

THE FOX OF FRANCE

Chapter 4: Don Quixote and Sancho

Mr. Fauve recovered quickly from his seasickness, as one would expect after a good night's sleep. Such maladies fade after a restful night. So, early the next morning, they continued their journey after a full day of jolting in a four-wheeled carriage, the group finally arrived at the important town of Marseille in the south of France.

The two Joseph brothers were enrolled in a noble school in Marseille, Otton Middle School, to study the French language. This was a school for nobles, where students were naturally of aristocratic background, even if they were just "provincial nobles." Nevertheless, even "provincial nobles" were considered much more aristocratic than the "Corsican nobles." In terms of their way of life, they were far superior to these two poor boys from Corsica.

At first, when the students learned that two poor noble students from Corsica would join their school, they were generally interested and welcomed them. Not out of hospitality, but because having two peasants in a noble school was something intriguing to these aristocratic students. It was akin to the young gentlemen and ladies in the Grand View Garden. While none of them respected the poor old Liu, everyone was looking forward to her visits. These "provincial nobles" at school also needed something to mock, like their own "Liu," to enrich their otherwise dull extracurricular lives. Even though if they were among the big nobles in Paris, they would be considered "country bumpkins."

When the two first arrived at Otton Middle School, they indeed lived up to the expectations of their noble schoolmates. Both had grown up by the seaside, and their appearances were rugged, with sun-tanned faces and rough skin. They clearly had the characteristics of lower-class people. Besides, there was a significant height difference between the two. Joseph was tall and thin, while Napoleon was short and stocky. If they were in China, their height difference might remind people of Wudai and Erwu from the Water Margin, but here, their classmates immediately gave them nicknames: one was called Don Quixote, and the other Sancho.

Many years later, when Joseph was writing letters to Napoleon, he would sometimes jokingly address Napoleon as "my dear Sancho" and sign it as "Don Quixote de La Mancha." Napoleon, in his replies, would do the reverse, calling himself "Don Quixote" and addressing Joseph as "Sancho." He felt that, in terms of character, he was more akin to the knight fighting windmills, while the rational Joseph was closer to Sancho.

The two of them did indeed have many qualities that brought joy to the students of this school. First, their accents when they spoke. Although the noble students at school were also provincials, they could all speak French with a Parisian touch. However, Joseph and Napoleon had different stories. Joseph's French had a significant accent issue, but it was still recognizable as French. However, Napoleon's French, aside from a heavy Corsican accent, was filled with Corsican words and was hardly considered French. So, in class, their bored classmates enjoyed imitating their accents and what they saw as their rustic behaviors.

In general, the shallower and less skilled a person is, the more they enjoy mocking others' shortcomings, especially when the person they are mocking excels in something they can't.

Though Napoleon's spoken French was not the best, both Joseph and Napoleon excelled in their studies. Joseph, as a time traveler from the 21st century, possessed knowledge far beyond his time and found it easy to outperform everyone at the school in most subjects. Besides art-related subjects, he could easily outshine every student.

As for Napoleon, although he didn't have Joseph's futuristic knowledge, he was naturally intelligent. After learning about the importance of knowledge, especially in subjects like mathematics, geography, history, and physics for warfare, his attitude towards learning became remarkably serious. His innate intelligence, combined with a dedicated approach to studying, made him excel in these subjects, which were closely related to warfare. In these subjects, the "provincial noble" students were far behind Napoleon, and in almost all subjects other than spoken language, they couldn't compare to Joseph either.

As they were being intellectually outshone, the noble students at the school found it less amusing to provoke Joseph. In fact, whenever they tried to provoke Joseph with their accents or imitations, they got unexpected reactions. They expected to see Joseph flustered or angry, and either reaction would have given them satisfaction. However, Joseph's response was entirely unexpected. When they taunted him, he watched their performance with a smile, as if he was observing monkeys in a circus.

This kind of response naturally didn't bring them joy, so they shifted their focus more towards Napoleon. In comparison to Joseph, Napoleon had more vulnerabilities. He was shorter, had a heavier accent, and more blemishes on his face. Moreover, Napoleon's reactions were more entertaining. Whenever they taunted Napoleon, they could easily witness his anger.

However, they soon realized that provoking Napoleon wasn't as enjoyable as they thought. Unlike Joseph, who might not provide the expected reaction, provoking Napoleon would lead to swift retaliation, and he used the most

barbaric methods, including violence, punching, kicking, and even biting with his teeth.

Though the noble students were taller than Napoleon, they lacked training in hand-to-hand combat. They did learn combat skills with swords, as dueling was common at the time. However, given the students' age at Otton Middle School, they weren't yet skilled enough to handle rapiers and mainly focused on small sword techniques. They had no knowledge of the primitive fighting techniques that involved using fists, nails, and teeth.

So, whenever fights broke out, they were always at a disadvantage. Napoleon's attacks were painful, but they often left no visible marks. Moreover, when a teacher intervened, Napoleon could act more miserable and victimized than the one who had been beaten.

As a result, they discovered that Joseph and Napoleon weren't as entertaining as they had thought; in fact, they made them uncomfortable in various ways. On one hand, fewer students actively provoked the two brothers, but on the other hand, the brothers found themselves isolated. However, both Joseph and Napoleon couldn't care less about this isolation.

"These are a bunch of people destined to be forgotten by history. They are not worth investing even a tiny bit of energy. Think about it; these guys will become the upper class of France one day? I'm visiting Toulon. Seeing the anxiety created by those warships makes all these worries disappear. Besides, you know, I won't stay at this school for too long," Napoleon wrote in a letter to his father, as found in his public correspondence many years later.

As the letter suggested, Napoleon's time at Otton Middle School wouldn't last long. Perhaps, by the end of spring, he would be transferring to the Brienne Military Academy. As for his brother Joseph, he indeed had his eyes set on the Louis-le-Grand School in Paris.

This school was the best secondary school in all of France, and, more importantly, it offered the highest scholarships in all of France for outstanding students. These scholarships could fully support a student's regular expenses for studying and living in Paris. For example, the future ruler, Robespierre, received a scholarship of six hundred francs upon graduating from Louis-le-Grand School.