

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of *The Chocolate War* introduces Archie Costello, who stands out as a manipulative and controlling figure within Trinity High School's underground organization, The Vigils. The narrative begins with Archie questioning a shy and anxious student, known as The Goober (real name Goubert), who is tall but lacks any real assertiveness. As Archie interrogates The Goober, it is clear that the student is intimidated by Archie's authoritative presence. The Goober's discomfort is palpable as he becomes ensnared in Archie's psychological game, a situation designed to highlight Archie's ability to control and torment those around him. His mastery over The Goober, in this drawn-out interaction, reveals Archie's cruel enjoyment of the power he holds, while also exposing his capacity to manipulate the emotions of others for his own satisfaction.

As "The Assigner" in The Vigils, Archie is tasked with assigning degrading and often cruel jobs to his peers. He takes great pleasure in creating assignments that make others uncomfortable, sometimes even breaking their spirit in the process. The Goober, caught in the trap of his latest task, is left anxiously waiting as Archie toys with his anticipation, slowly drawing out the moment before revealing what is to come. The scene in the dimly lit storage room is filled with a palpable sense of tension, as the other Vigils members watch closely, eager to see how the situation unfolds. This moment serves to reinforce Archie's ability to control the narrative and manipulate his peers into submission, as they hang on to his every word, unsure of what will happen next. The psychological manipulation Archie employs is not just a casual display of power; it's a reflection of his deep understanding of how fear, anxiety, and anticipation can be weaponized.

When the assignment is finally revealed, it's both bizarre and unsettling. Archie instructs The Goober to loosen all the screws in Brother Eugene's classroom, a task

that seems simple at first but carries a deeper, more sinister weight. The imagery of screws being loosened—of the classroom being dismantled bit by bit—symbolizes the way The Vigils methodically dismantle any sense of normalcy or safety for their members. The Goober is told that he will have the school to himself, forced to perform the task in a deserted, solitary environment. This loneliness and isolation make the task even more harrowing, as it becomes a metaphor for the way The Vigils isolate their victims emotionally, pushing them to the brink of discomfort and confusion. The tension builds steadily as The Goober is left alone to complete the task, knowing that his actions will determine how he's viewed by the group.

As the narrative unfolds, the tension in the story heightens not just around The Goober's task, but also around the fate of Archie's continued dominance within The Vigils. The black box, a central symbol of The Vigils' power structure, determines whether Archie will remain in control of the group or lose his position. The stakes of the game are made clear, with the marble drawn from the box representing a moment of fate and fortune. Archie's draw of the white marble signifies his unchallenged dominance and ensures that his leadership will remain intact. Despite his victory, the moment is not purely celebratory. As Archie looks at The Goober, whose emotional distress is clear, there is a brief flicker of empathy in Archie's gaze, a fleeting recognition of the pain he's caused. However, this moment is brief and quickly fades, highlighting the complex nature of Archie's character. While he is undeniably capable of manipulation and cruelty, this small, momentary glimpse into his humanity suggests a character that is more complicated than simple villainy. The brief appearance of empathy serves as a reminder that even the most ruthless individuals are shaped by internal conflicts, and that power and cruelty are often masking deeper, unresolved emotions.