

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 of *The Chocolate War* portrays a significant moment of emotional turmoil for both Jerry and Goober. On a Wednesday, a day without football practice, the boys are heading to the bus stop, with Jerry filled with anticipation as he hopes to see Ellen Barrett, a girl he finds beautiful. Ellen has previously smiled at him, and this small gesture ignites Jerry's hopes of perhaps building a connection with her. However, his excitement quickly diminishes when Goober, unexpectedly and with a seriousness Jerry has never seen before, announces that he is quitting the football team. Jerry is taken aback, as he believed Goober, who had always enjoyed football, would never consider such a drastic decision. Goober's words carry weight, signaling that something deeper is at play, something far beyond their usual school troubles.

As they continue their walk to the bus stop, Goober struggles to explain his reasoning, his hesitation revealing the complexity of the emotions he's dealing with. He eventually begins to discuss the recent departure of Brother Eugene, a pivotal figure at their school, who has taken sick leave following the destruction of Room Nineteen. This event, which has deeply shaken both boys, is especially significant to Goober, who reflects on the cruelty and injustice he has witnessed at Trinity. It becomes clear that Goober has been profoundly affected by the harsh and toxic environment of the school, and he struggles to come to terms with how such acts of cruelty have become normalized in their everyday lives. His words paint a picture of a school system rife with fear, manipulation, and control, where kindness and decency seem to be in short supply.

Jerry, trying to understand the full scope of Goober's emotions, asks what Eugene's departure and his own decision to quit football have in common. Goober, however, is unable to fully express the depth of his feelings. He mentions the word "evil" and references the Vigils, a secretive group at their school whose actions have contributed

to the pervasive toxic atmosphere. These words, though vague, are laden with significance, pointing to the systematic cruelty and pressure exerted by the Vigils and the wider school culture. Jerry, struggling to grasp the gravity of the situation, tries to downplay the severity of Goober's words, but Goober insists that these experiences are not mere games or insignificant events—they are moments that have left deep emotional scars on both of them. The conversation underscores the complex psychological toll of the boys' experiences, highlighting the strain they are under and their increasing awareness of the corruption around them.

Their conversation grows even more somber as Goober asks Jerry to sell the chocolates, an act that symbolizes the broader pressures they both face within the walls of Trinity. Selling the chocolates, something that Jerry has resisted doing, becomes a metaphor for conformity, the expectations placed on them by the Vigils, and the school's broader culture of compliance. Jerry, in an attempt to offer some form of solace, suggests that Goober reconsider playing football, believing it might help Goober regain a sense of normalcy and connection to the world he once enjoyed. But Goober, resolute in his decision, rejects this suggestion, refusing to return to a sport and an environment that have become symbols of everything he despises about the school. His refusal to participate in school activities marks a desire to separate himself from the toxic, controlling nature of Trinity, a rejection of the oppressive forces that have shaped his experience there.

The two boys fall into a heavy silence, each grappling with their own sense of helplessness and the weight of their feelings. They share this quiet moment, which speaks to the emotional burden they both carry as they try to make sense of the world around them. Goober's request to Jerry and his steadfast refusal to rejoin football reflect the larger struggle they both face—how to assert their individuality in a system that seems designed to break them down. The silence between them is filled with unspoken understanding, an acknowledgment of the loss of innocence and the deep sense of betrayal they both feel. When they finally arrive at the bus stop, Jerry's hope of seeing Ellen is dashed when they find out that she is not there. This absence

reinforces the sense of isolation that both boys feel, underscoring their emotional distance from the world around them and from the people they long to connect with.

This chapter serves as a powerful exploration of Jerry and Goober's emotional states, as they both struggle with the realities of their school environment and their personal dilemmas. The events that transpire reflect a turning point in their journey—one that forces them to confront their beliefs, their fears, and their growing dissatisfaction with the oppressive forces at Trinity. The rejection of conformity, whether through Goober's decision to quit football or Jerry's refusal to sell the chocolates, represents an act of resistance against the school's toxic culture. Through these small acts of rebellion, the boys begin to carve out spaces for themselves, asserting their autonomy in a world that constantly seeks to diminish their voices. However, the absence of Ellen at the bus stop serves as a poignant reminder that even these moments of self-assertion come with a price, leaving Jerry and Goober to face the consequences of their actions and the ongoing challenges of navigating a world that doesn't always reward their courage.