

Chapter 17

In Chapter 17, Jack Sawyer visits George Potter, a terminally ill cancer patient held in a jail cell under suspicion of murdering a child. The setting is grim, with the holding cell reeking of disinfectant and urine. Potter, a former carpenter turned contractor, is resigned to his fate, acknowledging his limited time left due to advanced cancer. Jack, hyperaware and intuitive, quickly assesses Potter's condition and demeanor, recognizing the man's frailty and despair. Their conversation begins with Potter's resigned acceptance of his circumstances, hinting at his weariness with life and the inevitability of his death.

Jack probes Potter about his past, learning he once had wealth and success but lost everything. Potter reveals he chose French Landing for its peacefulness, believing it to be a place where he could find decency in his final days. The town's proximity to the river and its serene atmosphere offered him solace. Jack connects with Potter by sharing his own mother's battle with cancer, establishing a rapport. Their dialogue shifts from personal history to the immediate crisis: Potter's wrongful accusation in the murder case, which he vehemently denies.

Jack explains how Potter was framed, detailing how a nosy neighbor, Railsback, was manipulated into leading authorities to Potter's room, where incriminating Polaroids of dead children were planted. Potter, though initially angry at Railsback, grasps the larger conspiracy. Jack suggests the real killer targeted Potter deliberately, possibly due to a past grudge. Potter struggles to recall anyone who might hold such a vendetta, though he mentions building homes in Libertyville decades earlier and a vague memory of a shady acquaintance from Chicago.

The chapter ends with Jack sensing a breakthrough in the case, his intuition lighting up as Potter mentions the term "moke"—a slang reference to a dubious character. Though Potter dismisses its relevance, Jack suspects this clue might be pivotal. The

interaction underscores Jack's skill in eliciting information and his determination to uncover the truth, even as time runs short and external pressures mount. The chapter blends tension with introspection, revealing both characters' depths while advancing the mystery.

