

THE FOX OF FRANCE

Chapter 10: Arrangements

The Bonaparte family was a very traditional Corsican family. This meant that in their household, women didn't meddle in affairs much. Letizia was a good wife and a good mother, always enduring even the toughest times silently. But she was also a very traditional Corsican woman, and when it came to making decisions, she remained silent.

So, after Carlo's death, almost all decisions in the family were left to Joseph. Whenever his younger siblings had questions for their mother, she would always say, "Go ask your brother and see what he says," just like she used to say, "Go ask your father" when Carlo was still alive.

Thus, Joseph suddenly became very busy. First, he arranged his father's funeral, and then he dealt with the inheritance and debts. Fortunately, his uncle helped with these matters, and the presence of Bishop Minio also made many people think twice before trying to take advantage of the family in the absence of adult males. So, these matters went quite smoothly.

On the third day after the funeral, most of the lingering issues were resolved. That evening, Joseph gathered his mother, uncle, and several younger siblings together.

"Mother, uncle, and my brothers and sisters, the funeral and related matters regarding Father are basically wrapped up," Joseph began. "After losing Father, our family's situation has changed significantly. Our previous way of life is certainly going to change as well. We must adapt to these changes and

prepare in advance. Now, I'll explain the possible changes our family might undergo."

Everyone listened attentively to Joseph's words.

"After Father's passing, his salary naturally ceased. You all know that our family owns very little land, and the yield is limited. Without Father's income from the governor's office, our family's income will be reduced to one-third of what it was before, relying solely on the meager produce from our remaining land. This means we'll barely make ends meet. Your allowances, and even your education funds, will be in jeopardy.

Napoleon, you're studying at the military school, and after graduation, you'll naturally join the army. Military school doesn't require much money. However, your allowance may have to be cut."

"That's not a problem," Napoleon replied.

"I've looked into your performance these past years," Joseph continued. "Your math, geography, and history are impressive. But I'm disappointed with your language skills."

"Math, geography, and history are all useful in warfare. Language..."
Napoleon hesitated.

"My dear brother, language is also a weapon in battle!" Joseph glanced at Napoleon and said, "Do you not know how Wellington defeated Soult? The ability to use language has always been indispensable for a great general."

Hearing Joseph use Emperor Wellington as an example, Napoleon stopped arguing.

However, Joseph was not ready to let Napoleon off the hook yet. He continued to address him, "For example, now our family is facing temporary

difficulties. To earn more money to support our younger siblings' education, someone must step up to fill Father's shoes.

You see, I'm graduating in a year, but we're currently in a tight spot. If I drop out of school now, I can find work, although the income will be much lower than what Father earned. If we can hold out for a year until I graduate and find a job, our income will roughly double, though it still won't match Father's. But this figure can barely sustain our family's living expenses.

Clearly, in the long run, dropping out of school is not the best choice for me or our family. However, we can't ignore the present situation either. So, I have come up with an alternative plan. I have a classmate named Armand, who is Mr. Lavasseur's nephew, as I mentioned in my letter to you, Napoleon. He has several translation scripts and poems he can pass on to me. This way, I can continue my studies while earning some income. Besides, my classmate Lucien can lend me some money. If we tighten our belts at home, we should manage to get by for a year.

Of course, Napoleon, if you improved your language skills a bit, perhaps you could join in and help out in some way, lightening my load. However, with your current performance, I can't entrust such tasks to you."

"I understand. I'll work on it," Napoleon replied, lowering his head.

Joseph then turned to his other younger siblings.

"Lucien, although you're still young, you need to know that you're also part of this family, and you need to study hard. Our family may carry a noble title, but we're not like those idle nobles in France who don't lift a finger. Men in our family must have skills. Lucien, do you know where the abilities of outstanding individuals come from? They come from learning, from overcoming difficulties. You're at an age where you should receive an education. I'll do my best to

ensure your education isn't affected by our financial difficulties, but you also have to work hard.

Louis, the same goes for you. When I graduate next year and find a good job, if possible, I'll take both you and Lucien to Paris for better education. In terms of the educational environment, Paris is much better than Corsica."

"Joseph, I'm graduating at the end of this year. Right now, I have an opportunity to be selected for the Paris Military Academy. After graduating from there, I can secure a higher position and better prospects. I don't know..." Napoleon began.

"My dear brother, what's there to hesitate about? Do you doubt your brother's ability to provide for the family with your meager intelligence?" Joseph interrupted.

"Napoleon, do your best to get into the Paris Military Academy, and leave the current matters to me," Joseph responded.

"Joseph, where am I foolish? I'm just..." Napoleon, rarely protesting against Joseph's label of "foolish," began to argue.

"Oh?" Joseph immediately retorted, "Napoleon, your mathematics is outstanding among all subjects. Do you want me to give you a problem to prove it to yourself?"

Napoleon was taken aback and, after a moment, reluctantly said, "Joseph, you're not a kind person."

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After spending a few days arranging family matters, Joseph set off for Paris once again. During these days, and even on the journey, he would seize any spare moment, even if it was just ten minutes, to translate the materials he

had on hand. The day after he returned to Paris, Joseph first reported back to school and then found Armand, handing over a manuscript to him.

"This is the translation of 'Themistocles in Athens.' Please take a look and let me know if any revisions are needed, and I'll make the changes," Joseph told Armand.

"Joseph, you completed this so quickly?" Armand was surprised. "For me, this would take more than half a year at least."

"You're slow because you're thorough. I'm fast but rough," Joseph explained.

"Joseph, I appreciate your kind words. However, I know the reason I'm slow isn't due to thoroughness but because I'm lazy. I'm like the idle kings of history who neglect their duties. As for you, you're a hardworking person. In fact, for literary translations, it's best to complete them in one go. This way, you can maintain the emotional and stylistic consistency. Well, I'll take a look when I have the time. As for your fee, I'll give it to you in a few days."

Armand had a habit of procrastination, and when he said he'd pay in a few days, Joseph prepared for a delay of at least two weeks. But to his surprise, after just three days, Armand handed over the commission for the translation—fifty francs in total.

"Joseph, the quality of the manuscript is excellent. If you can maintain this quality and speed, you could earn six hundred francs annually. With your scholarship and, by the way, how many younger brothers do you have?"

"Four, of which three are of an age to be educated. However, the eldest is in the military academy, so like me, he doesn't require funding," Joseph replied.

"Ah, in that case, only two of your brothers will need your financial support..." Armand calculated in his mind. "Oh my, this amount of money is simply not enough. Joseph, you'll have to give up beer, let alone foie gras. You can't even spread butter on your bread, and you'll have to eat one lamb chop per

month. That single chop should last you for three days, with the meat on the first day, the fat on the second, and the bone on the third. When you work, you can't smoke to stay awake, nor can you use black tea for a pick-me-up. You'll have to stick with the cheapest coffee, and the quantity will be limited... Oh, you can't afford to lose one brother, can you?"

Joseph replied, "In Corsica, there's a saying, 'Only when you have to deal with foxes do you realize there aren't enough hunting dogs. Only when you have to deal with enemies do you realize there aren't enough brothers.' So, we Corsicans never complain about having too many brothers or friends."

"That saying is quite interesting," Armand said. "However, it's a bit long. It could be condensed further. Maybe when you translated it from Corsican dialect to French, the flavor changed. I find that your translations, while precise, tend to be a bit verbose. If it were me, I would translate the saying like this: 'In Corsica, there's a saying, "Dogs are never enough when you need them."'"