

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 of *The Chocolate War* presents a tense and unsettling situation for Brian Cochran, as he grapples with the anxiety caused by the alarming decline in sales for the chocolate sale fundraiser. The previous day's drop was the sharpest yet, and Brian feels the weight of the responsibility on his shoulders. His dread is intensified by the knowledge that Brother Leon, the unpredictable and volatile teacher, will be the one to hear the dismal figures. Leon has already made Brian feel inadequate with his previous harsh criticism, and the task of presenting the sales totals seems like an insurmountable challenge.

Despite his anxiety, Brian feels a small, unexpected surge of triumph as he prepares to deliver the bad news to Leon. This moment offers Brian a sense of control, knowing that he is the one in charge of revealing the troubling numbers. When Leon arrives to hear the report, his presence is oppressive and intimidating. Brian informs him that the sales figures have not only fallen short of expectations but have also dropped below the totals from the previous year, which creates a serious problem for their current fundraising quota. Leon's reaction is immediate and sharp, questioning Brian's mathematical skills in a way that feels more like an attack than a mere inquiry. This only fuels Brian's frustration, though he tries to remain calm, suppressing any urge to respond in kind.

The tension in the room escalates as Leon insists that Brian continue reading the sales figures, forcing him to go through the list of students who have met or exceeded their quotas. At first, Brian gains a sense of control over the pacing of the report, but as he moves down the list, the numbers begin to decline, and his discomfort grows. Each drop in the numbers feels like a heavier weight, especially when Brian is forced to announce that one student, Renault, has sold nothing at all. This moment of failure sets the stage for Leon's manipulative response. Leon seizes on the opportunity to

claim that the overall decline in sales is due to what he describes as a "disease" of apathy afflicting the students. In his eyes, Renault is the "carrier" of this malaise, and he uses him as a scapegoat for the poor sales figures. This accusation intensifies the power dynamics at play, showcasing Leon's manipulative behavior and his tendency to shift blame onto others to protect his own position.

As Brian listens to Leon's ominous declaration, he begins to realize that the teacher's fixation on Renault is not just about the sales figures but part of a larger strategy to maintain control and manipulate the students. This moment of scapegoating highlights the chilling nature of the power structure at their school, where a teacher's anger and frustration are directed not at the system itself but at an individual student. Renault, who has already been marginalized, becomes the focal point of Leon's frustrations, and this marks a significant turning point in the narrative. The atmosphere becomes even more oppressive as Leon uses Renault as a symbol of all that is wrong with the student body, fostering an environment where fear and manipulation thrive.

The chapter ultimately underscores the toxic dynamics that are at play in the school, with Brother Leon using his authority to shift blame and control the students. Brian's internal conflict intensifies as he witnesses this moment of manipulation, realizing that Leon's actions go beyond a simple reprimand—they are part of a broader pattern of control and coercion. The fixation on Renault and the way in which he is scapegoated for the sales decline serve as a metaphor for how power and authority are misused within the school environment. Brian, who has already felt the weight of Leon's influence, now finds himself caught in the midst of this power struggle, his growing unease a reflection of the broader tension and conflict that will continue to unfold throughout the story. The unsettling nature of the chapter highlights the pervasive theme of manipulation and control, setting the stage for further challenges for Brian and his classmates.