

THE FOX OF FRANCE

Chapter 7: Becoming The Devil's Advocate - (1)

In the days that followed, their routine remained the same. They would buy two coach tickets, travel for a day to a town closer to Paris, rest in a monastery (or a hotel if necessary), and then buy another coach ticket. It was on the evening of the tenth day when Alphonso and Joseph finally reached the capital of France, Paris.

The coach traversed dusty streets and came to a halt on a street called Rue des Neiges, which lay on the outskirts of Paris. On one side of the street was the solemn Convent of the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, resembling a tomb. On the other side, there were shabby houses inhabited by the lower classes.

Their journey ended here. To reach their final destination, passengers would either need to pay for public carriages or rely on their own legs, as it was quite far and not particularly safe in this area. Alphonso led Joseph onto a public carriage and, after about half an hour, they arrived at the grand Saint Geneviève Cathedral.

In the future, this cathedral would be seized by the Revolutionary government after the outbreak of the French Revolution, transformed into a burial ground for great men, known as the "Pantheon." However, at this time, the Saint Geneviève Cathedral remained an important church under the control of the Catholic Church. Although this wasn't Joseph's destination, it was where Alphonso, the monk, intended to go. He escorted Joseph into the church and left him in a waiting room while he went to deliver a message to the bishop.

After a short wait in the waiting room, Joseph saw Alphonso return.

"Alright, I've delivered the message. Now, I'll take you to meet Father Jean-Jacques," Alphonso said.

Father Jean-Jacques's small chapel was a bit of a trek from here. As there were no public carriages available at this time, they had to walk along the lamplighted streets. It took them nearly an hour, and by the time they arrived, the moon had risen high, casting its silvery light on the steps in front of the small chapel.

Alphonso led Joseph up the steps and knocked on the door gently. After a while, they saw light spilling through a narrow gap in the door, followed by heavy footsteps from inside the building, as if a bear were approaching.

"Just a moment; I'll open the door... Blast it, door latch is stuck... Ah, please wait a bit; I'll fix it..." a coarse and breathless voice came from inside the door.

However, the door didn't open as quickly as expected. It rattled and was sometimes pulled hard from the inside, but it didn't open. More complaints came from within: "What's going on? Why can't I open it... Ah, please wait a bit more..."

After about ten minutes, there was a loud click, and the door finally swung open, a rush of air spilling out.

Joseph peered inside and saw a man who was about his height but at least twice as wide at the waist. He had a stocky build, and if he were transported to the future, he wouldn't need any makeup to play the role of the King of the Hill. Beside him was a nanny-like figure holding a candlestick, one hand cupped near the flame to protect it from the wind.

"Alphonso! Haha, you've finally arrived. Is the old man doing well?" the King of the Hill boomed, causing birds resting in the nearby trees to take flight.

"Father Jean-Jacques, the bishop is in good health," Alphonso replied. "Aside from bringing Joseph here as instructed by the bishop, I also have a message for you."

"What does the old man say?" the King of the Hill inquired.

"The bishop instructed me to tell you that gluttony is a sin," Alphonso answered calmly.

The King of the Hill's voice lowered, and he grumbled something inaudible.

"Alright, enough of the complaints. Joseph, let me introduce you. This is Joseph, the bishop's protégé. He's the one preparing to study at the School of King Louis."

"Ah, I know. Well, come in, both of you. This darned door... Nell, go get that cabinet from over there; we'll use it to block the door for the night."

"Father, I know, but it would be better if you helped me with it..."

"Oh, really... I've told you to eat more. How can you have the strength if you don't eat? Even for a cabinet..."

This place would be Joseph's home for the next few years.

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Joseph easily passed the entrance exam for the School of King Louis. He intended to study there for a few years, make some connections, and then leave Paris before the outbreak of the French Revolution, which was bound to bring chaos. He planned to go to the provinces and take advantage of the Girondins' time in power to speculate and amass wealth, ensuring his family's prosperity.

He also had to prevent his "foolish brother" from making disastrous decisions in Spain, especially in Russia. To do that, he needed to have a strong position

and not be the useless brother who relied entirely on his brother's success, as history portrayed him.

"My foolish brother is prideful and arrogant, thinking he's above everyone else. It won't be easy to put a stop to his reckless actions."

Joseph's days passed as he had planned. He excelled in school, earned a full scholarship, and built a good reputation among literary and scientific circles. He also took up some translation and other odd jobs to earn extra money. Everything was going smoothly until he received a letter with unfortunate news: his father was gravely ill, and the family's financial situation had become dire.

Joseph's scholarship and living in the church had kept him self-sufficient until now. However, with the added financial burden of supporting his siblings, he needed to find a way to earn more money.

"Ah, how could I forget the hereditary stomach cancer in the Bonaparte family?" Joseph pondered. The Bonaparte family had always been threatened by hereditary stomach cancer, especially among the males. Out of all his siblings, Joseph was the only one who hadn't been afflicted by it. He knew that just because he had avoided it in the original timeline didn't mean he was safe in this one.

Now, he needed to consider how to shoulder the family's responsibilities while maintaining his studies. But what could he do to increase his income effectively? Working a regular job was out of the question. He couldn't afford to quit his studies, as it would derail his entire plan. So, he had to find opportunities to make more money at the various salons he frequented.

"Joseph, what are you looking at? You don't seem well," a voice broke his thoughts.

Joseph turned to see a freckled young man named Armand René de Lavasse, his fellow student, and friend. Armand had a certain artistic flair and even had an uncle who was well-known in history. Unlike his famous uncle, Armand had no talent in the natural sciences but excelled in the arts, particularly as one of the pillars of the Louis School's student theater.

"Oh, it's Armand. I received a letter that my father is seriously ill. This might affect my financial situation," Joseph said, placing the letter away.

"Joseph, I believe your father's illness must be quite severe," Armand said, sitting down beside Joseph on the bench, their conversation illuminated by the noon breeze rustling the leaves of the plane trees above.

"I know you have a full scholarship, and you live in the church, so you probably don't spend much. Your family's financial situation shouldn't be a concern," Armand continued. "So, I suspect it's not about money."

Joseph blinked, surprised by Armand's perceptiveness. Armand then took out a small bottle, unscrewed the cap, and poured some liquid into the cap. He looked at Joseph and asked, "Would you like some?"