

Chapter 14

The chapter opens with Fred Marshall and Jack Sawyer stopping at a scenic overlook near Arden, where Fred reflects on how his wife, Judy, often pauses here to appreciate the view. The tranquil landscape contrasts with the tension between the two men, as Fred struggles to articulate his concerns about Judy's mental state. Jack remains reserved, carrying his father's briefcase—a detail Fred notices but doesn't question. The peaceful setting becomes a backdrop for Fred's emotional turmoil, as he hints at Judy's unusual behavior and his own conflicted feelings about her recent calmness despite their son Tyler's disappearance.

Fred reveals that Judy's demeanor has shifted dramatically; though still distressed, she seems oddly composed and fixated on a seemingly trivial news story about a rare word, "opopanax." Jack's reaction to the word suggests a deeper significance, hinting at hidden connections. Fred confesses his fear that Judy's newfound serenity might be a sign of further mental decline, yet he clings to the hope that her intuition about Tyler's whereabouts holds truth. His vulnerability is palpable as he grapples with the possibility that Judy's insights, however irrational, could be valid.

The conversation takes a darker turn as Fred shares Judy's belief that Tyler is alive and that Jack alone can find him. Judy's references to cryptic figures like the "Crimson King" and "Abbalah" unsettle Jack, evoking memories of a surreal alternate world he once encountered. Fred's desperation is clear—he oscillates between dismissing Judy's words as delusional and clinging to them as a lifeline. Jack, though cautious, recognizes the urgency of speaking to Judy directly, sensing that her fragmented thoughts may hold clues to Tyler's fate.

The chapter closes with their arrival at French County Lutheran Hospital, a grim, Gothic structure that unnerves Jack with its oppressive atmosphere. The stark contrast between the earlier idyllic scenery and the hospital's foreboding appearance

underscores the chapter's tension. As they enter, the mundane lobby offers a brief respite, but the stage is set for a pivotal confrontation with Judy, whose mysterious perceptions may unravel the truth about Tyler—or plunge them all deeper into uncertainty.

