

# THE FOX OF FRANCE

## Chapter 3: Toulon

Joseph and his younger brother, Napoleon, sailed for a day on a two-masted ship called the "Autumn Narcissus" in the calm waters of the Mediterranean. Early the next morning, they arrived at the port of Toulon in the south of France.

Toulon was France's largest naval port, home to its most crucial shipyards, and more than half of the navy's warships were stationed there. The commercial docks where ships docked were close to the naval port. Standing on the deck of the "Fleur de Lune," they could see the towering battleships lined up in the naval port, resembling castles floating on the sea. One after another, these formidable warships were anchored in the harbor.

Napoleon stood on the deck, his gaze fixed on these massive warships.

"They are truly impressive, aren't they?" Joseph placed his hand on his brother's shoulder and spoke in the Corsican dialect. "The pristine sails are like clouds in the sky, the towering hulls resemble floating castles, and the synchronized gunfire is like Zeus's thunder... Do you feel the pressure when you see these warships, my brother?"

"Indeed, compared to France, we are quite insignificant," Napoleon nodded.

"That's why we need a hero, someone who can overcome odds, conquer the powerful with the weak."

"Heh," Joseph chuckled.

"What does 'heh' mean?" Napoleon asked, dissatisfied.

"It means 'heh,' my foolish brother, just 'heh,'" Joseph replied.

By this time, the ship had safely docked. Passengers began disembarking. Mr. Fauve had not initially planned to stay in Toulon. According to his itinerary, he was supposed to immediately board a carriage and travel to Marseilles, about sixty kilometers away. However, he had suffered from severe seasickness on the way to Toulon, so he needed to rest in Toulon for a day until he felt better before continuing to Marseilles.

For Joseph and Napoleon, this meant they had a day to explore Toulon.

After temporarily settling into their inn, Napoleon encouraged Joseph to go out and explore. Joseph knew that Napoleon intended to use this opportunity to carefully observe the largest naval port in France and learn about their potential future enemies.

So, Joseph went to Mr. Fauve and expressed his desire to take his brother, Napoleon, out for a walk and practice their beginner's French.

Mr. Fauve was pleased with the eager young boy's request. However, he was concerned about the safety in the Toulon area. In recent years, France had been at a disadvantage in the struggle with England for overseas interests. This had put a strain on their economy, and in order to raise more funds for the conflict, King Louis XVI had increased taxes several times. The additional taxes were not exorbitant, but as is the nature of bureaucracies, officials often took advantage of every opportunity to enrich themselves, and the tax burden often fell heavily on the lower classes. This led to the bankruptcy of many farmers and artisans. In general, when a society has more bankrupt and destitute people, social unrest tends to increase. With France's economic troubles, the social order had also deteriorated.

Mr. Fauve thought for a moment and remembered that one of his servants was a local in Toulon. He called for a servant named Svan, who he asked to accompany the two brothers and ensure their safety.

Svan agreed and led the two brothers out of the inn.

"Where would you like to go?" Svan asked.

"We'd like to see the warships," Joseph said without hesitation.

Napoleon glanced at Joseph but remained silent.

"Ah, every boy who comes to Toulon for the first time loves to see the warships," Svan said with a smile.

"So, is there a way we can get a good look at the warships?" Napoleon asked.

"There is," Svan replied. "For a few sous, we can rent a small fishing boat and get close to the naval port. From there, you can see many warships, but we can't get too close."

"Then, it's a deal. Thank you," Joseph said to Svan.

As a local, Svan quickly arranged for a fishing boat. They boarded the boat, and the boatman rowed them toward the naval port.

At this time, it was around ten o'clock in the morning. The rare winter sunshine glistened on the fine waves of the bay. The boatman stopped the boat, cast the fishing bait into the sea, and pointed to the naval port not far away, introducing each ship anchored there one by one.

"You see that? That's the 'Boussole,' the largest one inside. It's a three-deck battleship with a hundred cannons. The one to the left is the cruiser 'Dreadnought.' It's much smaller, with only one gun deck..."

"This is the flagship 'Boussole' of the French and Spanish combined fleet in the later Battle of Trafalgar," Joseph thought as he listened to the boatman's explanations.

"What's that over there?" Napoleon pointed to a small hill that protruded into the bay on the right. Joseph looked in that direction and saw a fleur-de-lis flag flying on top of the hill, with some fortifications visible beneath it.

"That's Fort Marlagreave. It has defensive artillery for guarding the harbor. Would you like to go there? Sometimes you can catch good cod in the sea over there," the boatman replied.

"We'll go take a look," Napoleon said.

The boatman heard this and prepared to pull up the fishing line to head to Fort Marlagreave. However, at that moment, a bell attached to the fishing line suddenly rang loudly. The boatman quickly grabbed the fishing line. The line wasn't shaking much, and disappointment crossed his face. He pulled up the line, and there was only a small mackerel on the hook.

The boatman nonchalantly placed the mackerel in the basket, reeled in the fishing line, and rowed the boat towards Fort Marlagreave.

It took the boat a full hour to reach the area beneath Fort Marlagreave. However, the fortifications there were quite limited at this time, and there wasn't much to see. Plus, it was already past noon, and everyone was hungry. So, they didn't stay long and soon returned to their inn.

Once they disembarked and found a place to eat, Joseph took the opportunity to engage in conversations with passersby, using his rudimentary French. They discussed mundane, everyday topics, commiserating about the hardships of life. On the way back to the inn, Napoleon remained silent. It wasn't until they entered their room that Joseph turned to him with a smile.

"How about it? Did the French warships frighten you?" Joseph asked.

"No," Napoleon replied succinctly.

"Why did you insist on visiting Fort Marlagreave? There wasn't much to see there," Joseph inquired.

"If an army occupied that fort, they could use cannons to sink all the ships in the harbor. But... But they still have hope. Their only hope is heaven. They're different from Spartacus. They're people of faith," Napoleon said.

"People of faith?" Napoleon's words caught Joseph off guard. Though he was now seen as a divine instrument by Bishop Minione, he was well aware that the exorcism rituals had no real effect. Their supposed effects were just the result of Joseph adapting to his surroundings as a time traveler. Even now, Joseph had a tendency to overlook the influence of religion when considering matters.

"Religion is the opium of the masses," Joseph thought silently. Then he said, "My foolish brother, remember this: future bread cannot replace the present bread. Future bread won't fill your stomach now. Why do you think we Corsicans opposed Genoese rule in the past? Besides, rebellion and going to heaven are two different things, aren't they? Even though it's said that the king's authority is granted by God, those who rebel must be acting according to God's will, too. God is all-knowing and all-powerful. If he didn't want people to oppose kings, why would there be rebels? My brother, do you know what I saw in Toulon? I saw poverty and anger, just like the poverty and anger we witnessed in Corsica. Didn't you notice the dust-covered, struggling people on Toulon's dusty streets, almost like living mounds of dust?"

"What are they doing?" Napoleon asked.

"Even the lowliest slaves need hope. Did you see hope in the eyes of those impoverished people on Toulon's streets? Did you hear any hopeful dreams

about the future in their words? Do you know what happens when the lowliest slaves lose all hope?" Joseph continued.

"I know," Napoleon replied. "There's a Spartacus-like rebellion. But they're not entirely without hope. They still have one hope, the only hope: heaven. They're different from Spartacus; they are people of faith."

"People of faith?" Napoleon's words took Joseph by surprise. Although he was now treated as the embodiment of divine grace by Bishop Minione, Joseph was well aware that the exorcism rituals were futile. Their supposed effects were just a result of Joseph adapting to his environment as a time traveler. Even now, when he considered matters, Joseph had a habit of neglecting the influence of religion.

"Religion is the opium of the people," Joseph thought to himself. Then he said, "My foolish brother, remember that future bread cannot replace present bread. Future bread won't fill your stomach now. Otherwise, why did we Corsicans oppose Genoese rule? Moreover, rebellion and going to heaven are two different matters, aren't they? Although it's said that the king's power is granted by God, those who rebel must be acting according to God's will. God is all-knowing and all-powerful. If he didn't want people to oppose kings, why would there be rebels? My brother, do you know what I saw? I saw what seemed to be a powerful France, like a warehouse filled with firewood and sulfur, while its guardians were still lighting fires and roasting meat inside."