

Chapter 7: Peter Steinman's Disappearance

On an unusually warm November evening, *Chapter 7* begins with Peter "Stinky" Steinman riding his skateboard toward Dairy Whip, his mind fixated on the thought of a juicy burger. The mist clings to the streets, casting a hazy glow beneath the flickering streetlights, muffling the usual city sounds. He barely notices the darkened silhouette of an old van parked near a shuttered gas station, his focus instead set on reaching his favorite hangout before his stomach forces him home.

The nickname "Stinky" had followed Peter for three years, ever since a misstep into dog feces on his way to school had cemented his unfortunate reputation. No amount of teasing or attempted rebranding could shake the moniker, though with time, he had learned to accept it with a mix of frustration and reluctant amusement. Now, at fifteen, he had bigger worries—like scraping together enough money for food or ensuring he made it home in time for WWE Smackdown without disturbing his mother, who was preoccupied with work and her efforts to stay sober.

Upon arriving at Dairy Whip, Peter finds his friends, Richie and Tommy, finishing off their drinks, preparing to leave. Tommy has dinner plans with his family, and Richie is expected to help his dad with something at home, leaving Peter alone with nothing but his grumbling stomach. He attempts to kill time by practicing a few skateboarding tricks in the parking lot, but after several failed attempts and bruised pride, he gives up, realizing his growing hunger is making it impossible to focus.

His pockets nearly empty, Peter debates whether to approach "Wicked Wanda," the infamous Dairy Whip cashier, and ask for credit. He quickly dismisses the idea—Wanda had never extended favors, and tonight would be no different. He steps away from the Dairy Whip, sighing as he kicks a loose pebble along the sidewalk, beginning the long walk home with nothing but the hope that he might find something edible in the kitchen.

As he trudges down the dimly lit street, Peter is startled by the voice of an older man calling out to him from the sidewalk. The man, slightly hunched and wearing a well-worn jacket, gestures toward a van parked nearby, explaining that his wife is stuck in her wheelchair with a dead battery. The old man offers Peter ten dollars for his trouble, but Peter, eager to prove his selflessness and channel his inner action hero, refuses payment, envisioning himself as a real-life John Wick or Jackie Chan—someone who helps because it's the right thing to do, not for a reward.

With a sense of chivalry swelling in his chest, Peter nods and follows the man toward the parked van, confident that this would be a quick favor before heading home. However, as he steps closer, a strange unease prickles at the back of his neck, the dim glow of a single streetlamp casting an eerie shadow over the vehicle. Something about the van feels off—it's too still, too conveniently placed, but Peter shakes the feeling off, reminding himself that paranoia is for kids, not someone like him.

Still, his instincts whisper a warning, causing him to hesitate just as they reach the vehicle. Sensing his reluctance, the man's tone softens, offering reassurance, but Peter seizes the opportunity to renegotiate—he'll take three dollars instead of ten, just enough for a burger, figuring that if he's going to be late getting home, he might as well not be hungry. The man chuckles and agrees, motioning for Peter to step closer, but by now, the sinking feeling in Peter's stomach is no longer just hunger.

For a moment, he contemplates turning back, retreating to the familiar safety of the Dairy Whip and its blinding fluorescent lights. But the thought of food and the desire to prove himself push him forward, sealing his fate in an instant. Before he can fully register what's happening, Peter "Stinky" Steinman unknowingly steps into the final moments of his ordinary life, oblivious to the fact that he will not be making it home to watch Smackdown—or anywhere at all.