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"Indeed, the British are stronger than the Austrians and Prussians," Napoleon said to Oloron as he watched the approaching British army.

"If it were a field battle, these fellows could inflict significant casualties on us," Oloron nodded in agreement. "Look at them; after such a beating, the Austrians would have turned back home to their mothers."

"Austrians? At Valmy, just one round of artillery fire killed hundreds, and the rest of them, tens of thousands, froze in fear. But look at the British, they charge right at us," Napoleon admired.

"Fortunately, we now hold the initiative," Oloron sincerely stated, "General, as you mentioned earlier, in most cases, defense is a stronger strategy than offense, but in war, victory often requires an offensive approach. So, a good general, even in an offensive operation, should seize the crucial moments on the battlefield, capture the key positions, and force the enemy to attack our well-defended lines. Transform a strategically offensive operation into a tactical defensive counterattack. I used to think this was impossible, but now, haven't we achieved just that? We are the ones on the offensive, but because we hold the key positions, the defensive enemy is forced to leave their fortifications to attack us. General Bonaparte..."

Oloron raised his thumb in admiration. "Brilliant, simply brilliant!"

Napoleon, pleased with the praise, listened with satisfaction. He knew Oloron wasn't one to flatter, and even though this principle wasn't originally his idea, why split hairs among brothers? Besides, Joseph was all talk, and in this situation, he might not have grasped this key. So, Napoleon was quite content with his actions. However, he didn't display his satisfaction and simply said, "Let's discuss it further after we repel the British's current attack."

The British were now within musket range, and the cannons on the fortifications began to fire grape shot. Row after row of British soldiers fell, but those behind them continued to advance steadily, maintaining their uniform pace.

Compared to the European practice of walking a few steps and then firing or employing three-stage volleys, the British had a different approach. Their discipline was to advance directly, moving within bayonet reach, extending their muskets under their enemy's noses, and firing in unison. Then, they would follow with a bayonet charge, cutting down the opposition. While the British had a smaller army, their combat effectiveness was at a higher level than the foes that the French had faced before.

The British left behind several bodies, but they continued to close in. As long as a courageous force moved forward, it could always make progress. According to their tradition, they would approach within ten yards, halt, fire a volley, and then charge with bayonets.

However, this time, things took a different turn. Just as the British halted, something resembling a barrage of explosive stones came from the French side and landed among them, exploding violently.

These were the special weapons Joseph had advised Napoleon to bring, hand grenades.

In fact, throwing explosives at the enemy in battle wasn't a new concept. People had done it before, but those early grenades were filled with black powder, and to be effective, they needed to be quite large. Large enough that ordinary soldiers couldn't throw them far, and even the strong ones couldn't throw them very far. If the size was reduced to the point where regular soldiers could throw them far, their power would be closer to that of firecrackers.

But the grenades carried by Napoleon's soldiers were not filled with black powder but a new substance, nitrocellulose, developed by Lavassier. Nitrocellulose was more stable than nitroglycerin, requiring mercury fulminate for efficient detonation. However, it had an inconsistency issue; some nitrocellulose had higher explosive power than TNT, while others had only half of TNT's power. Nevertheless, these grenades' killing effect was beyond anyone's expectations, especially since Joseph had added pre-formed fragments to the grenade casings.

This barrage of grenades knocked down a significant number of advancing British soldiers, causing chaos in their formation.

Witnessing this, Napoleon immediately ordered a countercharge.

"For France, charge!" The French troops, bayonets fixed, rushed towards the British.

In this era, French and British troops had a clear difference: the British required formations to fight effectively, while the French excelled in disorder.

This countercharge pushed the British back. After repelling the British's counterattack, the British rapidly withdrew from Toulon. Napoleon assessed that it was unlikely the British would launch another assault on Fort Marlagne anytime soon. His focus could now shift to the ships in Toulon Harbor.

Of course, bombarding Toulon Harbor required some time. Soldiers had to adjust the cannons on the fortifications and transfer more cannons into Fort Marlagne, which took time.

"As long as we have these preparations in place before nightfall, we can deal with the ships in Toulon Harbor," Napoleon contemplated. "But if these tasks aren't completed in time, maybe we should pay Lucien another visit. It's raining, and there's nothing else to do."

Despite the decisive victory, Napoleon wasn't too angry anymore. Anger was like a storm; it came and went quickly. Besides, Lucien was quite adept at fleeing, and Pauline was causing trouble, so Napoleon didn't have the chance to be a good brother.

By the next morning, the cannons in the fortifications were all set up, and Napoleon gave the order to bombard Toulon Harbor. The shelling continued all day until night fell and reduced the efficiency of the French bombardment. During that day's shelling, over a dozen ships were damaged to varying degrees, and hundreds of sailors were killed or wounded. But what hurt even more was the fact that Toulon had no means to respond to the artillery fire from Fort Marlagne.

"Toulon is lost," the Spaniards were the first to realize. At nightfall, they abandoned their posts and planned to board the ships and escape. However, they were blocked at the harbor by a large group of British soldiers. The British were boarding their ships, and when it was impossible to stay any longer, they were excellent at retreating.

The British and Spanish spent two nights and a day, braving the artillery fire from Fort Marlagne, to withdraw from Toulon.

In fact, by the morning of the second day, the British had already evacuated most of their troops. Davout wanted Napoleon to use this opportunity to launch an attack, recapturing Toulon and eliminating the invaders who hadn't left yet.

But Napoleon vetoed this suggestion. He believed that attacking a fortified position of the enemy, while already having a decided victory, would result in unnecessary casualties, which was not cost-effective.

Davout was convinced by this reasoning. His only concern was whether the traitors of their homeland would escape with the invaders.

"The British and Spanish are barely saving themselves right now; they won't have time to worry about those traitors. Don't worry; they won't get away!" Napoleon assured.

The final ships were preparing to leave the harbor, but the docks were crowded with people - former royalists who had served the British. They realized that if they remained in Toulon, they would surely face the guillotine once the British left. So they flocked to the docks, hoping for mercy from their British protectors, hoping for a chance to board the ships and leave Toulon.

Napoleon watched this from Fort Marlagne and ordered, "Aim at those folks on the docks, fire with all you've got! Davout, prepare to enter the city!"

Davout acknowledged and rushed down. Napoleon continued to observe the artillery's results with his spyglass.

A cannonball landed in the crowd on the docks, creating a path of blood. More people, in a panic, leaped into the water, attempting to swim to the British ships.

Napoleon saw a British officer shouting something to the people below, perhaps, "God save the King" or something else. It didn't matter because the next moment, several British soldiers pulled out their bayonets, fired another command, and a thick smoke emerged on the ship's sides - the British soldiers were firing at the royalists swimming towards their ships.

One by one, the royalists were shot and sank into the sea. Napoleon watched, a satisfied smile on his face.

At that moment, a figure caught his attention. Gasping for breath, the person slipped into the water, avoiding the volley of shots, and swam towards the British ship. Like a spider, he crawled up the ship's side.

"This man is quite agile," Napoleon remarked. "But, unfortunately..."

The man had finally climbed up to the ship's side, extended his head, seemingly shouting something - perhaps "God save the King" or something else. It didn't matter because the next second, several British soldiers thrust their bayonets into his abdomen, and with a final push, they threw him back into the sea. This time, he didn't resurface.

"This is the fate of traitors!" Oloron, who was also watching, sighed.

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Almost synchronized with the departure of the British and Spanish, Davout and his army had entered Toulon. Davout had expected that the rebels might put up a stubborn resistance, but as he entered the city, people came forward willingly to show him the way. They claimed to be loyal to

the revolutionary republic and had long awaited the arrival of the army, whether it was the King's forces or, oops, I mean the Republic's army from Britain and Spain. However, Davout didn't trust these self-appointed guides. Who knows if they had welcomed the invading forces from Britain and Spain in the same manner?

However, such matters were not Davout's concern. He only needed to control the crucial points in Toulon. As for tracking down traitors and suppressing counter-revolutionaries, special envoys from Paris were handling that. Davout didn't care about how the envoys would deal with them.

Napoleon, on the other hand, didn't care about the fate of the people of Toulon either. With the battle over, his attention was now focused on finding his other family members. Lucien, Pauline, and Elisa were safe, but the situation with the other ship remained uncertain. Napoleon decided to put on a facade and sent out a large cavalry force to search for their whereabouts, claiming to be chasing fleeing traitors.

A day later, Napoleon received news that his other family members had been found. It turned out that Charles's ship had landed near Toulon, almost at the same time as the others. However, Charles correctly assessed that their location was very dangerous, so he decided to take them back to sea for another day before making landfall again. Once ashore, he sent a group of men to establish contact with nearby French forces. Only after ensuring that Toulon was no longer a risk did he bring Letizia, Jerome, and Caroline to Toulon, where they were able to reunite with Napoleon's group smoothly.

After learning about their experiences, Napoleon commended Captain Charles for his caution. He couldn't help but remember Lucien's recklessness and commented, "Joseph really knows how to judge people, that Lucien guy is just not reliable!"

However, he couldn't take the whip to Lucien anymore because, in this matter, he and Lucien had to be on the same page.

"Lucien, Joseph mustn't find out about these things," Napoleon frowned. He didn't want Joseph to lash out when they returned because of this. Considering that Joseph was increasingly giving him face, and this incident didn't lead to any irreparable consequences. Moreover, the main responsibility for this matter didn't lie with him. Perhaps Joseph wouldn't whip him like he had whipped Lucien. But even if that were the case, Joseph would certainly mock him, undermining his reliability by a significant percentage. If that happened, "it would be too embarrassing!"

"As long as you don't tell, I won't be itching to say anything," Lucien said, "Joseph may not be as brash as you, but if he finds out about this..."

At this point, Lucien suddenly remembered Joseph's pile of math problems and shuddered.

"Then there's Pauline and Elisa, they mustn't say a word either," Lucien quickly added.

"Pauline brought this upon herself, she probably won't talk... As for Elisa, we'll have a talk with her, and she probably won't either," Napoleon sat back in his chair, resting his chin on the backrest, furrowing his brows.

"That's hard to say," Lucien said. "Others are one thing, but Pauline... you don't know her yet! She's quite the handful, a real troublemaker. She's quite proud of her antics. Even if you tell her, she might brag to Joseph like showing off a treasure."

"That's true. We need to emphasize the seriousness of the matter to her so she becomes highly alert and develops a sense of responsibility from deep within," Napoleon said.

"Come on, Napoleon, that won't work. The most important thing is to make Pauline realize how terrifying Joseph can be when he's angry. Only when she truly understands that point, will she keep the secret."

"Well, Joseph has always been kind to Pauline. She doesn't know..."

"That's because when Joseph left home, Pauline was still very young. He didn't have the chance to impose his will on her then. But now it's different..."

"Hmm... what are you implying?" Napoleon straightened up.

"Napoleon, I mean Joseph didn't have the opportunity to give Pauline math homework. I think we should let Pauline experience it, so she understands how scary Joseph can be. Only then will she keep her mouth shut."

Listening to Lucien's explanation, Napoleon nodded with a rueful smile, "That makes sense... Let's gather all the math exercises Joseph assigned us and show them to Pauline. It will give her a profound understanding."

"I'll do that right away..."

An hour later, cries of Pauline could be heard from Napoleon's temporary residence study, "Sob... Sob... Lucien, you're a wicked person! If I had known, I would have let Napoleon whip you to death!"

So, the alliance dedicated to concealing the truth was officially established.

When Napoleon marched south, the Committee of Public Safety did not immediately send a special envoy with his army, as they were preoccupied with other matters. Moreover, Napoleon's military actions progressed rapidly, and within a few days, he had captured Toulon. Therefore, it was only after Toulon was taken that the special envoy arrived, albeit belatedly.

Although the special envoy arrived late, just by looking at the envoy's name, Napoleon knew that Toulon was of great importance to the authorities in Paris.

The special envoy assigned to Toulon was Couthon, a member of the Committee of Public Safety. His appointment as the special envoy to Toulon showed the significance the Committee attached to the city.

Couthon was confident that he would achieve success and gain more influence within the Committee of Public Safety in the same way Saint-Just had in the north. However, Carnot had been hesitant to send him to Toulon. This delay wasted precious time, and when Couthon finally rushed to Toulon, he was shocked to find that Napoleon had already taken the city.

"What a surprise! Weren't they saying that Toulon had a strong defense, numerous well-trained troops, and was challenging to conquer? How could..." Couthon felt like he had prepared extensively for a grand banquet, but when he arrived, the party had ended, and everyone had left. There were only leftover scraps of food in the plates, and people were heading home with satisfied burps.

Couthon, of course, couldn't blame Napoleon for acting too quickly and not waiting for him. However, he needed an outlet for his frustration. So, he initially directed his anger at Popo. From his perspective, it made perfect sense. You see, Napoleon had taken Toulon in just a few days with minimal casualties, indicating that Toulon's defenses were not strong. But facing such an easily defeatable enemy, Popo had still suffered heavy losses... didn't he seem suspicious of collaborating with the enemy?

Fortunately for Popo, the fact that his eldest son became a martyr helped clear him of suspicion, and Napoleon also acknowledged Popo's significant role in his victory (as many of the troops who dug trenches were under Popo). So, Couthon couldn't directly arrest Popo on charges of treason. However, Couthon did assert that Popo's previous performance could only be understood as incompetence. Popo was either not competent or just plain foolish, and it was up to him to choose.

Popo readily chose "foolishness," leading to his honorable retirement.

With his anger unable to vent on Popo, the people of Toulon bore the brunt of Couthon's wrath. Couthon began mass arrests of "traitors." Anyone with "De" in their name or who had ever worn a black robe (priests) was thrown into prison. He then promptly organized a "Revolutionary Tribunal" to swiftly try these individuals.

The trials were essentially like running a batch processing program. All the suspects were found guilty, and all those found guilty received the same and only punishment - the guillotine.

Toulon did not have a revolutionary symbol - the guillotine - within the city. The original guillotine had been used when the royalists occupied Toulon and had beheaded many Jacobin sympathizers. However, when the British arrived, an English officer, considering the device unique and valuable, had it transported back to England. Consequently, Couthon had to wait for several more days for a new guillotine to be brought in.

Of course, he wasn't idle during these days. Couthon continued his work, discovering many counter-revolutionaries who, at this time, had once again disguised themselves as revolutionary enthusiasts, attempting to evade punishment. Some had even infiltrated the Revolutionary Tribunal! Without Couthon's keen eye, these individuals would not only escape punishment but might even infiltrate the revolutionary ranks, causing greater chaos in the future.

As a result, a large number of people, including several members of the "Revolutionary Tribunal," were sent to prison to await the arrival of the guillotine.

In the prison, one condemned man asked another, "Why were you arrested too?"

"Because I raised my hand too slowly when we voted on whether the Marquis should be beheaded. They said I sympathized with the aristocrats."

"And what about you?"

"I... I was arrested for raising my hand too quickly. They said I had ulterior motives and was trying to hide something."

The two condemned men turned to the one who had been silent all along. "Hey, buddy, what about you?"

"I was arrested because I'm the Marquis."

A few days later, the guillotine arrived, and Couthon, as the special envoy, used it to behead nearly two thousand people in quick succession.

Chapter 113: Internal Challenges

As Napoleon rapidly resolved the Turin issue, the French mobilized more armies and turned their attention to the north. Their timing was impeccable because, at the very moment they launched their offensive, the anti-French alliance faced internal discord.

Much like the fable of the swan, the salmon, and the shrimp pulling a carriage together, each country in the anti-French alliance had its own agenda, leading to a lack of cooperation and even undermining each other.

The British were primarily concerned with their interests in the Netherlands. They strongly advocated focusing their main force on the attack on Dunkirk, surrounding it by sea and land and requesting the Prussians and Austrians to join the assault.

However, Dunkirk wasn't an attractive target for the Austrians and Prussians. Instead, they urged the British to shift their forces quickly to the Belgian border to launch a decisive attack on the French, considering Dunkirk a "secondary target."

The British army was limited and heavily engaged in securing their more visible interests in overseas colonies. The Austrians and Prussians tried to persuade the British to mobilize more troops swiftly. However, Prime Minister Pitt was reluctant to disrupt the nation's development rhythm. As a compromise, Britain provided funds and weapons, while Italy contributed troops to fight alongside the French.

The British recruited a mercenary force of over ten thousand men in Italy and used Austrian roads to transport them to Belgium. However, when this force arrived in August, the British claimed that, due to changes in the battlefield situation, they needed to deploy these mercenaries in the battle for Dunkirk.

The Austrians and Prussians argued that they had already factored this mercenary force into their plans. While they didn't intend to use the Italian mercenaries as a primary force (their combat effectiveness was questionable, and they were more affordable), they could have been employed for defensive purposes, allowing more troops to be freed up. Now, the British's sudden change of plans left them unable to proceed with their attack.

But the reality was different from what the British had stated. Recently, Empress of Eastern Rome had fallen ill due to the loss of her beloved Duke Bohemond. Her illness had caused unrest in the areas controlled by Prussia. The illness of the empress, on one hand, emboldened Prussia and Austria to consider gaining more benefits from Poland. Still, on the other hand, it required military support to realize these plans.

Austria and France shared a border, making it challenging for Austria to recall its troops. However, Prussia saw an opportunity to redeploy its forces eastward since it believed the Rhine Confederation was currently secure, and its interests in France were limited. The Prussians had long contemplated moving more of their troops eastward, but Austria had used various means to keep them engaged.

When the news of over ten thousand Italian mercenaries joining the Belgian front reached Austria, it became increasingly difficult to retain the Prussians. The Italians had yet to arrive when the

Prussians began withdrawing the bulk of their forces. They reasoned that the Italian mercenaries would fill the gap left behind. However...

On the opposing front, the French situation was entirely different. Envoys from various regions quickly executed those with "De" in their names on the guillotine while sending vast amounts of wealth and conscripted soldiers to Paris. By the end of September 1793, France had organized an army of up to one million soldiers. Yes, most of these troops were inadequately trained and poorly equipped due to the inability of military production to match the pace of conscription. But their morale was high.

While most of these units couldn't be deployed for combat, the newly trained forces (though their training was quite limited) were continuously sent northward by the revolutionary government. Unlike the situation during the Dumouriez defection, the French army had regained its morale and had a significant numerical advantage.

Using the hesitancy of the anti-French alliance to their advantage, Carnot concentrated a large number of troops in the Nord department and, under the supervision of Saint-Just, launched a counterattack in early September. They first defeated the British forces led by the Duke of York at Hondschooten, then turned their attention to the direction of Moberg, where they routed the Austrian army under General Coburg.

The military danger for France seemed to be temporarily resolved, but as the military tension relaxed, many problems that had been suppressed by the military crisis resurfaced.

The first issue that arose was economic.

After the Jacobins took power, they implemented various measures like the requisitioning of resources and price controls to support the war effort. While these quasi-war-time communist methods helped the country consolidate its strength against external enemies, they also brought about numerous problems.

According to a decree on September 29th, each county was responsible for setting price limits on grain, while municipalities were tasked with determining wage caps. Under these constraints, compared to 1790, grain prices had generally risen by one-third, and wages had increased by half. Things seemed fine on the surface.

However, price and wage standards set by different regions of France were significantly imbalanced. Each county strived to increase the prices of local products while lowering the prices of goods from other regions. This caused fragmentation in the national market.

On the other hand, the massive conscription caused labor shortages, especially in rural areas. Despite a bountiful harvest that year, the slow pace of harvesting and threshing due to the lack of labor, combined with the high demand for military provisions, led to food shortages in many regions, especially in the south of France, where these issues were exacerbated due to the war.

In simpler terms, the problem was that the Committee of Public Safety's control over the country and their understanding of the economy couldn't match the requirements of a planned economy that went beyond traditional market economics. But once they abandoned these planned aspects, it would almost be political suicide.

Therefore, the Committee of Public Safety had to continue deepening the revolution to truly control the country and survive the current crisis.

However, they needed pressure. Earlier, foreign intervention had provided this pressure. But now, an absurd situation had emerged where their series of victories had fundamentally undermined the legitimacy of the revolutionary government.

Without pressure, they had to artificially create it. At the very least, they needed to take on a significant enemy. That's when Robespierre chose the Church.

Before this, the Revolutionary Government had already taken measures against the Church with the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Now, the remaining clergy were those who had sworn loyalty to the parliament. However, the Republic needed an internal enemy to unite the people, so the remaining clergy and Christianity itself, including Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and even any form of Protestantism, became the enemies of the Republic.

On October 24th, the National Convention passed a law that implemented the Republican Calendar in France. In practice, it was a declaration of war against Christianity, a signal to expel religious beliefs entirely from France.

Carnot returned home in a sour mood, unenthusiastic about this new Republican Calendar. While it might seem exciting and sophisticated to some in later years with names like "Foggy," "Frosty," "Snowy," "Budding," and "Blooming," he found it to be unnecessary. Although he was the prime contributor to the recent string of French victories, his position had also diminished as a result. Hence, he had little influence regarding the Republican Calendar or the anti-Christian campaign.

"These people are getting crazier by the day! Especially those power-hungry thugs in the Paris Commune! If France allows them to continue like this, we're doomed sooner or later!" Carnot vented his frustration to his wife.

His wife turned pale, looking around anxiously. She whispered, "Are you out of your mind? Can you say such things so casually? Do you have a death wish?"

"What can they do to me?" Carnot asked, his voice lowered. "Honestly, this is all getting out of hand. And even though I'm the one responsible for the recent victories, the series of triumphs has undermined the authority and legitimacy of the Committee of Public Safety. My position is no better."

"Can't you go to Joseph's laboratory and discuss the research situation with him? Or ask him to come to the War Department and report to you?" his wife suggested.

"Hmm, that might be an option. Joseph certainly has more ideas, given his diverse research. Maybe he'll find a solution," Carnot conceded.

In contrast to Carnot, who had seen his standing fall due to the victories, Joseph's position had actually improved. He was responsible for the laboratory that had developed the hand grenade, which had proven highly effective in the Battle of Toulon and the northern battles. Napoleon praised it as the "infantry's artillery" and "Jupiter's lightning," acknowledging that without these grenades, their victories and the capture of the critical fortress of Maastricht would have been much harder, if not impossible.

Up north, at Saint-Omer, Saint-Just was similarly impressed with the products from Joseph's laboratory. "This new weapon has played a decisive role," he reported. "Well-trained soldiers can throw it fifty or sixty meters, ensuring relatively accurate targeting. This distance is not much different from the usual range of enemy musket fire. In Hondschoote, the British, as usual, wanted

to rush us with bayonets. They were halfway there when they were scattered by grenade explosions. The grenades also played a decisive role in Moberg. The grenadiers, especially those equipped with grenades, were the enemy's nightmare. Therefore, I recommend that grenade production be treated as the most urgent and critical military task. Everything related to grenades must be kept as the highest state secret."

Due to this achievement, Joseph was promoted to brigadier general. However, his rank was still below Napoleon's. During the promotion ceremony, Joseph emphasized Lavassier's contributions to the research, informing the Committee of Public Safety's observer, Charles, that Lavassier's research team had been instrumental in the development of the grenades and explosives. Joseph even suggested naming the explosive after Lavassier.

However, the Committee of Public Safety argued that Lavassier was an imprisoned enemy and that all his research results were obtained by taking what rightfully belonged to the people. They believed he didn't deserve the honor. As a result, the explosive was named the Republic's No. 1 explosive, and the hand grenade was named Equality No. 1 hand grenade. To the outside world, it was proclaimed as the collective achievement of the Military Technical Laboratory. However, soldiers preferred to call it the "Bonaparte's Little Melon."

It was said that after Joseph informed Lavassier of the Committee of Public Safety's decision regarding the naming of the grenades, Lavassier muttered, "It doesn't matter. I've contributed enough to science to have a substantial chapter in scientific history. Besides, a weapon that defends these tyrants, if named after me, is just an irony! Well... that's how it is!"

However, after some time, he remarked, "Well, Joseph, if I were an Englishman, I could earn a fortune just from the patent for the nitration of starch. In France, we don't even have the power to name things, let alone claim patent rights."

Joseph could only console him, saying, "Mr. Lavassier, as long as you take care of your health as I suggested maintain a healthy diet and run regularly every day you'll have the opportunity to receive patent fees in the future."

Speaking of running, Lavassier said, "You know, running has seemingly improved my health. It's made me eat more. But when I run every day in the sunlight, I can see that thug named Charles peeping at me from behind an iron window."

"I told him it's part of your disciplinary training," Joseph said. "Of course, I was just trying to placate him."

"I understand that," Lavassier said. "What I was actually thinking is that when I'm running in the sunlight and he's lurking behind a dark iron window, I wonder who looks more like a prisoner."

Chapter 114: Watching Tigers Fight on the Mountain

In the southern regions, Napoleon was busy with the retraining of his troops and the development of new battle plans. The introduction of the "little melon" had dramatically changed the way battles were fought. Previously, firing at a formation with muskets posed limited threat, as one musket ball could only take down one person, and the formation could retaliate effectively. Most of the time, skirmishers were considered more valuable than regular infantry because of their ability to fight independently. However, now, with the introduction of the "little melon," the damage it could inflict far surpassed a single bullet.

According to the "Military Technology Research Institute," each "little melon" explosion produced over thirty cast-iron fragments, each with the killing power of a bullet within a range of twenty to thirty-five meters. This meant that a single "little melon" thrown by a skirmisher could lead to casualties of several, even dozens of soldiers. Moreover, launching a "little melon" was much faster than firing a bullet. In the time it took to load a single bullet, skirmishers could launch dozens of "little melons." If an army continued to use dense formations rigidly, they would be crushed by a small group of skirmishers armed with "little melons."

Consequently, nearly all French generals who had witnessed the "little melon" in action, whether in the South with Napoleon or in the North with Joubert, realized that skirmishers armed with "little melons" would become the primary mode of combat on the battlefield. However, they still lacked a clear understanding of how to efficiently utilize these troops. Thus, Napoleon, who had previously overseen the development of the "Red Army," was tasked with researching an efficient way to employ skirmishers and creating a comprehensive battle plan for the entire French army's future operations.

Apart from this, Napoleon had another important task: coordinating testimonies with his family, ensuring that Joseph remained unaware of certain events transpiring outside Toulon. Joseph had been relieved that his legions were not being recalled but stationed in the South, tasked with suppressing local uprisings and studying new tactics.

During this time, Napoleon and Joseph corresponded via letters, but due to Joseph's unique situation, all his communications had to pass through the scrutiny of the "Committee of Public Safety." Each letter required the signatures of three committee members before being dispatched. Additionally, every letter sent by Joseph was treated as a highly classified document, with the safe supposedly crafted by the former King.

As a result, Joseph's letters to Napoleon mainly contained general greetings, with the bulk of their content focusing on tactical details and discussion.

Joseph might not have had a military education before crossing over, but after his arrival, he had been continuously involved in military matters for years. He had, by now, become a genuine expert in the field. His insights had garnered respect, even from Saint-Just.

Joseph took refuge in the "Military Technology Research Institute" largely to escape the turmoil outside. Recent times had seen internal divisions arise within the Jacobins, with external adversaries defeated. Carnot summoned Joseph to the War Ministry for a report, primarily to gain insights into the current situation.

They reportedly held a lengthy discussion in the War Ministry's office, but the specifics of their conversation remained closely guarded, deemed a matter of high importance.

Carnot's withdrawal from political discussions had led to an unexpected consequence his influence in the "Committee of Public Safety" seemed to rise. Even Robespierre and other committee members appeared somewhat wary of him. Carnot had stopped participating in political discussions but always brought up the same topic when he spoke: the need for funds.

"I must remind you all that the 'equality grenades' are excellent, but if we allow the current situation to persist, we'll soon run out of grenades! You must come up with a plan as soon as possible!" Carnot blustered, directing his frustration at Robespierre.

"What's the matter, General Carnot?" Robespierre leaned back slightly to keep a safe distance from Carnot's tirade.

"What's the matter? By all that's holy!" Carnot slammed a document onto the table. "Take a look at our current stock of saltpeter and caustic soda! I've brought up this issue last month, and you promised to address it. But here we are, another month passed, and you still haven't fixed it. By all that's holy, if this continues, our troops will have to fight with cold weapons! I tell you, we can't afford to delay any longer, every delay is an act of treason!"

Saltpeter and caustic soda were vital ingredients for producing explosives, and France didn't produce enough of them domestically. Both of these substances were imported. Saltpeter came primarily from France's traditional ally, Turkey, where there were numerous saltpeter mines. As for caustic soda, the French had previously relied on Spain for sodium hydroxide and the Baltic region for potassium hydroxide. However, these supply routes had been disrupted.

The loss of half of the French fleet at Toulon meant that France had lost its naval dominance in the Mediterranean. British, Spanish, and even Italian naval forces had cut off France's traditional ally, Turkey, from contact. Consequently, saltpeter shipments ceased. The Revolutionary government was left with no option but to resort to smuggling. However, smuggling was limited and couldn't support the enormous wartime consumption.

"We are doing our best, Carnot, but you must understand we can't create something out of nothing," Robespierre replied. "We've ordered the entire country to collect saltpeter, but the production is limited and takes time. This is the best we can do for now."

"Very well, tell me, how many saltpeter mills have we established, and what's the estimated production?" Carnot questioned. "This is crucial for our next phase of troop development. If we can guarantee production, we can manufacture more 'little melons.' Otherwise, we may need to suspend production or even compress it."

"We are doing our best within our means," Robespierre responded. "But you know, we can't perform miracles."

Carnot fell silent. He knew that Robespierre and his colleagues were making sincere efforts. They had even dispatched teams to every village to collect saltpeter from farmers' barns and animal sheds, along with ash from their kitchens, used to purify potassium salts. Farmers were allowed to use these materials as partial payment for their taxes.

"In essence, we must rebuild the navy," Carnot finally said.

"Yes, we need to rebuild the navy, but that's not easy. We lack much of what's necessary," Robespierre remarked.

"I suggest we establish a 'Materials Management Committee' to coordinate the management of essential resources. We should also restart trade with neutral countries," proposed Barere. "We should suspend the ban on trade and conduct trade with neutral countries using hard currency, foreign exchange, and other resources."

"Hard currency? Where do we get so much hard currency?" Robespierre asked.

"Confiscate the property of these traitors, including not only money but also various luxury goods, art, and other things they need, like wine and other items. Their ships won't return empty; we can exchange goods for goods," Barere replied.

"The Paris Commune might not be happy about this," Cambon noted.

Naturally, they wouldn't be pleased, as conducting this trade would mean many resources being diverted for foreign trade, which France could ill afford. Despite Barere's mention of wine, everyone understood that wine alone would be insufficient. What he didn't explicitly state but was understood by all was that the other valuable commodity was grain.

This year had seen a bountiful harvest. Supporters of the Paris Commune, representing the poorest segment of society, believed that grain prices would drop. Yet exporting this grain in large quantities would practically create a famine. Those who supported the Commune would be hit the hardest by this policy. So, it was clear that the Commune would react with great dissatisfaction.

"Yes, they will be unhappy. If we do this, it will lead to hunger and maybe even deaths. Paris might fare better, but in rural areas outside the capital, there could be tragic cases of people who grow grain during a harvest year starving to death. However, if we don't do this, our economy will completely collapse. Economic collapse would lead to military and political collapse. At that point, we would see more deaths and a higher cost," Barere argued.

"This is something I believe we must do, even if it carries risks," Robespierre said. "As for the reaction from the Paris Commune, I'll talk to Ebel about it. They should understand the Republic's difficulties."

Although Robespierre expressed his intent to communicate with the Commune, few believed he could truly persuade Ebel and the others. Particularly Carnot, who immediately recalled Joseph's words during his "work report."

"The scarcity of resources, especially strategic materials, will be the most challenging problem moving forward. If we don't solve it, all the victories the Republic achieved earlier will lose their meaning. However, to address these issues, we must rely on trade with neutral countries. The Republic lacks hard currency, so to a significant extent, we can only rely on barter trade. And the only goods we can provide in large quantities are grains. Consequently, there will undoubtedly be damage to farmers and the urban poor who support the Commune. They certainly won't agree.

Thus, the Committee of Public Safety is likely to come into conflict with the Paris Commune. Ebel is an ambitious man, and he probably believes he hasn't received the recognition he deserves. He certainly won't accept this.

He will attempt to use the situation, the discontent of the urban poor, to start a revolution, behead all the people in the Committee of Public Safety, and establish direct rule of the Paris Commune over France. However, this situation is different from the time when the Brissotins controlled the National Convention. At that time, the National Convention was not united, and no effective measures could be taken. But the Committee of Public Safety now won't be as easy to deal with. So, prepare for a good show..."

Chapter 115: Joseph's Reappearance

On the nineteenth of December, which should have been a frosty day in Frimaire, Napoleon encountered an old acquaintance in Marseille. Joseph Fouché, a commissioner dispatched by the

Convention. Fouch had been sent to Marseille to replace Couthon, tasked with investigating the counter-revolutionary activities in the south and overseeing requisitioning of various supplies.

When Couthon had arrived in the south, he was full of ambition, believing he could achieve the same glory as Saint-Just. Little did he know that the people of the south proved to be more challenging to suppress. His actions were slightly delayed, and he missed out on the victorious battles.

As for his efforts in suppressing the counter-revolution, he believed he had done a decent job. However, even in Paris, his achievements in suppressing the counter-revolution were not appreciated. It was said that Robespierre privately complained:

"Couthon only knows how to kill, yes, he has eliminated quite a few counter-revolutionaries. But, if we're only looking to get rid of that bunch, anyone could do it. Why send him? He must organize production, accumulate wealth. Look at him, though, he has beheaded two thousand, but he hasn't collected much. The number of heads he has cut off, compared to the amount of wealth he has confiscated, doesn't even meet the average for commissioners. This is... he's just wasting heads..."

Due to this, the Committee of Public Safety convened a special meeting to discuss Couthon's performance. Everyone, except Carnot, believed Couthon had not been effective. As for Carnot, he maintained his habit of not directly evaluating Couthon's performance during this time. But as soon as he spoke, it was, "I need money, a lot of money, a whole lot of money!" This statement, more vehement than others' accusations of Couthon's ineffectiveness, caught everyone's attention.

So, it was decided that Couthon had to return immediately, and a more resourceful person should be sent to the south. Among the Jacobins, there were two people recognized for their financial skills, Danthon and Fouch.

In terms of personal preference, Robespierre had more reservations about Fouch after all, Fouch had betrayed him. But when it came to choosing between these two individuals, Robespierre did not hesitate to select Fouch. There were two main reasons for this choice: one could be spoken aloud, the other could only be thought but not expressed.

The reason that could be stated aloud was as follows: Danthon was indeed skilled at accumulating money, but at the same time, he was adept at keeping a portion of it for himself. If Danthon were tasked with this mission, he could probably contribute more to the treasury in terms of wealth and resources than Couthon. However, he would likely embezzle a considerable amount for himself, which would tarnish the reputation of the revolutionary government.

The reason that could only be thought but not spoken was this: Danthon held a much higher position and influence than Fouch. Even though he had recently been pushed out of the inner circle, if given the responsibility for this task and it went awry, he might make a powerful comeback.

As for Fouch, despite his talent and danger, he had a lower starting point and limited influence. Even if he achieved remarkable success, Robespierre believed he could still control him.

Most others shared similar thoughts on this matter, and given Fouch's recent performance in Le Mans, Vende, and Lyon, where he had not claimed the highest number of heads although there were still many their deaths were calculated and not excessive. This was an important quality in a commissioner.

In terms of acquiring funds, Fouch excelled above all. Among all the commissioners, he was the most effective at raising money for the government. Moreover, his success was not like those sent to Belgium, who offended all the locals and destabilized society. Fouch managed to gather resources while maintaining social stability, which was a considerable achievement.

If one were to calculate the amount Fouch raised for the government for each head he beheaded, his efficiency was frightening. This ratio was almost double that of Couthon.

Currently, the government was in dire need of funds and resources, making individuals like Fouch invaluable. So, everyone unanimously agreed to let Fouch replace Couthon. Even Carnot, who had always looked down on him, gave his support after asking, "Can this guy handle money?"

Fouch was indeed a diligent worker. Upon arrival, he greeted his old acquaintance, Napoleon, and then locked himself in his office for three full days. During this time, he did not leave his office except to eat and use the restroom.

During those three days, Fouch meticulously reviewed the documents left by Couthon. When he got hungry, he had some bread and a bottle of milk brought in. When he got tired, he ordered strong coffee or ice-cold water. When it got dark, he requested candles. For three days, Fouch did not lie down for even half an hour. With astonishing energy, he studied, analyzed, categorized, and made notes on Couthon's records.

After completing this work, Fouch told his guards, "I need some rest. During this time, you must guard this room diligently. No one is allowed near it, remember, not to enter, but to approach."

Fouch's voice was not loud, and it carried a tone of fatigue. However, the guards did not take the task lightly; they understood that any mishap could result in fatalities.

Fouch went to his room, lay down, and immediately fell asleep. After three days of work, he had gained a general understanding of the current situation.

Fouch slept for four hours, then rose with a renewed spirit. He devoured three people's worth of bread and found Napoleon to inform him that he needed to visit Toulon in person and requested some soldiers to assist him.

Napoleon handed him a battalion and told him to contact Dawe, stationed in Toulon, after his arrival.

"If you need any support, you can request it directly from Dawe. He's the young man who used artillery to repel the counter-revolutionaries in Le Mans last time. You know him," Napoleon said to Fouch.

"General Bonaparte, thank you for your help. We had a very pleasant cooperation in Le Mans last time. I hope that this time, we can both contribute to the republic's restoration," Fouch replied politely.

Fouch then mounted his horse, waved to Napoleon, and departed.

Napoleon knew why Fouch had gone to Toulon. Couthon had beheaded two thousand people in Toulon, but he did it too quickly. He hadn't had time to figure out where the aristocrats had hidden their money before he beheaded them.

Couthon probably believed he could search the aristocrats' estates in the countryside and find all the gold louis and silver cus they had hidden. However, in those times, even the provincial nobles knew to invest their wealth in interest-bearing accounts. Hiding bank documents was not an easy task.

Fouch's trip to Toulon was likely an attempt to recover some of this money. Napoleon, however, had reservations about the success of this endeavor.

Fouch spent a little over two days in Toulon before returning to Marseille. Upon his return, he sought out Napoleon.

"General Bonaparte, I've obtained some leads in Toulon. These leads indicate that there were individuals in Marseille who either participated in or at least observed the rebellion in Toulon."

"Observed?" Napoleon inquired.

"Meaning they knew about it but didn't report it," Fouch replied with a cold smile. "Knowing without informing is collusion, it's joining the traitors. In this struggle, no one has the luxury of staying neutral."

Napoleon understood Fouch's intentions. His trip to Toulon wasn't merely about uncovering the aristocrats' missing funds; it was about connecting the Toulon rebellion to the aristocracy and the wealthy in Marseille. If he succeeded, there was no need to worry about the money.

Napoleon decided it was best not to intervene in these matters and smiled, saying, "These individuals have hidden their secrets well, and I can't do much about it. I hope you achieve success, and if you need any assistance, don't hesitate to ask."

"If there's ever anything I need your help with, I will definitely come to you," Fouch replied courteously.

The day after Fouch returned from Toulon, he initiated a massive search operation. Over a thousand people were arrested in one fell swoop, and the prisons in Marseille were almost bursting at the seams.

However, Fouch didn't immediately hand these people over to the "Revolutionary Tribunal," nor did he accuse them of any crimes. Even during the arrests, he referred to them as "assisting with the investigation."

Fouch presented enough evidence to potentially send some of these people to the guillotine, then stated he was tracing the money hidden by the rebels in Toulon. He knew some of that money had been concealed by wealthy individuals in Marseille. Fouch also made it clear that if these individuals helped the Republic in this matter, he was a generous man, and his memory wasn't the best he might forget some of their actions.

Chapter 116: Bountiful Years and Famine

Fouch's method of coercion was essentially extortion through kidnapping. However, it differed from regular kidnappings in one key aspect - he didn't demand ransom from his captives. Instead, he required them to "expose the people hiding money that belongs to traitors of the Republic." He told each captive that if they could provide information within the first fifty to prove their loyalty to the Republic, they would be set free from prison and even receive a reward from the money Fouch confiscated from the traitors.

This was clearly a manipulative ploy to sow discord, but the prisoners in the jail were genuinely trapped in a "prisoner's dilemma." They understood Fouch's true intentions, yet they feared that someone else might betray them, causing them to suffer losses. Falling behind could mean not just losing money but potentially losing their heads!

Nevertheless, one's own head was always more important than anyone else's. So, even though everyone understood Fouch's sinister motives, they raced to "expose" others. Fouch then swiftly dispatched his agents to confiscate the wealth "legally" based on these tips. With the collaboration of the "aristocratic traitors," he proved highly efficient in seizing assets. In just a few days, Fouch had accumulated even more wealth than Robespierre had imagined. He then proceeded to behead hundreds of "undeniable traitors" and seized their possessions. Simultaneously, he posted a commendation order in Marseille, recognizing the "citizens of the Republic" who had remained loyal and contributed to thwarting the aristocrats' conspiracy.

Subsequently, these "citizens of the Republic" demonstrated exceptional revolutionary spirit. They volunteered to donate their wealth to the Republic, claiming it was shameful to possess excessive riches during times of national crisis. They pledged to embark on a self-sustaining and honorable life henceforth.

The guillotine's falling blade was undoubtedly terrifying, but Fouch believed that a blade perpetually hanging overhead was even more effective in making people yield.

At this point, Fouch had achieved significant success in his mission. The new municipal administration had been established, sidelining the nobility and "respectable" citizens, and it appeared that Fouch should return to Paris. Furthermore, Fouch's friends, Eber and Chaumette, needed him now more than ever because the situation in Paris seemed to be going awry.

The "Committee of Public Safety" had passed resolutions opening the ports and promoting trade with neutral nations, involving a significant portion of barter trade. The most crucial commodity in this barter trade was food. However, the consequences of exporting vast quantities of grain soon became evident. In some regions, previously subdued rebellions reignited, and despite strict price controls and supply guarantees, people noticed significant changes in the quality of the flour.

In this era, Europeans primarily used "whole wheat flour" to make bread. This meant that the entire wheat, including the bran and germ, was ground together in millstones, resulting in flour containing bran and germ.

In later times, whole wheat flour became a sought-after health food, and modern whole wheat bread seemed to taste good. But in those days, whole wheat bread did not have the same flavor. Nevertheless, having flour to make bread was considered a blessing by many impoverished folks.

However, this newfound blessing was hard to sustain. People began to notice that the flour they purchased was becoming heavier, but its volume was decreasing. The bread they made from it also tasted worse and was less filling.

When they bit into these loaves, they often experienced a strange greasiness or encountered rough textures that could scratch their teeth. This was normal since millstones of the time were used to grind flour, and some grit or sand would inevitably mix with the flour. People had become accustomed to this. But the flour was genuinely awry now, and rumors circulated among the common people that the flour was being adulterated with various substances like chalk, talc, or sawdust.

In truth, adding such substances to flour was commonplace in that era, and most commoners had never eaten flour without these additives. But today, even they felt something was off. It was clear that more than the usual adulteration was taking place flour was being mixed with all sorts of random materials.

This behavior naturally sparked discontent among the commoners. Following their usual practice, they prepared to hang the flour merchants from lampposts. However, this time, those attempting to hang the merchants were quickly arrested and sent to the "Revolutionary Tribunal," where they were assured a life free from hunger.

This, of course, stirred widespread dissatisfaction among the commoners and, secretly, some jubilation among their advocates, such as the leaders of the Paris Commune. In their view, an opportunity for someone who could "truly represent the common people" to control France was within reach.

Fouch, fresh from his significant contributions to the Republic, had also become a prominent figure in Eber's circle. If Eber's faction had any plans, the resourceful and capable Fouch would be of great help.

However, Fouch had taken ill due to the intense work he had been doing recently. It wasn't that he had overexerted himself; Fouch had a peculiar constitution. When he wielded power and remained tirelessly busy, his body remained remarkably healthy. Conversely, when he had nothing to do and had idle time, he genuinely fell ill. In the original history, Fouch never suffered any severe illness during his busiest periods. But after he was forced to relinquish all his power in 1816 due to the "Regicides Act" and went into exile, illness overtook him rapidly.

For Fouch, holding and using power was the best form of self-care.

The reason for Fouch's "illness" was because he felt that the situation in Paris was not as optimistic as Eber had imagined.

Now, it was entirely different from 1789, even from just a few months ago. When the Brissotins held power, there were plenty of opponents within the National Convention. They hindered them from passing any resolutions against the Paris Commune, or even measures that would diminish the power of the Commune. For instance, when the Commune surrounded the National Convention, compelling them to pass a resolution to hand over more than twenty Brissotin deputies, one Brissotin representative had proposed forming a guard to protect the Convention. Still, that proposal was swiftly rejected in the Convention.

But now, in the "Committee of Public Safety," while there were factions, they were far more united than the previous National Convention. Additionally, they directly controlled the French military, making them more formidable and unified.

Furthermore, the Paris Commune's own power had diminished significantly. The incessant use of the guillotine and the terror it symbolized had wearied many. The most energetic and fearless individuals had enlisted in the military during repeated conscription rounds. Even the old veterans of the National Guard who became "volunteers" had gone to the front, taking their cannons with them. So now, the Paris Commune had fewer military assets at its disposal.

Eber had tried to replenish the National Guard with new recruits, but most of them lacked revolutionary fervor, physical fitness, and proper training. In previous times, such individuals wouldn't have been admitted to the National Guard.

All these changes led Fouch to believe that continuing to align with Eber might not lead to a favorable outcome. But if he were to return to Paris at this moment, it would signify his allegiance to Eber and the "Committee of Public Safety" publicly. In a sense, he would be trapped between them. Given the absence of specific orders preventing his return, Fouch suspected that Robespierre wanted to place him and Eber in the same predicament.

Therefore, feigning illness became Fouch's choice for now.

Of course, he couldn't pretend to be ill for too long. However, for Fouch, this period would be sufficient to determine which side he should align with. If Eber's faction emerged victorious, he would remain an important figure within their ranks. If the Committee of Public Safety triumphed, Robespierre would likely not spare him. But perhaps, through Napoleon, he could forge a connection with Carnot an appealing option indeed.

Chapter 117: The Naval Research Institute

The situation with saltpeter shortages had finally eased, and on the snowy day of December 21 in the Republican Calendar (which didn't correspond directly to the months of the conventional calendar it had slightly fewer days in each month, similar to the Chinese lunar calendar), a significant deposit of saltpeter was discovered in the Douran region of France.

To say it was a discovery wasn't entirely accurate. The presence of saltpeter in Douran had been known since the time when France was still a kingdom, and it had been documented. However, the French had never considered it a valuable resource during the kingdom's era.

Compared to the saltpeter from India or Turkey, the quality of Douran's saltpeter was mediocre. Saltpeter from India and Turkey could be used with minimal purification, and even for making gunpowder for bullets and artillery, it didn't need extensive refinement. But Douran's saltpeter required significant purification, significantly increasing production costs. Hence, during the kingdom's time, when they had a steady supply of saltpeter from long-term allies, the French didn't bother with Douran's resource. Over time, they even forgot about it.

It was only recently that someone rediscovered Douran's saltpeter while collecting grapes for wine.

Now, the "Committee of National Salvation," responsible for everything from saltpeter mines to pigsties and even toilets, had no qualms about the quality of the saltpeter mines in Douran or the high refining costs. Douran had convenient transportation and wasn't a logistical challenge, so the Committee marked out twenty-eight areas in Paris for building saltpeter refining facilities.

Even so, relying solely on Douran's saltpeter was not enough to equip a million-strong French army with an abundance of "little sweet melons," as the Chinese called them. Due to the urgency of production, various accidents continued to occur in Douran's mines and Paris's refining facilities, slowing down the increase in production.

"We have saltpeter mines, which is good news, but the bad news is that our enemies are gradually regrouping, and our production speed is not fast enough. Moreover, without enough caustic soda, we can't mass-produce 'Republic No. 1' explosives," Carnot said to Joseph, who was reporting on his work. "Joseph, do you know anything about shipbuilding?"

"What?" Joseph was taken aback. "Lazare, I was born by the sea, but I've never been involved in shipbuilding."

"I see. It's a shot in the dark, I admit. Well, I had this idea because some time ago, you published a paper on calculating fluid resistance using mathematical methods, right?"

"Yeah, but that was a year ago," Joseph replied.

"Has there been any progress in that research?"

"Not really. That research has been on hold for a while now. First, there was the war, then the explosives, and I couldn't spare time for such purely academic matters."

"Damn it!" Carnot exclaimed. "We still rely on smuggling for our caustic soda. Foreign smugglers charge exorbitant prices, and our own smuggling is expensive, as it's easy to get caught with both the ship and the crew. So, we need a fast ship, preferably faster than any ship the British or Spanish have. Well...? What can you do right now?"

Joseph pondered for a moment and then said, "Lazare, I understand your point. Tomorrow, I'll provide you with a list of the personnel and materials required."

"People are easy; materials..." Carnot mused, "let's try to be as economical as possible."

Joseph remembered a type of ship that might fit Carnot's requirements the Flying Clipper. In his previous life, Joseph had built a model of a Flying Clipper with his son, so he had some knowledge of the type of ship that had competed with early steam-powered cargo ships in the Atlantic.

Joseph stood up, preparing to leave, but then he remembered something. "Ah, Lazare, do we have enough wood for shipbuilding? Keep an eye on it; make sure it's not being repurposed for something else."

"You'd better give me that list first!" Carnot said impatiently.

Carnot was in a tough spot. Robespierre and others had forcibly redirected French sailors into smuggling, which Carnot felt was a heavy loss because sailors were not like infantry you couldn't just recruit them from the countryside.

But Robespierre claimed that unless Carnot had some new solutions, they were out of money. Joseph returned to the research institute, spent two days preparing a proposal, and then came back to Carnot's office.

After closing the doors and windows, Joseph handed over his proposal to Carnot. "Lazare, have a look. This is the basic plan."

Carnot examined the document closely. Joseph couldn't help but ask, "Where's the coffee, Lazare? I was planning to have a cup before leaving."

"We're running low on supplies," Carnot replied, not even looking up.

"Ah, I was hoping to take some with me from here."

"Your allocation is already quite generous. For now, only the research staff get coffee. There's none left for anyone else."

"Damn, I thought I could make up for some of my losses here."

"Well, you'll have to drink water; I'm busy."

After a while, Carnot put down the papers. "What do you think?"

"The plan has potential, but, Lazare, we're friends, aren't we? Don't you think the budget is a bit high in your vision?"

"What? You think I'm asking for too much money? Joseph, let's be honest," Joseph's eyes widened, and he countered vigorously, "Look at it; is there any part of my plan that's unnecessary? Is there anything that hasn't been calculated for the best cost-effectiveness? All the relevant calculations are in the appendix; have you looked at them?"

"I have, of course."

"So, is my math flawed?"

"Of course, it's not. But..."

"The only problem is that we can't come up with that much money," Carnot said.

"Can we ease the schedule's demands a bit?"

"Well, how is that possible? Joseph, don't haggle, okay?"

"Ugh... Lazare, you're treating me like just another researcher. This won't work. I think, with your abilities, at the very least, the schedule and costs should be halved."

"Do you understand science?" Joseph was getting impatient. "In science, sometimes things can't be clearly explained, and there's a significant element of luck. Take Archimedes; if the servant filling his bath hadn't put too much water, how long do you think it would have taken him to discover the law of buoyancy? How can you suggest a fifty percent cut? If Robespierre and the others believe your nonsense and my luck isn't good, if the money runs out before we have results, how many people will accuse me of negligence or even sabotage?"

"Oh... I understand," Carnot laughed. "Joseph, you're so... you're so cautious. Well, I promise that if things go south, I'll cover for you."

"Nonsense! You think you can cover everything, who do you think you are? Atlas?" Joseph scoffed, "Do you really think this is a matter where you need to 'cover' for me?"

"You should hand this plan over to them and let them handle the pressure," Joseph advised. "Put the pressure on them! If they see we have a staged approach, first validating the most critical and likely successful aspects, then, if it works, they can consider halving the budget. If it doesn't work, they've reviewed and approved the plan; we're not responsible. Understand?"

Carnot was briefly taken aback, but after a moment, he nodded. "That's not a bad idea; let's do it this way. So, Joseph, where do you think it's best to build the new shipyard?"

"It's better to place it on the Mediterranean side. Spain is one of our smuggling targets, after all. Our envisioned ships will prioritize speed, and other performance aspects will likely be affected, including some of the maritime capabilities. Using these in the Mediterranean would be relatively safer."

...

A day later, at a meeting of the Committee of National Salvation, Carnot criticized all the penny-pinchers, including Robespierre, until the committee finally approved the new research plan. Shortly after, Joseph received orders to go to Toulon, where he would establish the Naval Technology Division of the Military Technology Research Institute.

Chapter 118: The Collaboration of Two Josephs

The decision had been made, but its execution required more time. Establishing an institution was no easy feat, and preparations involving personnel and resources took time. Additionally, many matters in the Paris Institute needed to be organized. Therefore, it wasn't until mid-Rainmoon that Joseph was finally ready to depart for Toulon.

If we only considered the research aspect, having Lavoisier oversee the Paris Institute would have been the best choice. However, given Lavoisier's "prisoner" status and some of his quirks, it was unlikely that this idea would be accepted, not only by the "Committee of Public Safety" but even within Joseph's own circle.

Furthermore, Laplace also wanted to join the "Military Technical Research Institute." However, due to Laplace's close associations with certain individuals, Joseph had always maintained that Laplace was more suitable for theoretical research rather than practical technical research. Therefore, appointing him to lead the institute was out of the question.

So, to replace Joseph and temporarily manage the Paris Institute, Monge took the role.

In terms of academic standing, Monge was naturally not on par with the previous two individuals. However, Monge had a military background, was reliable, and had a good relationship with Joseph. Hence, Joseph readily recommended him to Carnot.

Carnot was also satisfied with this choice. Monge had been his teacher, and he knew that Monge was a reliable individual. Although Monge's abilities might not match Joseph's, it also meant that his spending habits wouldn't be on par with Joseph's. These days, he chased Robespierre every day for funds, and then Joseph chased after him. Perhaps, they could temporarily relax a bit now.

Carnot breathed a sigh of relief. However, in the South, another person, or rather, a group of people, had a very different reaction. This group was none other than Joseph's unreliable siblings.

"Lucien, Lucien..." Napoleon shouted.

"Here, what's up?" Lucien, sweating, rushed in from outside.

"What were you doing?" Napoleon asked.

"Nothing much, just taking a walk with Pauline outside," Lucien hadn't realized that something seemed amiss.

"Ah, Lucien," Napoleon suddenly smiled. "I have a surprise for you. Want to know what it is?"

At that moment, Pauline entered the room, holding a small ivory-handled umbrella, just in time to hear Napoleon's words. She asked eagerly, "What's the surprise? Napoleon, tell us, what is it?"

Napoleon didn't continue but changed the subject, "Lucien, when you came south, Joseph gave you a stack of exercises. How many have you completed?"

"I've done quite a few; don't worry. We'll finish them before returning to Paris. What's the fuss about..." Lucien said, still not realizing that something wasn't right.

Napoleon didn't say anything but just stared at Lucien with a smile.

Lucien, seeing the mischievous expression on Napoleon's face, began to sense that something was a bit off. He hesitated and asked, "What's going on? Napoleon, what do you mean?"

"I have a surprise for you," Napoleon said. "Joseph is coming to Toulon very soon. Surprised, isn't it? Unexpected, right?"

"What?" Lucien was momentarily stunned. "How is that possible? Joseph is supposed to be... busy."

"Surprised, aren't you? Unexpected, right?" Napoleon grinned mischievously. "The army is establishing a Naval Technical Research Institute in Toulon, and Joseph is coming here temporarily to oversee the work. But don't worry, your exercises are almost done, even though they're not complete yet. That should be enough, right?"

"Damn!" Lucien exclaimed. "What kind of surprise is this? Napoleon, explain to me, what kind of surprise is this?"

Napoleon replied, "When did Joseph arrive?"

"On Rainmoon 15th, so you have three more days," Napoleon answered.

"Great!" Lucien shouted. "What a relief! What a surprise, indeed!"

Successfully frightening Lucien, Napoleon felt quite pleased. During lunch, he even had an extra piece of bread. As for Lucien, he didn't come downstairs to eat at all. Letizia had to personally bring him some bread and milk in the study.

Lucien didn't come down for lunch, and he didn't come down for dinner either. Around ten in the evening, while Napoleon was sound asleep (there were no video games like King of Glory or PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds in this era, not even electric lights), he suddenly felt someone lightly shaking his arm.

"Who is it?" Napoleon opened his eyes.

"Oh, it's me, Lucien."

"Goodness, what time is it? What are you doing?" Napoleon was quite annoyed.

"Napoleon, I have a few problems, and I don't know how to solve them. Can you help me?"

"Are you serious? Can't we do this tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow, when it's light out, who knows where you'll be? You're not like Mom; she can always find people no matter the time. Please help me now!"

"Fine, fine! I want to sleep! We'll look at it tomorrow during dinner," Napoleon said.

"Please, Napoleon, just help me," Lucien implored. "These problems are quite challenging. If Joseph asks, I might embarrass myself..."

"Nonsense! How could Joseph give you problems I can't solve?!" Napoleon said in his mouth, but he was thinking, "Joseph is quite nasty when he comes up with these questions. They can't be approached with ordinary thinking. I can't predict if he might leave Lucien with one or two genuinely challenging problems."

"Show them to me," Napoleon said.

"Okay, but let me light a candle first."

...

"This is so simple! Lucien, you're not... I can't believe that you're my and Joseph's brother. How can you be so clueless? Look, draw an auxiliary line here... then... and then... Well, you wait for me to think... There's no way. Lucien, let's try a different approach. Let's establish a coordinate system here... All right, do you understand?"

"Not at all," Lucien said, looking puzzled.

...

Three days later, Joseph arrived in Marseilles. He first went home to visit his mother and other siblings. His mother was still in good health, though she had aged a bit, her health remained robust. His siblings were also doing well, especially his sisters who were becoming more and more beautiful. However, they seemed to have developed some distance, perhaps due to growing up and Joseph's prolonged absence. Even Pauline, who used to stick to him or Napoleon, now appeared somewhat reserved. She seemed to be avoiding him.

"Girls grow up this way," Joseph consoled himself. Then he told Napoleon, "I can't stay in Marseilles for too long. Tomorrow morning, I'll set out for Toulon. I've brought an order for Mr. Fouch. You should find someone to take me to visit him."

Joseph had been well-prepared for his visit, thanks to prior notice. He was pleased with this assignment because it meant he wouldn't be recalled to Paris at the most critical moment. Although Joseph had been in the provinces, he closely monitored the situation in Paris, which he believed would be very dangerous in the coming month or two.

Once Joseph left, several people breathed sighs of relief.

"Lucien, why are you so nervous? Haven't you completed your assignments?" Pauline asked.

"I have, but some of the questions were done by Napoleon, and he didn't explain them well. If Joseph asks me about them, I might embarrass myself..."

Joseph had been in Marseilles for a short time, but they had used his limited time to discuss various issues. By the time they looked outside, it was already dark.

"Oh, it's this late?" Joseph said as he glanced at the sky. "I had intended to check Lucien's homework, but by now, he's probably asleep. I need to leave early tomorrow... Oh well, I'll check it later. Toulon isn't too far from Marseilles; I'll have plenty of chances..."

Chapter 119: The Flying Clipper and the Maiden of Toulon

As Joseph and his entourage departed, Lucien let out a sigh of relief. He patted his chest and said, "Thank goodness, Joseph was in a hurry. Well, we can take a break now. It's finally daylight!"

After uttering those words, he suddenly turned to Napoleon and asked, "Napoleon, Joseph's visit to Toulon and the matter of Pauline in Toulon, almost everyone there knows about it. Do you think..."

Pauline grew nervous upon hearing this.

Napoleon reassured them, "Don't worry. Joseph is a cautious and rule-abiding person. He's responsible for highly confidential matters, which means he can't easily interact with the locals.

Normally, he only deals with the researchers at the institute and the soldiers responsible for security. Those researchers are from out of town, so they don't know about this matter. As for the soldiers, I've already ordered them not to engage in any non-work conversations with anyone involved in the research. Furthermore, I've advised Joseph that, due to the inefficiency of the Kudon administration in Toulon, there are security risks, so it's best if he stays within the research institute. You know how cautious Joseph is, so this adds an extra layer of security. Besides, his institute isn't even located within the actual city of Toulon..."

"Napoleon, you are truly impressive!" Lucien genuinely commended Napoleon with a thumbs-up. "Now I can sleep in peace."

Napoleon replied, "So can I... But Lucien, don't relax too much. According to the current schedule, Joseph takes a day off every ten days. Toulon and Marseille are so close; you never know when he might suddenly return to check on your work."

Lucien shivered and said, "At least not today. Ah, I'm going back to sleep..."

As Napoleon had anticipated, Joseph had very limited interaction with the locals in Toulon. He didn't even enter the city; instead, he went straight to an estate in the suburbs.

The previous owner of this estate had already gone to meet his maker, and the Republic's government had naturally confiscated the property. There were many such estates in Toulon. When the "Naval Research Institute" needed a location, this estate was chosen for its suitability.

Suitability included several factors. First, the estate didn't produce much, so converting it into a laboratory wouldn't harm production. Moreover, the estate was located by the sea and had a nearly enclosed small bay nearby. A small harbor was constructed there for ease of experimentation and secrecy.

Once the location was determined, the rest of the work involved modifying the estate, erecting high walls around it, and preparing various supplies. All of this had been prepared before Joseph's arrival. Joseph's current task was to quickly get the institution up and running and produce one or two efficient smuggling ships.

Upon taking up his post, Joseph immediately immersed himself in his work. In just one week, he completed the first model of the world's first flying clipper. After undergoing testing in a water tank, it received unanimous praise from the Navy's engineers.

This model differed significantly from other ships of the era, with the most significant distinction being its extreme length-to-beam ratio. In this era, ships generally had a length-to-beam ratio of around 4. For instance, the British Royal Navy's "HMS Victory" warship had a length-to-beam ratio of approximately 4.3, and even fast cruisers, designed for speed, usually had a length-to-beam ratio of about 4.6. However, Joseph's ship model had an astonishing length-to-beam ratio of 6.5.

According to Joseph's calculations based on his experimental formula, this high length-to-beam ratio significantly reduced resistance. Additionally, the longer length allowed the ship to accommodate more masts and hoist more sails, resulting in greater power.

Less resistance and more power naturally meant higher speeds. If Joseph's calculations were correct, this ship should be at least one-third faster than British cruisers under the same wind conditions, making it nearly impossible to capture at sea.

Of course, to achieve such performance, this ship was designed to the extreme and came with significant drawbacks in many other aspects.

Firstly, it had reduced cargo capacity. Anyone with basic knowledge of geometry knew that the more elongated a ship's body, the lower the ratio of volume to surface area. This meant that for the same displacement, such ships could carry significantly less cargo.

Moreover, the increased number of masts and sails raised the ship's center of gravity, reducing its stability and making it prone to capsizing. To address this, the ship's design involved lowering other parts of the ship, using a deep V-bottom hull, which increased draft and guaranteed a wet deck. Large stabilizing fins were also added, further diminishing maneuverability.

The high length-to-beam ratio, coupled with the massive stabilizing fins, made the ship challenging to maneuver. Despite these deficiencies, the design had its extreme advantages and disadvantages.

"Since this thing isn't meant for warfare anyway, it's not a problem if it's not agile. As long as it can achieve high speeds, who can catch something that's one-third faster than anything else out there?" Joseph reasoned.

So, at least for now, if this ship could demonstrate the performance shown in the model in the testing tank, it was precisely what France needed. It could effortlessly evade interception by the British and Spanish, smuggling in essential supplies for the Republic quickly.

The first ship, however, was relatively small, with a tonnage of about 200 tons and a pitiful cargo capacity of just 100 tons. Considering the need to carry people and provisions, the available payload was even smaller.

To expedite the testing and development, this ship was constructed somewhat haphazardly. Even so, it would still take less than a month to complete.

Since Joseph wasn't well-versed in shipbuilding, he found himself with some spare time now. However, the presence of rebels hiding near Toulon made him too wary to relax or venture into the city.

One day, the weather suddenly cleared up. In the Rainy Month, especially near the Mediterranean, such clear weather was a rare sight. Joseph gazed at the rising sun and had a sudden urge to go outside. If he couldn't go into the city, then how about visiting the military camp near Toulon to relax? It seemed like a good idea. He remembered the time he and Napoleon had come to France and took a boat to the sea near Fort Malgrve, which offered beautiful scenery and was now a military-restricted area where no one else could enter. Resting there, fishing amidst the rocky bay, sounded quite appealing.

With this thought in mind, Joseph couldn't sit still any longer. He had a pass signed by Fouche, Napoleon, and Dawoo, allowing him to travel freely to any location in the vicinity of Toulon. He took a few people with him, ostensibly for a topographic survey, and, under the escort of a cavalry unit, set off in a carriage towards Fort Malgrve to go fishing.

The journey from the "Naval Research Institute" to Fort Malgrve was short, taking about half an hour. When Joseph arrived near Fort Malgrve, there was a flag-raising ceremony taking place.

The flag-raising at Fort Malgrve was different from elsewhere. At the highest point of the fort, a tall flagpole stood, and a soldier dressed in civilian men's clothing but with long lady's wigs was in the midst of raising a three-colored flag, under the watchful gaze of other soldiers.

"Hmm? Why are they raising the flag like this here?" Joseph couldn't help but find it peculiar as he watched from a distance. However, there was no one around to provide an answer.

The carriage arrived at the fort's entrance, and Joseph's aides showed the pass to the guard. After a brief inspection, the barriers were lifted, and a major came to receive him.

Joseph stepped out of the carriage and, accompanied by Major Andr, entered the fort. As they walked, he inquired casually, "Ah, Major, I saw your flag-raising ceremony just now, and it seems different from other places. Can you explain why there's such a ceremony here?"

Major Andr hesitated for a moment and then replied, "Monsieur General, General Bonaparte has issued orders that your work is of the highest secrecy. To maintain this secrecy, we are not permitted to converse with you. I can only accompany you inside, and after that, I'll have to remain silent."

Joseph listened and felt somewhat baffled. He couldn't shake the feeling that Napoleon's order was suspicious, carrying a scent of favoritism. He wondered what Napoleon was up to.

But he knew that asking directly wouldn't yield any answers, so he decided not to press the matter further.

After a tour of the fort, Joseph told Major Andr that he didn't need an escort any longer. Once the major left, Joseph sent his aides to inquire about the peculiar flag-raising ceremony and then set off to find a fishing spot. He brought fishing gear and sat on a large rocky outcrop behind the fort, ready to enjoy a day of fishing.

Chapter 120: Joseph is Indeed Terrifying

A few days later marked the start of the "Ten-Day Holiday." Ever since the French Republic adopted the "Republican Calendar," this holiday system seemed to align with the ancient customs of the East, where officials would enjoy one day off every ten days. This system was humorously praised in "Tengwang Pavilion Ode" with the line "ten-day holidays, friends aplenty." Meanwhile, in the Western territories, the tradition of resting one day every seven days, influenced by Jewish customs, was changed to one day every ten days after the introduction of the "Republican Calendar" to distinguish it from Christian practices.

Joseph had never been a fan of this quirky holiday system.

Today marked the second ten-day holiday for Joseph since arriving in Toulon. During the previous one, he had been too engrossed in work and ended up spending it in overtime. But this time, with some free time and a few other reasons, Joseph decided to take this holiday to relax with his family. For this purpose, he had prepared by getting a good night's sleep a few days in advance.

Early in the morning, before the sun had even risen, Joseph hopped into a carriage, accompanied by a cavalry escort, and left the "Naval Research Institute" headed for Marseille. The distance between Toulon and Marseille was quite significant, and ideally, they should have departed in the evening, slept in the carriage, and arrived in the morning. But due to safety concerns, Joseph opted for a daytime journey. After all, they had half a day to spare, and it was ample time to reunite with his brothers.

After a hasty journey, they reached Marseille around noon, just in time for a family meal.

Joseph's arrival was greeted with genuine enthusiasm by the entire family. After lunch, he addressed everyone, "You all know that I have only one day for this holiday, so I'll have to return in the evening. It's ridiculous that most of my time is spent on the road."

The family members echoed their agreement, but Joseph noticed a glint of satisfaction in Lucien's eyes.

"Lucien, last time I visited, I wanted to check on your schoolwork. Unfortunately, I spent too much time with Mr. Fouch, and when I returned, you were already asleep. I didn't want to wake you, and I had to rush off early the next morning. Is there anything you don't understand?" Joseph inquired.

"Nothing, Napoleon explained everything to me," Lucien replied.

"Good, let's go to the study together. Bring your exercise book," Joseph said as he stood up.

"Joseph, if Lucien hasn't performed well, don't be too harsh, and don't beat him," Ltitia suddenly interjected.

"Mother, am I such a rough person? Lucien, tell your mother, when have I ever beaten you? I'm not a violent man like Napoleon," Joseph replied nonchalantly.

"Joseph rarely resorts to violence," Lucien obediently added, while thinking to himself, "But he has more tricks up his sleeve than violence..."

With that, Lucien accompanied Joseph to the study, and Napoleon followed. It was unclear if he intended to support his brother or watch Lucien's antics.

Since Napoleon followed, Pauline and the others followed suit.

Joseph took a seat at the desk and examined Lucien's exercises. Lucien had performed well this time, and he had indeed completed many questions. In the past, Lucien had been less diligent.

"It seems he's trying to cover his tracks," Joseph thought to himself, but he put on a friendly smile and said, "Lucien, this time you've done well. Your self-discipline has improved significantly. And, when you solved this particular question, the knowledge you used was something I hadn't taught you yet. Did Carnot teach you before?"

"No, no," Lucien said, "Napoleon taught me."

"Napoleon, you've done quite well," Joseph smiled. "I know you're busy just like me, always in a rush. In such circumstances, finding time to teach Lucien is commendable. I assume it was quite challenging for you. Lucien isn't as efficient as you in learning mathematics."

Napoleon nodded and continued, "Yes, indeed, it's just a limit problem, but it took me several days to explain it to him. Even Pauline understood it while listening, and she doesn't even study math."

Joseph nodded and continued, "However, Napoleon, there's actually a simpler solution for this question. You don't need to do it the way you did; it's too complicated. Look, all we need to do is... Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes, I understand!" Napoleon quickly nodded, while Lucien remained baffled.

"Alright, let's finish the assessment here," Joseph said.

Lucien immediately breathed a sigh of relief and hurriedly put his exercise book away.

"Lucien, your performance is commendable," Joseph said, "You can also relax a bit. When you have time, you can go nearby and enjoy yourself. But I heard from Mr. Fouch that the suppression of counter-revolutionaries in Coudon was not successful, and while many were killed, many rebels evaded capture. Even the place we currently live was their estate. They must hold a deep grudge against our family, so if you go out, be cautious and visit safe places. There's a beautiful and secure place near Toulon, the Marguerite Fort..."

Lucien and Pauline's faces changed.

"When Napoleon and I first came to France, we took a boat trip near there; the scenery was truly breathtaking. Besides, this is where Napoleon achieved a decisive victory. He's quite the show-off, and I assume he's already taken you there, right?" Joseph continued, as if he were simply recommending a nice tourist spot.

"No, no," Lucien hurriedly replied, "I've been busy with math, I didn't have time."

"In that case, Napoleon, since you've been there, take him to enjoy," Joseph said with a smile.

"Pauline, you can also take him to raise the flag. After all, you are the Saint of Toulon."

"Ah..." Lucien sat down abruptly, and Pauline turned pale. However, Pauline had only heard about Joseph's terrifying reputation from others and hadn't personally experienced it. Although she was startled, she didn't lose her composure like Lucien.

"Joseph, I...", Pauline began.

"Pauline, to be honest, you are not at fault in this matter. You are also a victim," Joseph said. "These two troublemakers are to blame for this nonsense, even threatening my sister. I have no intention of blaming you for this."

"I knew it, Joseph, you're the best! You've always been so kind to me," Pauline quickly responded.

"But I'm saddened," Joseph said. "Pauline, I've always been good to you, haven't I? So why did you assist these two rascals in deceiving me?"

"They... they frightened me," Pauline burst into tears. She saw an opportunity to get herself out of a tight spot, and she wasn't about to let it slip. "They threatened that if you found out about this, you'd punish me and make me do math problems non-stop. Then Lucien told me that if I didn't help, you'd drown him in math problems. So I..."

"Napoleon, you're quite a character!" Joseph gritted his teeth. "You even threatened your own sister. Today, I must teach you a lesson."

Joseph stood up as if searching for a riding crop or some other substitute.

"Joseph, spare Lucien. In reality, it's not entirely his fault. If not for that storm, if not for the heavy fog..." Pauline continued.

"Lucien, look at Pauline. You threatened her, and she's still trying to defend you. Aren't you ashamed? It's infuriating! Lucien, tell me, how should I punish you?" Joseph inquired.

"I... I'll do another set of practice exercises..." Lucien quickly replied.

"No, that's not enough!" Joseph said firmly. "First, you must write a reflection."

"Alright, alright, I'll write it," Lucien replied promptly.

"This reflection must touch your soul. It must explore the root causes of your mistake and trigger a genuine transformation from within. It must be sincere, with a minimum of five thousand words, no spelling errors, no misuse of words, no repetitive sentences, and no attempts to pad the word count with redundant phrases. It must be submitted to me before dinner tonight. Do you understand?"

Lucien stared blankly, nearly on the verge of collapsing.

As Joseph mentioned the "Saint of Toulon," Napoleon knew something terrible was about to happen. While Joseph was scolding Lucien, Napoleon saw an opportunity to escape. Sneaking out of the room, he intended to go inspect the troops, staying away until Joseph returned to Toulon. However, just as he was about to cross the threshold, Joseph's voice stopped him in his tracks.

"Where are you going, Napoleon?" Joseph asked.