

Chapter 7

The chapter opens with a vivid description of Henry Leyden's striking outfit, a blend of old-fashioned diplomatic finery and zoot suit flair, evoking the regal style of African-American entertainers like Duke Ellington or Cab Calloway. Rebecca Vilas, escorting Henry to the common room, vaguely recalls seeing similar attire in old films but remains curious about its origins. Henry, enigmatic as ever, offers no clear explanation, while Pete Wexler, pushing a cart of records, makes a crude remark about the suit's provenance. Henry's calm response and dignified demeanor disarm Pete, leaving Rebecca in awe of his coolness and poise.

The tension escalates when Henry questions Pete about rumors of a child's disappearance near the building. Pete reveals he witnessed a police officer collecting a child's bike and marking the sidewalk with chalk, though he avoided engaging with the officer. Rebecca is shocked Pete didn't report the incident, while Pete defends his silence, claiming he saw no reason to intervene. Henry's presence and measured questioning prompt Pete to share more details, including the officer's distressed expression and the arrival of additional cops. Rebecca, frustrated, processes the information, trying to downplay the severity of the situation.

Rebecca's reaction—raising her hands to her forehead—unintentionally gives Pete an opportunity to ogle her, highlighting his lecherous nature. Despite her irritation at Pete's behavior, she refocuses on the incident, rationalizing that the bike might have been stolen or borrowed, not necessarily linked to a kidnapping. Pete, meanwhile, remains fixated on Rebecca's appearance, revealing his crude and opportunistic mindset. The chapter underscores the contrast between Henry's composed authority and Pete's vulgarity, with Rebecca caught between them.

The chapter concludes with Rebecca attempting to maintain control of the situation, though Pete's lack of professionalism and Henry's cryptic nature complicate matters.

The unresolved mystery of the child's disappearance lingers, adding tension to the narrative. Henry's ability to command respect and Pete's boorishness serve as foils, while Rebecca's efforts to navigate the chaos highlight her role as a mediator. The scene sets the stage for further developments, leaving readers curious about the truth behind the sidewalk incident and Henry's enigmatic persona.

