

Chapter 20

Jack Sawyer receives a frantic call from Fred Marshall, whose wife Judy has been disturbed by a disturbing tape sent by the Fisherman, the serial killer targeting children in French Landing. The tape features the Fisherman taunting Judy with Tyler's screams and a mocking, accented voice, pushing her into a state of distress. Jack, already en route to the hospital, lies to Fred about his reasons for going, aiming to investigate the tape himself. Fred reveals he inadvertently shared details with reporter Wendell Green, complicating the situation. Jack's priority is to secure the tape and analyze it for clues, hoping it might reveal the killer's identity or motives.

The chapter highlights Jack's reliance on his friend Henry Leyden, whose acute hearing could decipher nuances in the Fisherman's voice. Though Jack doubts the killer would be easily identifiable, he trusts Henry to detect subtle patterns or historical hints. Meanwhile, Henry is preoccupied with radio ads, humorously downplaying his role. Jack's urgency is palpable as he speeds to the hospital, reflecting his growing sense that events are accelerating and converging around Judy Marshall. The Fisherman's deliberate targeting of Judy and Jack suggests a deeper, more personal confrontation ahead.

Fred's emotional breakdown during the call underscores the toll the Fisherman's actions have taken on the Marshall family. The tape's contents—Tyler's cries and the killer's boastful threats—reveal a sadistic mind reveling in terror. Jack's calm demeanor contrasts with Fred's despair, emphasizing his role as a stabilizing force. The chapter also critiques institutional negligence, as hospital staff allowed Judy to hear the tape unchecked, exacerbating her trauma. Jack's determination to retrieve the tape and collaborate with Henry underscores his methodical approach to the investigation.

The chapter builds tension by intertwining personal and procedural stakes. Jack's lie to Fred hints at his protective instincts, while Wendell Green's involvement introduces media scrutiny as a complicating factor. Henry's lighthearted interlude provides brief respite, but the focus remains on the Fisherman's escalating brutality. The narrative suggests Judy's connection to the Territories and Jack's role in the unfolding mystery are pivotal, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of their intertwined fates in the chapters to come.

