

THE FOX OF FRANCE

Chapter 1: My Brother, Napoleon

A naturally timid engineering student found himself transported to France before the grand revolution, only to become the older brother of the future Emperor Napoleon for some inexplicable reason. Now, he faced a crucial decision: would he seize this opportunity to create his own remarkable destiny or merely cling to this lifeline and drift along?

In recent days, the city of Ajaccio has been shrouded in relentless rain, and it seems like even the sea has been drenched by this endless downpour. The rain, thick and sticky, pours down from the perpetually overcast skies, descending upon the bay. The sea resembles a gray, soft sponge, rising in the bewildering bay.

Despite the continuous rain, the water's surface seems unnaturally calm. There is a subtle, broad undulation in the sea, creating a misty haze that merges with the damp city walls and blends with the mist from the bay. In every direction, it feels like one is breathing water, and the air has become something you can almost taste.

In this misty ambiance, Joseph Bonaparte, the eldest of the Bonaparte family, tall and slender like a bamboo shoot, is walking along the sandy beach with an umbrella. He's heading towards the cliffs that extend into the sea. These cliffs, now colored the same gray-blue as the sea due to the unending rain, reach into the bay. During the dry Mediterranean summers, Joseph and his younger brothers and sisters often come here to fish among the rocks under

the cliffs or search for various seashells and oysters. At these times, their short-statured second youngest, Napoleon, would take a book and run to a natural cave in the middle of the cliffs to read.

"But now, with all this rain, that troublesome fellow, has he gone to that cave again?" Joseph mumbles to himself as he heads towards the cliffs.

That troublesome fellow is none other than his younger brother, Napoleon Bonaparte, who is destined to leave a significant mark on the pages of history. But at this moment, the future Emperor who will dominate Europe is just a headache-inducing child.

Among Joseph's seven brothers and sisters, Napoleon is the one who gives him the most trouble. Perhaps it's because he's always been short and subject to ridicule, his personality is somewhat peculiar. Even among his siblings, very few can get along with him. Despite his small stature, Napoleon has a penchant for violence. Whenever he's teased or gets into a conflict for any reason, he prefers to resolve it directly through physical force.

To be honest, Napoleon's physique is not suited for this kind of behavior. In theory, fighting relies on strength, and strength is closely tied to one's physique. Otherwise, why would boxing matches be categorized by weight class? Since Napoleon's size and strength don't match up, he's developed two tactics to compensate for his physical limitations.

The first tactic is using unconventional means to target vulnerabilities. For example, he might bite when someone's not expecting it or strike someone's vulnerable spots with his knee.

The second tactic is playing the victim first. This tactic is usually used against his own brothers. In families with many siblings, there are bound to be fights during childhood. Every time there's a fight, when their mother Letizia rushes in to stop it, the first to come forward and put on a convincing "I've been

terribly wronged" act is Napoleon. And since Napoleon rehearses in his mind how to play the victim and deceive his mother many times before initiating a fight, he's usually the one to strike first and get scolded by his mother.

As a result, Napoleon's siblings don't particularly like him, but they are somewhat afraid of him and hesitant to oppose his will. There is one exception, however, someone who not only isn't afraid of Napoleon's tactics but can often control him: Napoleon's older brother, Joseph. This is because, one day, Napoleon and Joseph had a conflict, and following their usual pattern, Napoleon initiated the physical confrontation. He kicked Joseph hard in the stomach when he least expected it, causing Joseph to fall over, hitting his head on a sharp stone. He lay unconscious, blood flowing, and Napoleon panicked, quickly calling for their mother...

Joseph remained unconscious for two whole days. When he finally woke up, he didn't recognize the family, and he couldn't even speak. Well, to be precise, he suddenly couldn't speak Corsican (a dialect of Italian), and when he tried, he spoke in a strange language that no one could understand. It sounded somewhat like English but was quite different. The family thought he was possessed, and if not for Joseph's father Carlo being of noble lineage (albeit a minor one), his fate might have been much bleaker. Carlo called upon Bishop Minio to perform an exorcism.

The exorcism had a noticeable effect. After the ritual, Joseph wasn't completely restored, but at least he stopped speaking that terrifying language, which seemed to come from hell.

"The devil has been cast out of him," Bishop Minio said. "But it's like a house that has been set on fire. Even though we've extinguished the fire, what's left might be just ruins. When the devil occupies a person's body, it can cause as much damage as a fire, or even worse. Although the devil has been expelled

now, rebuilding the house is a challenging task, and whether this damage can be fully repaired depends on God's will."

"Amen," Carlo, Letizia, and Joseph's siblings all said, crossing themselves.

After ensuring Joseph's complete recovery, Bishop Minio asked Charles to bring Joseph back home. They discovered that the familiar, gentle Joseph had returned, but now he was quieter, more introverted, and had developed a passion for reading. He even started teaching himself French.

Joseph's mother, Letizia, was overjoyed by her son's transformation. She believed that her son's recovery and newfound goodness were solely the result of God's grace. She donated for a mass to express her gratitude. Because of this, she wouldn't entertain any negative comments about Joseph. In her eyes, her son had received God's grace, so how could he possibly do anything wrong?

So, Napoleon's "accuse your brother first" tactic no longer worked on Joseph. If Napoleon attempted to shift blame or make accusations against Joseph, Letizia would grab his ear and make him confess his false accusations before the statue of the Virgin Mary.

Wise young Napoleon quickly realized this and had to show respect to his older brother Joseph. However, Joseph had changed in many ways that he didn't like. While Joseph was once easygoing, he had now become remarkably perceptive, often seeing through Napoleon's schemes. Yet, Joseph never exposed them and always refrained from falling into Napoleon's traps. Besides, Joseph had become well-read and knowledgeable, able to provide convincing answers to Napoleon's clever and quirky questions.

Of course, Joseph had acquired some unpleasant habits as well, the most irritating being his tendency to stroke Napoleon's hair while saying, "My foolish little brother, well, the thing is..."

Today, Napoleon has once again gotten himself into trouble. He beat up the neighbor's child, Paul, too severely, causing the boy to faint. (One of Napoleon's fighting strategies was to never hold back; once you started, you had to commit.)

Paul's father, Mr. Giovanni, is a friend of Carlo, and Paul is his only son. When he saw Paul unconscious, Napoleon immediately realized that his father might severely punish him for this, so he swiftly fled before anyone could react.

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