

THE FOX OF FRANCE

Chapter 2: Journey to France

Just as Joseph had expected, he indeed found Napoleon in that cave. When he discovered Napoleon, the troublemaker was sitting on a rock, gazing out at the mist-covered sea.

"Hey, my foolish brother, what are you doing here?" Joseph called out.

"Nothing," Napoleon lazily stood up. "I was thinking I should leave a book in this cave for the future, so I'll have something to do when I come here. Anyway, Joseph, I think there shouldn't be any big trouble now, right? I can go home."

Napoleon's last statement was not a question but a statement.

"Basically," Joseph replied, "but how can you be so sure?"

"If things weren't settled, I wouldn't be able to return, and you should have brought some food instead of coming empty-handed," Napoleon answered. Then he asked, "Joseph, how did it end?"

"You barely ran for a few minutes, and Paul woke up," Joseph said. "Of course, Carlo was still angry, and he told Giovanni that when they catch you, they'll whip you hard. But after Giovanni left, Polina told him that you only hit Paul because he was pulling her hair. After Polina said that, it seemed like our father was not so angry with you anymore. He even said to me, 'Joseph, you're my eldest son. Why weren't you in the front lines when things happened? If only you could balance things like Napoleon.'"

As Joseph spoke, he imitated his father's tone, making Napoleon burst into laughter. He said, "So, I shouldn't have much trouble, right?"

"Basically, you're in the clear," Joseph said. "You might get scolded a bit, but this time, if it weren't for Polina, you'd be in serious trouble. My foolish brother, your methods have their merits, but there's always one issue – you struggle to control the situation, and it's easy to go overboard."

"I'd rather go overboard than be meek and get beaten up," Napoleon said nonchalantly.

"Alright, come with me now. Everyone's hungry, but Mom and Polina insist on waiting for you to have dinner," Joseph said. "When we get back, Dad will scold you a bit, you apologize, and then we can all eat. Hurry, I'm starving!"

The two of them returned home, and as Joseph had predicted, Carlo only scolded Napoleon briefly without using a whip. Carlo, who had made peace with Joseph earlier, made Napoleon reflect on his mistake and promise that he'd control his emotions better in the future. "As men of the family, we must protect the women, but we must also exercise restraint," Carlo said, quite satisfied. "Joseph, you seem to have been influenced by Bishop Minio in many ways. Bishop Minio is a good man, a holy man, but your mother and I don't want to see you become a priest."

"Alright, Carlo," Letizia frowned slightly. "Your speech should end now, and the children are hungry."

"Very well," Carlo smiled, bringing his hands together. Everyone followed suit, joining their hands together for the pre-meal prayer. "Lord, bless us and the food we are about to enjoy. Bless all your gifts, through Christ our Lord. Amen."

After the meal, Carlo led everyone in a post-dinner prayer, a common practice in most households during that time. Joseph couldn't help but think, "If I were God, I'd probably be driven crazy by all these people bothering me every day."

Entertainment was scarce in those times, and since it was winter, nights fell early. Typically, after dinner, Carlo would read a passage from the Bible or something else to pass the time before darkness enveloped the land, and everyone would wish each other good night.

However, this time, Carlo had something different in mind. He asked everyone to sit and said, "Let's sit here for a moment. I have something to discuss with you all."

Everyone continued to sit in their chairs, waiting to hear what Carlo had to say.

"Joseph, Napoleon, you're not getting any younger, and it's time for you to learn something. I have a friend, Monsieur Armand de Fouvas, who visited our home not too long ago. He's returning to France, and he can take you with him to study in France, learn French, and based on your performance in school, decide what you'll do next."

As soon as Joseph heard the name Armand de Fouvas, an image formed in his mind – a tall, freckled, red-faced man with a beer belly, probably about his height but twice as wide. Joseph suspected that if he lowered his head, he wouldn't be able to see his own toes.

Armand was a relative of the Governor of Corsica and worked in the Corsican Ministry of Justice. Just like many with "de" in their names, his job seemed to involve doing nothing and getting paid for it. He was always seen fishing around with a fishing rod. Carlo, who had been Deputy to the leader of the Corsican Resistance, Paul, should have had a hard time gaining the trust of the French authorities. However, due to his close relationship with Armand,

his "Italian noble" status was recognized, although Carlo knew that it meant nothing in France, especially in Paris.

Now, Armand was leaving Corsica, and Carlo had asked him to introduce a prestigious French school for Joseph and Napoleon. Carlo knew that Corsica didn't offer many opportunities, and France was the place where real prospects lay.

"Why learn French? French people..." Napoleon began but caught himself when he saw Carlo's gaze.

"Remember, the future of our family depends on you," Carlo said. "Napoleon, when you get to France, don't stir up trouble."

Napoleon remained silent, but his reluctant expression was obvious.

"Joseph, talk to Napoleon later. When you get to France, make sure he doesn't cause any trouble," Carlo added.

No one knew what Joseph said to Napoleon that night, but by morning, Napoleon displayed a different level of interest in going to France to learn the language.

"I want to go into the heart of the enemy, observe them up close, and understand them. This will help Corsica gain freedom," Napoleon confided in his sister Pauline.

Since Armand de Fouvas was leaving for France in a month, Carlo used this time to hire a private tutor named Valentin to teach his two sons French. He wanted them to have some grasp of the language before their departure. Valentin was a young man under twenty who had supposedly studied at the University of Paris but hadn't graduated. To make a living, he came to Corsica. He had fair skin, black hair, and blue eyes, and he always smiled when he spoke, making him quite likable.

Valentin had his own work, so he could only teach the Bonaparte brothers French after work hours. For Joseph and Napoleon, who already had a good grasp of Corsican dialect, Italian, and some French similarities, mastering basic French in just over a month wasn't particularly challenging.

Time flew by, and before they knew it, it was time to leave Corsica.

Early in the morning, after breakfast, Carlo led his family to Armand de Fouvas's residence to meet him. People in that era woke up early, and Armand's house was bustling with servants loading things onto a carriage.

Armand, on the other hand, stood alone to the side, showing no sign of attachment to the place he had called home for several years or any excitement about returning to his homeland. It was as if the situation had no relevance to him at all. Only when he saw Carlo's family did he smile and approach them, saying, "Hello, Carlo, and Joseph and Napoleon. You're up early."

"Good morning, Monsieur Fouvas," Joseph quickly responded in French. Napoleon remained silent.

"Ah, Joseph, your French pronunciation still has a bit of an Italian accent, but it's not too important. There are people with that accent in Toulon. Ah, Napoleon, you seem quite reserved. You should be more open, hahaha..."

Evidently, Armand mistook Napoleon's hostility toward the French for shyness. Little did he know that Napoleon's willingness to study in France was motivated by a desire to understand the enemy and eventually lead Corsica to independence. At least for now, Napoleon was a staunch Corsican nationalist.