sheepishly. *Uh-oh*.

MARYBETH PICKETT (CONT'D)

Please don't be mad.

Joe raises an eyebrow.

MARYBETH PICKETT (CONT'D)

Apparently, my mom's fiancée's just been arrested.

JOE PICKETT

Arrested?

MARYBETH PICKETT

White-collar stuff. Wire fraud or something. She needs us to come get her.

JOE PICKETT

When?

MARYBETH PICKETT

Now.

JOE PICKETT

All the way to Jackson Hole?

Marybeth shrugs.

MARYBETH PICKETT

Being closer to Missy was one of the reasons we took this post, remember?

JOE PICKETT

Huh. Was it?

They share a wry smile. That's about all they share regarding her mother.

MARYBETH PICKETT

Well it was one of my reasons, anyhow. Joe, she needs us.

He gets it. And knows well enough to not complain.

JOE PICKETT

Girls, let's eat quick and get your pjs on. We're going to go get Grandma Missy.

SHERIDAN PICKETT

(corrects her dad)

Just "Missy." She doesn't like the word "Grandma."

Joe rolls his eyes. His mother-in-law is so hopelessly vain.

LUCY PICKETT

Yay, Missy!

Joe tries to put on a good face for Marybeth. But he doesn't try too hard.

EXT. TRAIL TO CRAZY WOMAN CREEK - SUNSET

Ote Keeley rides horseback up the mountain with KYLE LENSEGRAV (30s, Pabst Blue Ribbon in human form) and CALVIN MENDES (20s, quiet). They are heavily armed.

OTE KEELEY

(pats his horse)

Elway needs a break. Altitude's gettin' to him.

KYLE LENSEGRAV

We should keep moving. We can take a break over the ridge.

Ote stops his horse.

OTE KEELEY

Besides, I gotta piss.

Ote hops off his horse, turns his back to the guys and starts.

KYLE LENSEGRAV

Again? What's this, the fourth time we stopped so you can piss?

OTE KEELEY

(over his shoulder)

Doctor calls it a spastic bladder.

Kyle shakes his head, annoyed.

OTE KEELEY (CONT'D)

It happens when I don't hydrate enough. Staying hydrated is real important for overall health.

KYLE LENSEGRAV

Wow, that's really interesting Ote. Now would you get back on your damn horse?

Just then, the horses neigh, spooked. Ote zips up as the men silently pull their guns, scanning the woods.

OTE KEELEY

Guys.

The others follow Ote's eye, but can't see anything at first. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, a form takes shape. Human.

Up stands NATE ROMANOWSKI (30s, Hispanic, ex-special forces) in full camouflage, armed with a compound bow.

OTE KEELEY (CONT'D)

What in the hell.

The three men stare at him and he stares back. Ote slowly climbs back onto his horse and continues up the trail with Kyle and Calvin, none of them breathing as they get away from whoever the hell that guy was.

INT. MARYBETH'S CAR - NIGHT

Joe drives as Marybeth glances nervously to the back seat to make sure the girls are sleeping.

MARYBETH PICKETT

He took your gun? Joe, he could have killed you.

JOE PICKETT

But he didn't.

MARYBETH PICKETT

But he could have.

Marybeth sees Joe already feels bad about it. She lets him off the hook with a kind smile.

MARYBETH PICKETT (CONT'D)

I'm starting to like this place.
Don't ruin that for me by getting
yourself killed, alright?

He attempts a smile, but he's still kicking himself over:

JOE PICKETT

I just... I wasn't expecting it.

She takes his hand.

MARYBETH PICKETT

One of the things I've always loved
about you is your ability to accept
people as they are. But now you
might need to start being more...
pragmatic about who you trust.

Joe shakes his head and sighs. He's harder on himself than anyone else would ever be.

JOE PICKETT

You're right. I'll do better. I
won't die dumb. I promise.

MARYBETH PICKETT

I don't want you to die smart
either.

He shrugs.

JOE PICKETT

Better than dumb.

He shoots her a grin, but she's not having it. She takes his hand and puts her head on his shoulder and they drive on in silence.

EXT. TETON VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Teton Village is like something out of a Swiss storybook, a perfect little mountain town nestled into the base of the world-famous Jackson Hole ski resort.

The Pickett station wagon looks very out of place as it navigates perfectly-manicured streets, lit year-round by Christmas lights.

Marybeth can't help but be enchanted while stifling a hint of resentment about just how easy some people seem to have it.

They pull up to a PALATIAL JACKSON HOLE MANSION. Joe and Marybeth leave the girls sleeping in the back of the car and approach. Joe rings the bell.

MISSY (O.S.)
It's open!

INT. JACKSON HOLE MANSION - NIGHT

They enter to find Marybeth's mother, MISSY VANKEUREN (late 50s, dressed three tax brackets above what she can actually afford) standing above them on the landing drinking red wine, blasting Verdi's "La Forza Del Destino: Overture." She is lit from below, shadowing her face like Bela Lagosi.

MISSY
They took him away. My lover. The Federal Government came into my house and took MY LOVER!

JOE PICKETT
(under his breath)
Oh, great.

Marybeth nudges him to shut up.

MARYBETH PICKETT
I see you're drinking again, Mom.

MISSY
I am not! I haven't had a drop in over a year!

Missy notices the glass of red wine in her own hand.

MISSY (CONT'D)
But really, who could blame me, on a night like this if I did have a glass of wine. Or two. Who could blame me?! I think I'd deserve one glass of wine on a night when the government stole MY LOVER!

JOE PICKETT
Can you ask her to stop saying "lover?" It's creepy.

MARYBETH PICKETT
Joe.

MISSY

I decorated all of this. Shep has no taste. I picked every damn piece! And now they're saying I have to leave it all behind?! Ooh, "*frozen assets.*"

She stumbles to the dining room.

MISSY (CONT'D)

This chair?

She notes the chairs around the dining room table.

MISSY (CONT'D)

This one single chair costs more than your entire house. How does that make you feel?

JOE PICKETT

Like maybe I should take up wire fraud.

MARYBETH PICKETT

Joe!

Joe takes a breath. Excuses himself before he loses his cool.

JOE PICKETT

I'll wait with the girls.

Marybeth nods. Missy shakes her head.

MISSY

(loud)

You could have married anyone. Why you would choose a *park ranger* is beyond me.

MARYBETH PICKETT

You stop it! He's not park... Joe is a good man and a good father and a good husband. And it looks to me like maybe I should be the one giving you advice on picking men.

Missy starts to cry.

MISSY

You're right. You're right.

MARYBETH PICKETT

Mom. Stop. I'm sorry. Come on. Just grab your stuff. It's okay.

INT. PICKETT HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe climbs into bed. It's very late and he's exhausted. He watches Marybeth change into her pajamas as he waits for her. Maybe he's not as tired as he first thought.

JOE PICKETT
You're looking pretty sexy there in those cat pajamas.

Marybeth smiles, *maybe*.

MARYBETH PICKETT
My mother is right downstairs.

JOE PICKETT
Yeah, but her pjs aren't as sexy.

Marybeth snickers. He does too.

MARYBETH PICKETT
That's not what I meant.

JOE PICKETT
Then why don't you show me what you meant.

He takes her hand and pulls her into bed. She giggles.

EXT. PICKETT HOUSE - DAWN

The sun crests over the canyon behind the Picketts' house as deer graze in the morning light.

INT. PICKETT HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Missy folds the blankets on the couch she slept on as Sheridan recounts her scary dream to a terrified Lucy.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
Then the monster came down from the mountains in the middle of the night. I heard it rattling around. Looking for our house.

Lucy cringes. Joe tousles her hair as he makes a beeline to the coffee maker.

JOE PICKETT
Knock it off, Sheridan. You're gonna scare your sister.

LUCY PICKETT
 I'm already scared.
 (to Sheridan)
 What did it look like?

Sheridan continues. Joe can't help but smile a little, enjoying Sheridan's storytelling prowess.

JOE PICKETT
 (to Missy)
 How'd you sleep?

MISSY
 Not so good. The dog kept
 scratching at the window.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
 Then the monster rattled the gate.

MISSY
 Joe, I... might not have been at my
 best yesterday.

JOE PICKETT
 It's okay. Apology accepted.

MISSY
 That was not an apology.

Joe grins. He knows.

JOE PICKETT
 I wasn't at my best either. Also
 not an apology.

Missy smiles. Marybeth catches that last exchange as she enters, dressed and ready for the day.

MARYBETH PICKETT
 This is great. Now I have a seven
 year old, a nine year old and a
 pair of ten year olds.

She kisses Joe as she passes and they share a sweet "morning after" smile. Joe makes coffee as Sheridan continues in the background.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
 Then the man walked toward the
 woodpile where he fell down with a
 boom.

Joe suddenly stops what he's doing.

JOE PICKETT
 Hold it, Sheridan. Just now you
 said "man." You didn't say
 "monster." You said "man."

Sheridan looks up quizzically, her big eyes wide.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
 I guess it coulda been a man.

Joe thinks, concern dawning on his face. He looks to Missy.

JOE PICKETT
 Where did Maxine want to go? Last
 night when she kept you up?

MISSY
 Out back.

MARYBETH PICKETT
 (catching on)
 Toward the woodpile.

They all exchange a look.

JOE PICKETT
 I'll go take a look.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
 Better take your gun.

Joe attempts a grin.

JOE PICKETT
 Eat your breakfast.

JOE BUCKLES HIS HOLSTER OVER HIS BATHROBE, CLAMPS ON HIS
 BLACK STETSON, and steps outside onto the back porch.

EXT. PICKETT HOUSE - MORNING

Joe scans the area as he slips outside. He hears something
 and looks out by the horse stables. There, standing alone in
 his back yard stands an emaciated horse, it's saddle dangling
 down underneath it.

JOE PICKETT
 Hello? Is someone here?

No response. Nothing. Dead silence.

Joe pulls his revolver and makes sure it's loaded. He glances
 over his shoulder.

Framed in the dining room window stand Sheridan, Lucy and Marybeth, watching on, their faces wide open. With a flick of Joe's head, Marybeth pulls them inside.

Joe stalks deliberately across the patio. He finds LARGE SPATTERS OF BLOOD dotting the stone walkway.

Grasping the pistol in front of him with both hands, Joe steps through the open gate to the woodpile.

Joe takes a breath as he sees: A BIG, BEARDED MAN SPRAWLED ACROSS THE WOODPILE. AN ARROW THROUGH HIS ABDOMEN.

THE MAN IS OTE KEELEY AND HE LOOKS DEAD.

Joe touches Ote's meaty, pale white hand. The skin is cold and does not give to the touch. Definitely dead.

The backdoor slams shut. Joe spots Sheridan skipping down the walk in her nightgown with Marybeth right behind her.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)
Get back into that house!

Hearing his tone, Sheridan spins on her bare feet and flies right back inside. Joe scans the surroundings one last time. Listens.

INT. PICKETT HOUSE - DAY

Marybeth studies Joe's face as he reenters the house.

MARYBETH PICKETT
What is it?

He speaks quietly, just for her ears.

JOE PICKETT
It's Ote Keeley. And he's dead.

She gasps. Then searches for how she knows that name.

MARYBETH PICKETT
Ote Keeley. Is he the one...?

JOE PICKETT
Yeah. That's him. I'm going to call the Sheriff. Will you make sure all the doors and windows are locked?

She nods and leaps into focused action. He appreciates that about her.

INT. PICKETT HOUSE - JOE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Joe steps into his bedroom for privacy and dials.

JOE PICKETT
Hey Cricket. I need to speak with
Sheriff Barnum.

INT. SADDLESTRING DISPATCH - INTERCUT - DAY

Police dispatcher CRICKET LUDLOW, (30s, conspiracy buff),
revels in the above-average excitement this morning.

CRICKET
Sheriff's out. So's the deputy.
They had an emergency call this
morning.

JOE PICKETT
You know where they went?

CRICKET
Some campers reported seeing a
wounded man on horseback last night
riding toward Bighorn Road. The
suspect allegedly rode his horse
right through their camp while
brandishing a weapon and
threatening the campers with said
weapon.

Cricket loves saying things like "allegedly" and "said
weapon." She doesn't often get the chance.

JOE PICKETT
You get a description of the man on
horseback?

Cricket pauses, then reads from the report.

CRICKET
Late thirties, beard, bloody shirt.
A big fella. The suspect was
allegedly swinging some kind of
plastic box or cooler around.

JOE PICKETT
If the injured man had a weapon in
one hand and a plastic box in the
other, how'd he steer his horse?

CRICKET

That's what the campers reported.
Out-of-staters. From Massachusetts
or Boston or some place like that.

JOE PICKETT

Are you in radio contact with
Sheriff Barnum?

CRICKET

I believe so.

JOE PICKETT

Why don't you let him know that the
man on horseback was Ote Keeley and
that Ote is lying dead on the
woodpile behind my house.

Joe hears Cricket gasp, then try to regain her composure.

CRICKET

Come again?

INT. PICKETT HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Marybeth loads shells into her shotgun in the kitchen.

Missy pulls the curtains aside to rubberneck outside.

MISSY

Where's the body? On the woodpile?

MARYBETH PICKETT

Mom.

With a nod of her head, Marybeth attempts to covertly remind
her mother that there are kids in the house.

MISSY

(not sorry)

I'm sorry. This kind of thing just
doesn't happen in Jackson Hole.

Joe heads for the backdoor, deadly serious despite the fact
that he's still wearing his bathrobe and holster.

MARYBETH PICKETT

(whispered)

You're going back out there?

He notes her shotgun. She dares him to make fun. But he
wouldn't. If anything, it's pretty goddamn sexy.

JOE PICKETT
Just for a minute.

EXT. PICKETT BACK YARD

Joe walks back toward the body of Ote Keeley, his eyes sweeping across the yard, taking in the bloodstained walk, the woodpile, the canyon mouth behind the house. He again notes Ote's emaciated horse grazing in his yard.

Joe crouches near Ote Keeley and studies the broadhead of the arrow sticking out of his back. He snaps a couple photos.

Something occurs to Joe as he stands. He scans the yard with his eyes, looking for something. *There.*

Joe arcs wide into his yard to stay away from potential footprints, until he arrives at a SMALL PLASTIC COOLER minus the lid that Ote must have dropped in his yard.

Joe kneels down and looks into the cooler, which is empty except for a scattering of small animal excrement. The inside walls of the cooler are all scratched up, as if clawed. He snaps a couple more photos and heads back for the house.

INT. PICKETT HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - SOON AFTER

Joe changes into his day-to-day uniform: blue jeans and his red, button-up chamois shirt with the pronghorn antelope patch on the sleeve. Over the breast pocket reads: GAME WARDEN - J. PICKETT. He looks himself in the mirror. He looks sharp. Official. He takes a deep breath and steels himself.

INT. PICKETT HOUSE - KITCHEN

As Joe comes downstairs, Sheridan intercepts him, needing information.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
Dad, why did he come here? Was he trying to hurt us?

JOE PICKETT
No, honey. I don't know why, but I'm going to figure it out.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
If you don't know why he came here, how do you know he wasn't here to hurt us?

Joe stops and looks his daughter in the eye.

JOE PICKETT

Listen to me. No matter why he came here, there is nothing in this world I would not do to keep you safe. Don't ever forget that.

Sheridan nods.

SHERIDAN PICKETT

I won't let anyone hurt you either.

He's touched by this sentiment. These two share a deep bond. He kisses her on her forehead and continues down the stairs.

Joe clocks the worry on Marybeth's face. He lowers his voice so the kids won't hear.

JOE PICKETT

You and the girls should get a motel in Saddlestring for a day or two. While we get this sorted out.

MARYBETH PICKETT

You think it's still unsafe here?

JOE PICKETT

I don't know what to think yet. But we should play it careful.

MARYBETH PICKETT

(quiet)

Will the state pay for it?

JOE PICKETT

Why? We can't?

Marybeth shakes her head no.

MARYBETH PICKETT

It's the end of the month.

Joe hates the "end of the month." He feels his face flush.

MARYBETH PICKETT (CONT'D)

Maybe we could find someone to stay with.

JOE PICKETT

Who?

Marybeth knows he's right. It's hard still not having any real friends in this town.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)

Can we use the credit card?

MARYBETH PICKETT

Nearly maxed out. It might work for a night or two tops.

Joe feels the shame of his salary. Or lack thereof.

MARYBETH PICKETT (CONT'D)

I could ask Missy, if she'd...

JOE PICKETT

No.

(a beat)

Sorry. But just... no. Okay? Let's just use the credit card.

She nods to him. They hear trucks pulling onto the property outside. Joe fits his dusty black hat on his head and goes out to greet them.

MARYBETH PICKETT

Wait.

She straightens his hat and pats his chest with an assuring smile. He appreciates the subtle vote of confidence.

EXT. PICKETT BACK YARD

Sheriff O. R. "Bud" Barnum, (60s, tough as old boots) is the first to arrive. In office for 24 years, Sheriff Barnum is an institution in Twelve Sleep County. He has rarely faced opposition when running for re-election.

SHERIFF BARNUM

Where's the body?

Joe leads Barnum to the back yard. Despite his age, Barnum still moves with speed and stiff grace. Joe watches as Barnum's eyes sweep the scene. The two men arrive at the woodpile. Barnum peers around back of it, revealing the body.

SHERIFF BARNUM (CONT'D)

Yup, that's Ote all right.

DEPUTY McLANAHAN (30s, the oafish football player you never liked in high school all grown up) catches up to them.

SHERIFF BARNUM (CONT'D)

Nice of you to join us.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN

Got stuck behind a bunch of cows. He still dead?

Barnum shoots him a look. *Don't push it.*

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN (CONT'D)
That an arrow sticking out of him?

SHERIFF BARNUM
Yup. Guess we can forget
ballistics.

JOE PICKETT
Wait, but... that arrow is custom.

They look at him. Joe gets closer and points.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)
The broadhead is a four-blade
mechanical with shock collar. And
look, see that little rubber guy
underneath? That's a pod.

SHERIFF BARNUM
A "pod?"

JOE PICKETT
A little pouch that holds poison.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
That legal?

JOE PICKETT
No. That's very not legal. My guess
is the toxicology on that pod will
give you more than ballistics would
have.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
That so.
(sarcastic, to Barnum)
Regular Columbo we got here.

SHERIFF BARNUM
Columbo was a lawyer, not a cop,
you dumbass.

JOE PICKETT
One other thing...

Joe walks them over to the cooler.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)
This cooler. There's some sort of
scat inside of it.

Barnum looks closer. McLanahan leans over their shoulders.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
 (feigning being impressed)
 Ooh. That's a nice piece of
 detective work.

McLanahan pantomimes raising a walkie to his mouth.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN (CONT'D)
 All points bulletin. Keep your eyes
 peeled for a giant mouse carrying a
 bow and arrow.

McLanahan and the Sheriff guffaw at Joe's expense as Joe
 bristles. Joe fights his urge to lash out.

JOE PICKETT
 It doesn't look like mouse scat to
 me. I think you should take a
 sample and send it in for testing.

SHERIFF BARNUM
 Seems unnecessary.

Barnum starts to move on.

JOE PICKETT
 I can do it if you won't.

Barnum turns and looks at Joe, wondering if that was a
 challenge. Joe holds his gaze. Barnum shrugs.

SHERIFF BARNUM
 ("fine")
 If it makes you feel better, we'll
 send it in.

The Sheriff points to the horse in the yard.

SHERIFF BARNUM (CONT'D)
 Is that Ote's horse?

JOE PICKETT
 ("yeah")
 It's not *mine*.

They approach the horse. The sheriff notes its loose saddle.

SHERIFF BARNUM
 Keeley must have ridden this horse
 pretty hard for it to lose this
 much weight.

INT. PICKETT HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Missy watches through the window as the men outside look over Ote Keeley's horse.

MISSY

That Sheriff is kind of handsome.
In a sun-damaged kind of way. Is he
married?

MARYBETH PICKETT

Seriously? That's what you're
thinking about right now?

MISSY

Says the girl who can't afford a
night in a mo-tel.

MARYBETH PICKETT

Says her homeless mother.

Missy seems genuinely offended.

MISSY

I am not homeless. I'm visiting my
granddaughters. If that's a
crime...

Outside, Deputy McLanahan looks back and sees Missy in the window. He smiles and tips his hat. She smiles at him coquettishly and he seems to like it. Missy might be 30 years his senior, but there's some chemistry here.

Missy backs away from the window, blushing. She sees Sheridan also peeking outside.

MISSY (CONT'D)

Sheridan, I don't think your
parents want you looking out there.

SHERIDAN PICKETT

Okay Missy.

Sheridan backs away and walks upstairs.

INT. PICKETT HOUSE - UPSTAIRS

Sheridan sees her mother packing. *Good, she's busy.* She sneaks back to her own bedroom.

INT. PICKETT HOUSE - SHERIDAN AND LUCY'S BEDROOM

Sheridan crosses the room to her window, and peeks out. She sees Joe talking to Barnum, but she can't hear them through the window.

Suddenly SOMETHING MOVES IN THE WOODPILE. Sheridan's eyes light up. Was it real or did she imagine it? Then it moves again. Something tan and lightning fast streaks across the bottom row of logs and darts into a dark opening at the base.

Sheridan is so mesmerized she almost doesn't notice Barnum walking directly towards her, counting out paces from the woodpile to the house. As Barnum reaches the house, he looks directly up at Sheridan. She ducks down below the window so as not to be seen.

SHERIFF BARNUM
(to McLanahan)
Thirteen paces.

When she peeks back outside, Barnum has moved on.

MARYBETH PICKETT (O.C.)
Sheridan, why aren't your shoes on?

Sheridan jumps, feeling like she's in trouble.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
Okay, okay.

She glances back at the woodpile, but the animal is gone.

EXT. PICKETT BACK YARD / FRONT YARD

Joe walks Marybeth and the girls from house to car, making sure they can't see the body. He loads Marybeth's suitcase into the trunk, then crouches down beside Sheridan.

JOE PICKETT
Next time you say you see a
monster, I'm going to believe you.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
Okay, Dad.

Joe kisses both girls and closes the door. Marybeth looks nervously back toward the wood pile.

MARYBETH PICKETT
Is the body gone?

JOE PICKETT
Soon.

Marybeth holds her arms across her pregnant belly, as if to shield her unborn baby from all of this.

MARYBETH PICKETT

I know these things happen but why would he come here, to our house?

JOE PICKETT

I don't know.

MARYBETH PICKETT

Have you told them about... your run-in with Ote?

JOE PICKETT

No. Not yet.

MARYBETH PICKETT

There's no way Ote Keeley didn't tell *somebody* about that. It's better the Sheriff hears it from you.

JOE PICKETT

Yeah. Alright.

Joe dreads telling them. She takes his hand as she studies his face.

MARYBETH PICKETT

Joe, don't make this worse than it has to be, okay?

JOE PICKETT

What do you mean?

MARYBETH PICKETT

I know that look in your eyes. Like you're trying real hard not to go kill someone.

It's true, but he tries to play it off.

JOE PICKETT

I don't know what you're talking about. I'm a summer fucking breeze.

MARYBETH PICKETT

Joe.

JOE PICKETT

He came to *our house*, Marybeth.

She pats his chest, gently, letting him know that she does understand him, but also hoping the touch will calm him.

Joe looks past Marybeth to find Missy, carrying a tray with coffees on it to the sheriff and deputy.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)
Regular Betty Homemaker, isn't she?

Missy hands Sheriff Barnum a coffee. The sheriff takes it without even acknowledging her. But Deputy McLanahan is more than happy to make up for his boss. He takes the coffee and sips enthusiastically.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
Mmmmm. This is delicious. What is this? Dark roast?

MISSY
Truth be told, I can't tell one coffee from another.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
(winks)
Your secret's safe with me.

Missy giggles coyly.

MARYBETH PICKETT
(over it)
You almost ready to go mom?

MISSY
(singsong)
Coming.
(then, to McLanahan)
A mother's job is never done. They grow up, but they never really leave the nest.

Deputy McLanahan turns back around to find Sheriff Barnum scowling at him.

SHERIFF BARNUM
I wish you knew how to work a crime scene half that good.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
(grins)
Public outreach.

INT. MARYBETH'S CAR

Marybeth drives Missy and the kids down the driveway.

MARYBETH PICKETT
Really, mother.

Missy shrugs and sits back. Judging. Sheridan stares out the rear window, her eyes locked in on the woodpile.

EXT. PICKETT BACK YARD - DAY

Sheriff Barnum photographs the crime scene. Joe approaches.

SHERIFF BARNUM

(to Joe)

You'll write up a report on this?

JOE PICKETT

Of course.

Joe steels himself.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)

There is one more thing I should mention... I met Ote Keeley. I wrote him a ticket for hunting out of season.

Against his better judgement, Joe continues.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)

And we had a bit of an incident.

Barnum stops what he's doing and studies Joe.

SHERIFF BARNUM

What kind of incident?

JOE PICKETT

He took my sidearm from me. And threatened me with it.

Barnum scoffs.

SHERIFF BARNUM

He took your sidearm?! Why is this the first I'm hearing about it?

Joe feels his face flush hot as he explains.

JOE PICKETT

Ote and I resolved the situation internally.

Barnum scowls. Joe continues sheepishly.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)

We figured it kinda looked bad. For both of us.

SHERIFF BARNUM
I'll say. Especially when one of
you winds up dead on the other's
wood pile.

JOE PICKETT
Yeah.

SHERIFF BARNUM
Tell me, Pickett, you don't happen
to have a compound bow around, do
you?

Joe doesn't appreciate the insinuation.

JOE PICKETT
No. I don't.

Barnum and McLanahan share a look. Joe notes it.

SHERIFF BARNUM
Mind if McLanahan takes a look
around?

Joe snaps, the anger and the stress of the day getting the
better of him.

JOE PICKETT
You think if I was gonna kill
someone, I'd do it in my own back
yard?!

SHERIFF BARNUM
I've seen smarter people do dumber
things. Just dottin' my i's.

Barnum nods to McLanahan, who walks towards Joe's house.

JOE PICKETT
Actually, I do mind.

McLanahan stops.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
What? What is it you're afraid
we'll find?

JOE PICKETT
There's nothing to find.

The Sheriff and Deputy look at each other. Joe explains.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)
The sanctity of my home has been
violated.

(MORE)

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)

Today, anybody wants to go in that house, they'd better bring a court order. Or be ready to kill me first.

Barnum glares at Joe for a tense beat. Then shakes his head and sighs.

SHERIFF BARNUM

Well then, why don't you at least make yourself useful and help us carry this dead hillbilly to the truck.

EXT. SADDLESTRING MOTEL - DAY

Marybeth's car pulls up to a run-down motel in Saddlestring.

MISSY

Oh, Dear God.

MARYBETH PICKETT

(warning)

Mom.

Missy chokes back a sob.

MISSY

It's just... what a difference a couple days can make.

MARYBETH PICKETT

Mom.

Lucy pipes in from the back.

LUCY PICKETT

Careful Missy, that's her "angry mom" voice.

Marybeth laughs at the situation. Three generations of spirited women stuck in a shitty motel together. *God help us.*

EXT. PICKETT BACK YARD

Sheriff Barnum motions to Ote's body beside a body bag on the ground.

SHERIFF BARNUM

Ready?

Joe nods. They struggle to lift Ote Keeley's heavy body to the body bag on the ground. McLanahan zips the bag as far as Ote's gut.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
 (ala "Jaws")
 I think we're gonna need a bigger
 bag.

Barnum and McLanahan lift the half-zipped bodybag and carry it to the back of the Deputy's Blazer.

As Joe waits for them to finish up, his eyes fall back to the plastic cooler. He pulls a small evidence envelope from his uniform pocket and approaches it.

He covertly squats over the cooler and uses the tip of a pencil eraser to flick several small pieces of scat from the cooler into his envelope. He seals and pockets it.

Joe brings the cooler to McLanahan at his Blazer.

JOE PICKETT
 Don't forget the cooler.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
 Oh yeah, God forbid.

McLanahan reluctantly takes it as he starts his truck.

JOE PICKETT
 What do you want me to do with
 Keeley's horse?

McLanahan looks the horse over.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
 I don't know. Kill it and eat it
 for all I care.

And with that, McLanahan and the Sheriff leave Joe's property with the man who died in Joe's yard.

Joe stands alone, looking his yard over, asking himself one question: *why here?*

I/E. JOE'S TRUCK/ OTE KEELEY'S AREA - DAY

Joe rolls his dark-green pickup through an old mountain mining area. Shacks 100 years old have been tarped and taped together for yet another generation of semi-transients.

Joe looks at the hunting license application on his passenger's seat. A photo of Ote Keeley on it.

Finds the right place. He pulls up to the property line. Sees a sign that reads, "NO TRESPASSING - Are you bullet-proof or just stupid!"

Joe straps on his sidearm and gets out of the truck. He slowly approaches the ramshackle house.

He sees a girl, 7 years old, APRIL KEELEY, Ote's daughter. Unbrushed hair, dirty clothes, shoeless. She looks at Joe, as if she feels sorry for him.

JOE PICKETT
Hi, is your mom home?

KU-CHUCK! The unmistakable sound of a 12-GAUGE SHOTGUN COCKING.

JEANIE KEELEY (O.C.)
And who in the hell are you?

Joe turns slowly to find JEANIE KEELEY (early 30s, Southern, pregnant, barely five feet tall but hard as nails).

JOE PICKETT
My name is...

JEANIE KEELEY
That was a *rhetorical* question. I don't care who you are. How 'bout you take one step forward so I can shoot you legally.

JOE PICKETT
But ma'am...

JEANIE KEELEY
I ain't your "ma'am."

JOE PICKETT
It's about Ote.

JEANIE KEELEY
He ain't here.

Joe glances to April, then back to Jeanie.

JOE PICKETT
I take it nobody's been here to talk to you yet?

Joe looks at her, solemnly, waiting for her to catch up.

JEANIE KEELEY
(joking)
What, is he dead or somethin'?

JOE PICKETT
("yes")
Would you put down the weapon?

Jeanie's face drops as she realizes what's going on.

JEANIE KEELEY
Oh hell.

She lowers her weapon.

INT. KEELEY HOUSE - DAY

Joe and Jeanie sit at the table. As she absorbs the word "murder." She shakes her head, fighting emotion.

JEANIE KEELEY
Ote, you dumb sonofabitch. What am
I supposed to do with all these
damn kids now?

Joe hears a child coughing in the next room.

JEANIE KEELEY (CONT'D)
You know who done it?

JOE PICKETT
Not yet.

She thinks about it.

JEANIE KEELEY
I'll tell you: lotta people didn't
like Ote. That old boy could sure
start some shit.

She smiles fondly. The smile drops.

JEANIE KEELEY (CONT'D)
But he never did nothin so bad to
get killed over.

JOE PICKETT
Did he ever hunt with a bow?

She looks at him, puzzled.

JEANIE KEELEY
No. Ote was a man. He killed his
elk with a gun. Like a normal
person.

Joe nods, treads lightly.

JOE PICKETT
When did you see him last?

Her brow furrows as she studies his uniform.

JEANNIE KEELEY
Wait, you're a Game Warden? Why are you investigating a murder?

JOE PICKETT
I'm not... technically. I'm... looking into a hunting violation.

She scowls.

JEANNIE KEELEY
A hunting violation? You mean my husband's *murder*?

JOE PICKETT
No. The weapon. It was an illegal arrow.

JEANNIE KEELEY
Ote was killed with an arrow? Well that's about the stupidest shit I ever heard.

Joe's heart aches for Jeannie and her kids.

JOE PICKETT
I'm sorry.

Joe rises to leave, then hesitates.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)
Just one more question? Where was Ote headed when you last saw him?

Jeannie measures her response for a long moment. Looks at Joe.

JEANNIE KEELEY
He didn't say.

EXT. KEELEY HOUSE - DAY

Joe swings open the horse trailer. He takes hold of Keeley's horse's reins, but the horse seems spooked.

JOE PICKETT
Whoa. Easy there. Easy.

The horse gets more and more agitated. Joe drops the reins and backs away, giving the horse a chance to calm down.

April, Ote's shoeless daughter, appears behind him.

APRIL KEELEY

(soft)

He gets scared of strangers. Let me do it.

Before Joe can object, she walks right into the trailer with the horse (even though she's barefoot) and gets in front of it. She speaks to the horse in a gentle tone.

APRIL KEELEY (CONT'D)

Hey, Elway. I need you to get outta this trailer and come back home.

She places her forehead to the horse's and it seems to calm down. April then blows into the horse's nostrils and, as if hypnotized by this little girl, the horse backs calmly out of the trailer.

April leads the horse away without looking back. Joe just stares at this amazing little girl and her horse. *That was the damnedest thing.* He closes the trailer.

EXT. TRAIL END GROCERY - DAY

One part rustic grocery store, one part cafe/restaurant, "Trail End Grocery," is the social hub of Saddlestring.

Marybeth puts enough food to get by for a day or two into a basket. As she nears the end of the aisle, she notes the Community Bulletin Board. She lingers over the "Help Wanted Section" for a moment.

"Automotive Mechanic?" Nope. "In-Shop Sandwich Maker?" Just kill me. "Pet Stylist?" Here? "Dishwasher?" *She passed the bar exam for this?*

As she nears the register, she can't help but overhear the "Tuesday Knitting Crew" a group of women (and one gay man) who gather every Tuesday to knit sweaters over coffee while talking all things macabre.

MITCH (gay with a subversive sense of humor and sweater vest) conspires.

MITCH

A poison arrow? That's rich. I like this killer already.

Marybeth freezes, realizing what they're talking about.

The knitters' unofficial leader, VALERIE (50s, Earth mama, and on-duty cashier), scolds her friend.

VALERIE

A man is dead, Mitch. Let's have some respect.

MITCH

Oh, please. Ote Keeley was an asshole.

The knitting crew snickers.

VALERIE

Has anyone ever told you that you're a terrible person?

MITCH

Oh, you love it.

Valerie laughs. *It's true.* Marybeth does her best to stay invisible as she puts her basket on the counter for checkout. Valerie swipes her items without ever really looking at her.

KELLY (50s, working class serious) chimes in.

KELLY

Where was he found?

VALERIE

That's the best part. He was found on the doorstep of the new Game Warden's house.

They all gasp. Marybeth scrambles through her purse for cash.

KELLY

The one who wrote the governor a ticket?

VALERIE

The same.

Marybeth's face goes red. She gathers her stuff.

MITCH

When's the last time we had a local killing?

KELLY

Three years. The Donahue thing.

Oh, yeah.

MITCH

So a new Game Warden comes to town and suddenly, after three years, there's a fresh murder?

VALERIE
At his house no less?

MITCH
Ten dollars says he's the killer.

Marybeth wants to leave, but she just can't help herself.

MARYBETH PICKETT
But what you don't know is the new
Game Warden has an airtight alibi.

They regard her quizzically, not used to someone barging into their discussions uninvited.

VALERIE
Yeah?

MARYBETH PICKETT
Yeah. He was laying in bed with *me*.

Marybeth shrugs and walks off with her groceries as the realization hits the knitting crew like a gut punch.

Mitch chuckles.

MITCH
I like her.

As Marybeth leaves the store, she can't help but smile to herself. Maybe not her finest moment, but it sure felt good.

INT. TAXIDERMY SHOP - DAY

Joe enters a taxidermist's shop. A bell rings. OLIVER LOPEZ calls out from the back room.

OLIVER LOPEZ
I'll be right out.

Joe looks around. Mounted deer and elk wait for clients to pick them up. Joe touches the antlers on an elk head. Velvet. Hmm. He feels the back of it, where the head meets the mount. Wet glue. This is new.

OLIVER LOPEZ (40s, da Vinci with a bone saw and mount) freezes as he sees Joe in his Game Warden uniform. Oliver's eyes glance to the elk mount and back. Joe notes it.

OLIVER LOPEZ (CONT'D)
What brings you in, Warden?

JOE PICKETT
You do nice work.

OLIVER LOPEZ
Yes I do. The very best.

JOE PICKETT
Do you get many trophies killed by
bowhunters?

OLIVER LOPEZ
Some. Not a lot.

Joe pulls up the photo of the arrow broadhead.

JOE PICKETT
You ever see a broadhead like this?

Oliver looks it over.

OLIVER LOPEZ
Maybe... But see, I can see there's
a pod on that thing, and I'm not
too up on the code, but I have to
assume that's illegal. Not sure
it'd be too good for business me
getting customers in trouble.

JOE PICKETT
I'm not sure it'd be much better
for your business if I noticed this
elk you mounted still has velvet on
its antlers.

OLIVER LOPEZ
It's an old mount.

JOE PICKETT
With wet glue?

Oliver struggles to contain his anger.

OLIVER LOPEZ
A client wanted me to remount an
old trophy. Everything I do here is
above board. So why don't you go
look for trouble somewhere else.

Joe considers whether or not he needs to apologize. Then he
sees something. He crosses past Oliver to a wall of flyers.
On one is A PHOTO OF THE EXACT CUSTOM BROADHEAD.

Joe peels it off the wall. Looks at Oliver, who avoids his
eye.

JOE PICKETT
Thanks for your help.

Joe leaves.

EXT. SADDLESTRING STREET - DAY

Joe walks outside to his car to find his mentor, VERN DUNNEGAN (70, black, former Game Warden and current unofficial mayor of Saddlestring), approaching.

JOE PICKETT
Vern Dunnegan. As I live and breathe.

VERN DUNNEGAN
How's the adjustment to the top job going?

JOE PICKETT
It's been interesting.

Vern can't help but smile.

VERN DUNNEGAN
Got time for a drink?

JOE PICKETT
Little early for me.

VERN DUNNEGAN
Then you can sit and watch me have one.

Joe realizes this wasn't an accidental meeting. He folds the flyer and puts it in his pocket.

INT. STOCKMAN'S BAR - DAY

Even though it's mid-day, this gentleman's bar has a good number of patrons sitting, drinking, playing pool, talking. This is a strange place. It's part cowboy dive bar and part place of business.

JOE PICKETT
How's retirement treating you?

VERN DUNNEGAN
Not too bad. I now live by two rules: I do everything I want to do, and nothing I don't want to do.

JOE PICKETT
Sounds pretty good.

Vern raises his pint and sips.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)
How's Sandy?

VERN DUNNEGAN
We split.

JOE PICKETT
I didn't know. Sorry to hear it.

VERN DUNNEGAN
Don't be. Turns out I could really only take her in small doses. I might only have a couple decades left. I'm not going to spend them talking about why I don't want to take *salsa* lessons.

Joe chuckles. Vern really is a charmer.

VERN DUNNEGAN (CONT'D)
I heard you had some action there at the house. Ote Keeley?

JOE PICKETT
You heard about that already?

VERN DUNNEGAN
Saddlestring's a small town.
Everybody's heard of that already.
Good riddance to bad rubbish I say.

Vern raises a glass to toast Ote's demise. Again realizes Joe doesn't have a drink.

VERN DUNNEGAN (CONT'D)
Now I'm insisting you have a drink with me.

He waves to the bartender.

JOE PICKETT
I'll grab a sparkling water I guess.

Vern waves the bartender away before he gets to them.

VERN DUNNEGAN
Jesus Joe, you can't order a *sparkling water* in here. They'll eat you alive.

Joe shrugs with a wry smile.

JOE PICKETT
I like the bubbles. So kill me.

VERN DUNNEGAN

You know what else everyone heard about already? That Ote took your gun away from you. That true?

Joe takes a breath. He doesn't like having to explain himself to his mentor.

JOE PICKETT

It happened real fast. I wasn't expecting it.

Vern gets stern.

VERN DUNNEGAN

Everything bad happens fast. There's a reason Game Wardens get killed more often than any other officer of the law. Poachers are often drunk. Always armed. And there's something that happens to a man when he's out in the middle of nowhere. He starts thinking wild. Thousands of years of domestication goes right out the window. He becomes a goddamned caveman with a gun.

JOE PICKETT

You're right.

VERN DUNNEGAN

Damn right I'm right. I just don't want you to wind up a sad story I tell my friends.

JOE PICKETT

I appreciate it, Vern.

VERN DUNNEGAN

And Joe, be careful how much you tell Sheriff Barnum. He's not your friend. Don't forget that.

Off Joe, unpacking the meaning of this warning.

EXT. PRONGHORN BLVD. - DAY

Joe walks along a side street comparing the address on his custom arrowhead flyer to the buildings he passes. 1136. 1140. 1142.

Joe looks to find the FIRST ALPINE CHURCH OF SADDLESTRING. He double-checks the address on the flyer. Yup. That's what it says. Joe enters.

INT. FIRST ALPINE CHURCH OF SADDLESTRING - DAY

Joe enters to find the "unconventional" REVEREND BJ COBB (40s, fringe element with a pulpit). Reverend Cobb welds a couple pieces of metal together at the front of the church.

Joe approaches him.

JOE PICKETT

Excuse me.

The Reverend stops, pulls up his welding mask.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)

Is the reverend around?

REVEREND BJ COBB

I'm the reverend. Here, hold that steady.

Joe complies, puzzled. Cobb puts his mask down, welds. Stops. Looks at it.

JOE PICKETT

What is it?

REVEREND BJ COBB

I'm making a stained glass window.

Joe tries to make out the design. Kind of looks like a football player. Reverend Cobb looks at him.

REVEREND BJ COBB (CONT'D)

Franco Harris.

Joe looks at him blankly.

REVEREND BJ COBB (CONT'D)

("duh")

Pittsburgh Steelers? The Immaculate Reception?

Rev. Cobb regards his creation.

REVEREND BJ COBB (CONT'D)

This was the moment I realized that God is real. Through this miracle, I understood there is justice on this Earth. Goodness prevails.

(MORE)

REVEREND BJ COBB (CONT'D)
 Though you might not think so if
 you come from Cincinnati.

Joe doesn't quite know what to make of this guy. So he gets
 to the point.

JOE PICKETT
 Do you know why I'm here?

Cobb looks him over.

REVEREND BJ COBB
 From the way you're dressed, I'd
 guess your soul feels dirty helping
 the oppressors keep good men down
 in the dirt.

Joe is taken aback. Not the response he expected.

JOE PICKETT
 Um. Not exactly.

Joe takes the printed page with the mailing order for the
 arrow.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)
 Do you sell these broadheads?

REVEREND BJ COBB
 Nope.

JOE PICKETT
 The order form says to mail the
 money here.

Cobb looks it over.

REVEREND BJ COBB
 So it does.

Cobb goes back to working on his stained glass piece.

JOE PICKETT
 Do you know who sells them?

REVEREND BJ COBB
 It would figure that I do, now
 wouldn't it?

Joe is losing his patience for the games.

JOE PICKETT
 Yes. It would. But I take it from
 your tone, you're not interested in
 helping me?

REVEREND BJ COBB

Hah. No, you guys got your boots on their throats just fine without me.

JOE PICKETT

Reverend, I'm a Game Warden. Not really the jackboot thug you're making me out to be.

REVEREND BJ COBB

Yeah. Tell that to Ote Keeley.

Reverend Cobb stares Joe down. Joe doesn't look away.

REVEREND BJ COBB (CONT'D)

Now, unless you're looking to relieve your soul, I've got a window to finish.

Cobb goes back to welding. Something occurs to Joe. He points to the stained glass window.

JOE PICKETT

Franco Harris...

Cobb stops and looks back at him.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)

He was number 32, not 23.

Cobb looks at his window and realizes he flopped the numbers.

REVEREND BJ COBB

Oh, goddamn it!

Cobb throws his welder down in anger as Joe walks away with a twinkle in his eye. That felt pretty good.

INT. JOE'S TRUCK - DAY

Joe gets back into his truck. He takes a deep breath, frustrated with the way this day is going. He looks over at the printed flyer. Something catches his eye. He takes a closer look.

Insert shot: The photo of the broadhead arrow from the printed flyer. Behind the arrow, is a distinct mountain ridge referred to as "the Sleeping Indian" by the locals.

EXT. SLEEPING INDIAN MOUNTAIN RIDGE - DAY

The photo lowers out of frame, revealing the real-life Sleeping Indian ridge line in the distance.

Joe sits atop his horse, out past where the roads end, comparing the images. This is the place the photo was taken. Somewhere around here.

Joe pulls a monoscope out of his saddlebag and scans the horizon. He sees a small shanty built into the rocks in the distance. *Is someone living out here?*

Joe approaches.

EXT. NATE ROMANOWSKI'S CABIN - DAY

As Joe nears the cabin, he dismounts from his horse and grabs his rifle. He hears a "thud" sound from behind it. Then a pause, then another "thud." Joe circles the cabin wide to find Nate Romanowski, shirtless, chopping wood. Nate turns to face Joe.

JOE PICKETT
Please drop the axe.

Nate just stares at him. As Joe looks back, he can feel that this man is dangerous. Joe grips his rifle tighter.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
I should warn you not to point that
in my direction.

Joe keeps his rifle pointed at the ground but ready. Nate looks Joe's rifle over.

NATE ROMANOWSKI (CONT'D)
(genuinely surprised)
Did you bring a *rabbit shooter* up
here?

Joe pulls the flyer out without taking his eyes off Nate.

JOE PICKETT
You the one making these custom
broadheads?

Nate takes a step closer.

JOE PICKETT (CONT'D)
Don't come any closer.

Nate takes another step, threatening.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
I'm not wearing my glasses.

Nate takes another step.

JOE PICKETT
Then drop the axe.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
This is my property. You drop *your*
weapon.

JOE PICKETT
This is not your property. This is
public land.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
And I'm the public.

Nate takes another step toward Joe. Joe cocks his gun.

JOE PICKETT
You take one more step and I will
consider it an act of aggression.

Nate looks around. He seems confused to see nobody else.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
The broadheads I make are legal.

JOE PICKETT
Not when you outfit them with
poison pods.

Nate looks confused.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
Poison pods? Do I look like the
kind of asshole that would use
poison pods?

Joe thinks it over.

JOE PICKETT
I guess I haven't made up my mind
what kind of asshole you are yet.

Nate smirks.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
Then I'll tell you. I'm the kind of
asshole, that if I saw some other
asshole using a poison pod, I'd
give 'em two in the chest with
this:

And with that, Nate pulls THE BIGGEST HANDGUN YOU'VE EVER
SEEN out of the back of his waistband, and holds it at his
side.

JOE PICKETT
Drop the weapon! Drop the weapon!

NATE ROMANOWSKI
I'm just sayin...

Nate drops the handgun into the grass.

Suddenly, a low, throbbing sound rises from the distance. Both of them look for the source. A helicopter crests over the ridge line and approaches as two police SUVs race into view.

Sheriff Barnum and Deputy McLanahan and four other officers in bulletproof vests and AR-15s rush the scene.

SHERIFF BARNUM
Nate Romanowski, put your arms in
the air!

Nate casually raises his arms away from his body. Joe looks around, surprised by the cavalry.

SHERIFF BARNUM (CONT'D)
Pickett?! What the hell are you
doing here?

A deputy walks forward and pats Nate down as McLanahan keeps his gun trained on Nate.

JOE PICKETT
Following up on the arrow
broadheads. What about you?

SHERIFF BARNUM
Got a tip that he and Ote had a
beef about some *birds*.

One of the other deputies steps out of Nate's cabin holding a compound bow up high for all to see.

DEPUTY 2
Hey Sheriff, compound bow.

SHERIFF BARNUM
I love it when they make it easy.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
I gotta admit, I'm a little
insulted they sent the local yokels
to take me.

McLanahan rushes Nate and HITS HIM IN THE MOUTH WITH THE BUTT OF HIS GUN. Nate drops onto his back. Deputy McLanahan kicks him. Kicks him again. Sheriff Barnum doesn't seem to mind.

JOE PICKETT

Stop it!

McLanahan ignores Joe, kicks Nate again. Joe grabs McLanahan and throws him off. McLanahan gets in Joe's face.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN

This isn't Game Warden business
Pickett. This doesn't concern you.

Joe pushes back.

JOE PICKETT

If you're gonna beat him like an
animal, then maybe it is Game
Warden business.

McLanahan looks at Joe, irritated. Nate looks up at Joe as blood pours out of his mouth. Sheriff Barnum kneels on Nate's back, yanks his arms into cuffs.

SHERIFF BARNUM

Nate Romanowski, you are under
arrest for the murder of Ote
Keeley.

NATE ROMANOWSKI

Wait, what?

SHERIFF BARNUM

You have the right to remain
silent. Anything....

Joe watches on, the excessive force and Nate's reaction not sitting right.

EXT. PICKETT HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Joe pulls up to the house. He opens the front door to let Maxine outside. Maxine jumps all around, excited to see him.

JOE PICKETT

It's nice to see you too.

Joe walks around the side of the house, stares at the blood on the walkway and wood pile. He grabs the bloodiest logs.

INT. PICKETT HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Joe throws the bloody logs into the empty fire place.

EXT. PICKETT HOUSE - WOODPILE - AFTERNOON

Joe uses Comet and Brillo pads to scrub the blood off the stones of the walkway. Not coming off too easily. He dumps some water on it. Keeps going.

INT. POLICE STATION - NATE ROMANOWSKI'S CELL - AFTERNOON

Nate Romanowski, wearing a sky-blue county jumpsuit, lays back on his cot with his hand in his mouth, trying to force his teeth back into their sockets. Deputy McLanahan appears at the cell door.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
Get your fist out of your mouth!
I'm not gonna let you kill yourself
under my watch!

Nate says something back, but it's impossible to understand because of the hand in his mouth.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN (CONT'D)
What was that? Prisoner, get your
fist out of your mouth! NOW!

Again, Nate says something without taking his fist out.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN (CONT'D)
I can't understand you! I'm warning
you now. Get your fist out of your
mouth.

Nate finally does.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
I said, "fuck you, hillbilly."

Then Nate puts his fist back in his mouth.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
Fuck me? Fuck me?

McLanahan loses his cool.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN (CONT'D)
I'll show you who's fucked here.
Sure ain't me.

McLanahan unclips his taser and unlocks Nate's cell. Nate just lies back in his cot, casual. As soon as the cell door is open a crack, McLanahan fires his taser through it, hitting Nate in the throat with the metal projectiles. But something unexpected happens.

As Nate is shot full of electricity, instead of being incapacitated, he rises through the convulsions to his feet, and rips the wires out of his own neck.

Before McLanahan can react, Nate slams him in the face. Does it again, knocking McLanahan out cold.

INT. POLICE STATION - AFTERNOON

Nate drags McLanahan back out to McLanahan's desk. Cricket, the dispatcher, sees him, and raises her hands in terror. Nate smirks at her.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
Might want to get this jackalope
some aspirin or something.

Nate then steps back to his cell and closes himself inside. Cricket lowers her hands. *What the hell was that?*

EXT. CHEAP MOTEL POOL - DAY

Sheridan and Lucy play around in the pool as Marybeth and Missy watch on and talk.

Sheridan and Lucy swim to the edge.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
I win!

LUCY PICKETT
It wasn't a race.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
I said "race you."

LUCY PICKETT
But I didn't agree.

Sheridan sees her mom and Missy are too far to hear them.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
Wanna know a secret?

LUCY PICKETT
Okay.

SHERIDAN PICKETT
I think maybe I can do real magic.

LUCY PICKETT
Really?

SHERIDAN PICKETT

I've been wishing for a new pet.
And then today I saw one. At home.

LUCY PICKETT

Is it a cat?

SHERIDAN PICKETT

No. I don't know what it is. I
think maybe it's a magic pet. Only
for kids to see. And if you tell
mom, I won't tell you where she
hides.

LUCY PICKETT

I won't.

SHERIDAN PICKETT

Race you to the other wall!

Sheridan pushes off and swims. Lucy follows.

LUCY PICKETT

Not a race!

Marybeth and Missy watch on from deck chairs.

MISSY

They're okay in there without you?

MARYBETH PICKETT

Joe taught them to swim early. His
parents weren't too good at
teaching him things like that so it
was important to him to do better.

They watch the girls play for a moment.

MISSY

I feel like I should apologize to
you.

Marybeth looks at her. *What for?*

MISSY (CONT'D)

I'm afraid I wasn't a very good
mother to you and your sister and
brother.

MARYBETH PICKETT

You were fine. We all turned out
okay.

MISSY

Sort of.

That hangs in the air as Marybeth starts to stew.

MARYBETH PICKETT

"Sort of?"

MISSY

I just mean, your brother, let's face it, never reached his potential. Your sister is basically still a child.

(sighs)

I had such high hopes for you.

MARYBETH PICKETT

I like my life mom. This is a good life for me.

MISSY

Is it, though?

Marybeth is getting real pissed now.

MARYBETH PICKETT

Just because your life is in the crapper, doesn't mean we all have to be miserable.

MISSY

But Marybeth, you have a law degree. You were one of the tops of your class. You're too special to be some *park ranger's* house wife.

MARYBETH PICKETT

He's not a park...

MISSY

Or, whatever.

MARYBETH PICKETT

I did the law firm thing, remember? Oh no, you won't remember that, because that was part of your "lost year."

Missy looks away, stung by the reference. Marybeth relents. She puts the focus back on herself as she explains.

MARYBETH PICKETT (CONT'D)

I spent 80 hours a week in a 10x10 office with a view of a *parking lot*. When I did see Joe and the girls, I was so tired and anxious, I had nothing left for them. I didn't like myself in that life.

(MORE)

MARYBETH PICKETT (CONT'D)

And now? Yesterday, I picked tea from my own garden and drank it as moose played in my yard. This is where I belong. Regardless of what you wanted for me.

Missy snaps back.

MISSY

All I'm saying is look at me. Look at my life. I am you in twenty years. Drink it up. I relied on men all my life and look where it got me. I raised you to rely on yourself. Not some *man*. And what did you do? You went and became a housewife.

MARYBETH PICKETT

But Joe is not like dad.

MISSY

They're all like your dad. Some just hide it better.

Marybeth shakes her head, done talking with her impossible mother. They'll just have to agree to disagree.

INT. PICKETT HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Joe watches the fire burn the bloody logs. He considers the last couple days. How out of control everything feels to him. The phone rings. He picks it up.

JOE PICKETT

Hello.

NATE ROMANOWSKI (O.C.)

This Pickett?

It takes Joe a moment to place the voice.

JOE PICKETT

Yeah. Who is this?

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERCUT - EVENING

Nate calls from his cell.

NATE ROMANOWSKI

This is Nate Romanowski. I've got one phone call and I'm calling you, buddy. Can you meet with me?

Joe is surprised to hear Nate's sarcastic drawl.

JOE PICKETT
Why aren't you calling a lawyer?

NATE ROMANOWSKI
(annoyed)
Because I'm calling you. Because I
thought about it for five hours and
now I'm calling you, mister.

JOE PICKETT
That's ridiculous.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
It sure is.

Joe can tell Nate is referring to the case against him.

NATE ROMANOWSKI (CONT'D)
I'll be waiting for you. I'll clear
my schedule.

JOE PICKETT
Clear your--

Nate hangs up. Joe stares at his floor, unsuccessfully trying to piece together why Nate would be calling him.

EXT. COUNTY BUILDING - NIGHT

Joe parks in the visitors' section and walks toward the institutional blond-brick building that houses the sheriff's office, the jail, and all other county offices.

The inscription over the front doors reads: "Twelve Sleep County - Where the Pavement Ends and the West Begins."

INT. COUNTY BUILDING - ENTRYWAY

A semi-retired deputy wearing a name tag that reads "STOVEPIPE" mans the metal detector and security desk.

Joe unbuckles his gun belt and slides it across the counter. Joe pats his pockets for metal items.

STOVEPIPE
Don't worry about it.

Stovepipe leans forward conspiratorially.

STOVEPIPE (CONT'D)
The machine hasn't worked since
July.

EXT. COUNTY BUILDING - 2ND FLOOR - NIGHT

Joe pushes through frosted-glass doors with stenciled text reading "Sheriff's Office." Deputy McLanahan is there as is Cricket from dispatch. Joe notes McLanahan's black eye.

JOE PICKETT
What happened to you?

CRICKET
Nate Romanowski happened to him.

McLanahan glares at Cricket.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
What are you, my goddamn
mouthpiece?

Cricket looks away, obviously hiding a smile.

JOE PICKETT
Has he admitted to killing Ote?

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
He denies everything. He won't even
talk to his lawyer.

JOE PICKETT
Maybe you should hit him again with
your rifle butt.

McLanahan tries to grimace, but it clearly hurts his face.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
Why exactly did he call you?

JOE PICKETT
I have no idea.

McLanahan shrugs.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
I guess it's his funeral. If
Romanowski wants to talk to a *game*
warden instead of a lawyer, I guess
it's his right. Just.. Something
doesn't seem right to me.

JOE PICKETT
Me either.

McLanahan stands up, jangles his ring of cell keys, and throws Joe a "follow me" nod.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
You left your gun and everything
with Stovepipe, right?

JOE PICKETT
Yup.

DEPUTY MCLANAHAN
Watch that son-of-a-bitch. I'll be
right outside, but a guy like him
can do a lot of damage to a guy
like you in a couple minutes.

Joe glances at McLanahan's stitches.

JOE PICKETT
So I see.

McLanahan scowls at Joe.

INT. NATE ROMANOWSKI'S CELL

Nate Romanowski looks surprisingly handsome as he lays back on his cot with his hand in his mouth.

As Deputy McLanahan unlocks the door and lets Joe in, Nate sits up and fixes his sharp eyes on Joe. The door closes loudly behind him.

Nate withdraws his fingers from his mouth. He works his mouth gently with his tongue, probing his teeth and trying to reattach the loose ones to sockets they had come from.

JOE PICKETT
(impressed)
Think that's going to work?

NATE ROMANOWSKI
They're loose - but they should
firm up as long as I don't use 'em.

JOE PICKETT
You mean, like for eating?

Nate grins.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
Been meaning to lose a few pounds.

Nate seems oddly comfortable with his surroundings, given he's in jail and charged with murder.

JOE PICKETT

I don't suppose you called me here to listen to your confession.

NATE ROMANOWSKI

I didn't kill Ote Keeley. Not that I wouldn't be tempted if given the chance. Last spring, he killed one of my falcons. If you ask me, he got what he deserved. But I'm innocent on this one.

JOE PICKETT

Why aren't you telling your lawyer this?

Nate fixes his gaze on Joe.

NATE ROMANOWSKI

My public defender is a twenty-six-year-old named *Jayden*. He asked me if I listen to hip-hop.

Joe can't help but find Nate a little bit funny.

JOE PICKETT

Then maybe you ought to call a real private-practice criminal lawyer.

Nate shifts slightly to look at Joe from a different angle.

NATE ROMANOWSKI

But I didn't. I called you.

JOE PICKETT

Why?

NATE ROMANOWSKI

Because you brought a *rabbit shooter* to apprehend me. Everyone else had AR-15s and bulletproof vests. But not you. Why is that?

Joe isn't sure where Nate is going with this.

JOE PICKETT

I'm comfortable with it. I've had that rifle since I was a kid. And I didn't know... your reputation.

Nate grins at him.

NATE ROMANOWSKI

I don't buy it. You know what I think?

JOE PICKETT
I'm all ears.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
I think you *like* people to underestimate you.

Joe scoffs.

JOE PICKETT
And why would I like that?

NATE ROMANOWSKI
I'd guess for the same reason I like it. Tell me Pickett, were you raised by a dangerous man?

Joe looks away. He doesn't like talk about this. Nate fixes his eyes on Joe as he talks.

NATE ROMANOWSKI (CONT'D)
Because I was. And you know what? I learned early on, best way to be effective, and keep the people around me safe, was to make my old man think I was an idiot. Safe on the outside. Dangerous in here.

He taps his chest.

NATE ROMANOWSKI (CONT'D)
They might not recognize you, but I do.

Joe sits back, processing this.

NATE ROMANOWSKI (CONT'D)
I got nowhere else to turn. Like it or not, you're the only thing between me and a needle.

JOE PICKETT
You can't put that on me.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
I got nowhere else to put it. Can I trust you?

JOE PICKETT
Depends on how you mean that. This here does not constitute attorney-client privilege if that's what you're asking. You should choose what you tell me accordingly.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
 Can I trust you to look for the
 truth? Wherever it leads?

This isn't at all what Joe would think Nate would ask.

JOE PICKETT
 Yes. You can trust me to look for
 the truth.

NATE ROMANOWSKI
 Then there's something I should
 tell you.

EXT. SHERIFF BARNUM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Joe pulls up to a nice suburban house. He walks to the front door and knocks. Sheriff Barnum answers the door.

SHERIFF BARNUM
 Pickett? What the hell do you want
 at this hour?

JOE PICKETT
 Romanowski told me he saw Ote
 Keeley with two other men headed up
 toward Crazy Woman Creek. He said
 they were armed to the teeth.
 Looked like they were up to some
 bad business.

SHERIFF BARNUM
 Yeah?

JOE PICKETT
 And he said he told you that too.

Barnum studies Joe, irritated by the insinuation.

SHERIFF BARNUM
 Are you suggesting I ride a horse
 two days up the mountain based on
 the word of some survivalist
 asshole?

JOE PICKETT
 I just think, if there's a chance
 we got the wrong guy, shouldn't we
 make sure?

SHERIFF BARNUM
 We? No. I keep this town safe, and
 I do a damn good job of it.

(MORE)

SHERIFF BARNUM (CONT'D)
What happens all the way up at
Crazy Woman Creek? *Nature* tends to
sort out those problems.

Joe grits his teeth, not backing down.

JOE PICKETT
Then maybe it is a Game Warden
matter. A known poacher on state
land with two armed men?

Barnum snaps.

SHERIFF BARNUM
You wanna do my job?

JOE PICKETT
No, I don't. But... *somebody's* got
to do your job.

Barnum loses his cool.

SHERIFF BARNUM
He did it. Just look at the guy for
chrissakes!

JOE PICKETT
But what if the killer is still out
there? Ote Keeley died on my
woodpile. I'd really like to know
who to thank for that.

SHERIFF BARNUM
We have our guy. Leave it alone.

Joe really wants to but...

JOE PICKETT
Then I'll head up there myself in
the morning.

SHERIFF BARNUM
You're a real pain in the ass, you
know that, Pickett?

JOE PICKETT
My mother-in-law sure seems to
think so.

SHERIFF BARNUM
You go up there, you're on your
own. I'm not sending any backup.

JOE PICKETT
Kinda figured.

SHERIFF BARNUM
If there is anyone up there,
they're going to have you
outgunned.

JOE PICKETT
Yeah, maybe.

Barnum locks his eyes on Joe with a scowl.

SHERIFF BARNUM
And Pickett, if this thing goes
sideways, I'll personally make sure
it's your last fuck-up in
Saddlestring.

Barnum shakes his head and spits on the ground.

SHERIFF BARNUM (CONT'D)
Goddammit. I hate it when things
turn cowboy.

Barnum slams the door, leaving Joe standing on the porch
alone. The porch light flips off, stranding Joe in the dark.

Joe sighs.

CUT TO BLACK: