

The Fox 121

Chapter 121: The Black Pearl

Joseph had a busy schedule, so he set off later that afternoon. Napoleon, being thoughtful, even arranged for a cavalry escort from one of his regiments to accompany him. Yet, as they bid him farewell, there was an air of uncertainty, as if they were watching a paper boat being set alight.

Joseph hadn't criticized Napoleon too severely; he simply pointed out that while his intentions to protect his younger brother were admirable, his methods were flawed.

"A truly moral person demands and guides others through moral means when showing care, only the unwise resort to indulgence and leniency in expressing their affection. You, and Pauline, have both erred in this. Pauline is still a child, but Napoleon, you are not. You should reflect on your actions and avoid repeating such mistakes. As for the recent incident, the blame doesn't lie solely with you; Lecroix, whom you dispatched, performed admirably. However, you allowed personal desires to cloud your judgment concerning Lucien. You must realize that the world doesn't revolve around our personal wishes. But Napoleon, you are a clever man and excel in many aspects. I believe you can understand this lesson."

As a result, both Napoleon and Pauline were let off lightly, while poor Lucien was not only ordered to complete a 5,000-word self-critique but was also assigned a mountain of extra work. He was still busy rewriting his self-critique when Joseph departed, following Joseph's instructions to have Napoleon receive it in an official manner once it was completed.

Back at the research facility, Joseph immersed himself once more in his work. Time swiftly passed, and the first hastily constructed smuggling ship was finally ready.

It was a makeshift vessel, and its imperfections were evident in many areas. But considering its sole purpose was to test technical specifications, there weren't many stringent requirements.

Nonetheless, even for a vessel of this nature, a secret launching ceremony was in order.

One morning, the small ship, painted in a dark gray color, gently slid into a small bay along a buttered wooden slide. It stirred up some white foamy waves in the calm bay.

"This ship must be very fast, faster than any ship we've ever seen," commented a slender naval captain, gazing at the white splashes.

"Captain Sparrow, are you sure about that?" Joseph inquired while observing.

"The splashes during the launch were minimal, much less than other ships of similar size," Captain Sparrow replied.

At this point, the freshly launched ship had stabilized. Captain Sparrow informed Joseph, "General, we must test this ship now. Please allow me to depart temporarily."

"Wish you a smooth voyage," Joseph said.

Captain Sparrow led a group of sailors onto two small boats and rowed toward the new ship.

Captain Sparrow had originally been the bosun on the naval escort ship "Tirena" during the revolutionary era. He had led soldiers in preventing a mutiny by the ship's captain, Lebron, earning

the trust of the revolutionary government. Subsequently, he was appointed to command a smuggling ship, responsible for smuggling various critical strategic resources between France and Spain.

During these operations, he had evaded British and Spanish warships multiple times. In an encounter with a Spanish cruiser, he had lured the Spaniards into a reef area, causing severe damage to their cruiser. In Richet's words, "No smuggling ship captain is more reliable and capable than Sparrow."

Typically, small ships of around 200 tons had only one mast, and the mast's height was relatively limited. In addition, a forward slanting mast was used for triangular sails.

These were the mainstay of smuggling ships. They had shallow drafts, operated along the coast, and could reach places where larger vessels couldn't. If the captain was familiar with the local waters, they could use reefs and shallow banks to evade enemy warships. They were agile in turning and excelled at sailing against the wind. Sometimes, even when facing enemy warships in open water, they could seize the windward position, then use their windward advantage to escape.

However, this ship was different. Due to its larger length-to-width ratio, it could accommodate two masts. Coupled with its deep V-shaped hull and low freeboard structure, this ship's two masts were slightly higher than those of typical vessels of the same tonnage.

The sailors quickly hoisted the triangular sails between the main mast and the slanting mast. These gray-black sails, like the ship itself, unfurled gently in the morning breeze, carrying the ship out into the open sea. The sailors then unfurled the sails on the two main masts and set the ship on a course against the wind.

Sailing vessels using these sails could exploit the Bernoulli effect, enabling them to sail against the wind in a zigzag pattern. Even from Joseph's vantage point, it was clear that the ship had rapidly accelerated within a short period.

Joseph watched as the length of rope used to measure the ship's speed was rapidly pulled into the sea.

Next, they retracted the sails on the main masts and began turning the ship using the triangular sail at the bow. The ship drew a large circle on the sea, turning with the wind.

By now, the sailors had retrieved the ropes used to measure speed, which had all been pulled into the sea within a short time. Then they unfurled the sails again, increasing their speed when sailing with the wind. Even from Joseph's viewpoint, it was apparent that the ship was even faster when sailing downwind.

"It's almost like flying," exclaimed Bernard, the shipbuilding engineer. "I believe it's going at more than ten knots! Anyone up for a bet?"

Laughter echoed from nearby, and someone retorted, "Bernard, isn't it obvious? What's there to bet on? I'd say it's doing at least twelve knots. Bet or not?"

"No bet," Bernard responded without hesitation. "It's still accelerating. I'm certain it's more than twelve knots now."

By now, the ship had covered a significant distance. From afar, the gray-black hull, gray-black sails, and the sea and sky blended into a blue-gray mosaic.

This was the very reason Joseph insisted on painting the ship in this color. Compared to the stark white sails of military vessels, this ship was inconspicuous. Even in good lighting conditions, it would be challenging to spot from a distance. In dim mornings or evenings, it might slip by unnoticed. For smuggling ships, this was crucial.

When the ship's speed test with the wind was completed, they retracted the sails and turned the ship around. It returned to the bay.

In the bay, the ship retracted its main sails and triangular sails, relying solely on a small triangular sail at the bow to approach the dock. The ship's docking appeared somewhat clumsy, taking much time to complete.

Once the ship was securely docked, Captain Sparrow led the way as they went to welcome the crew.

"How was it?" Joseph asked first.

"The ship is incredibly fast, particularly against the wind. It reached a remarkable nine knots, faster than most cruisers sailing with the wind. When sailing downwind, it reached a top speed of thirteen knots. I think it could go even faster; I'm still not completely familiar with this ship."

"In any case, even at this speed, it's already the fastest ship in the world, isn't it?" someone remarked.

"That's right, at this speed, no warship can catch it," Captain Sparrow replied.

"Excellent. Apart from speed, what are the other characteristics?" Joseph inquired.

"Other characteristics? Well, when it slows down, it's quite clumsy and challenging to maneuver. It feels like I'm controlling a first-rate battleship when turning this small ship. Even a first-rate battleship is more agile at low speeds. But once it unfurls its main sails, it's like a racehorse. So, I suggest not getting too close to the shore or smuggling docks while in operation. It should stay offshore, using skiffs to transfer cargo. It will be much safer that way."

Captain Sparrow paused for a moment and added, "We expected the ship's seaworthiness to be subpar. But based on the recent experience, it appears better than we anticipated. The ship sways quickly, but the amplitude isn't significant. I even think that for use in the Mediterranean, we could raise the masts a bit higher. This way, we could potentially achieve even greater speed."

"This speed is sufficient. Raising the masts further to increase speed has limited practical value," Joseph replied. "It's better to retain some redundancy."

In history, flying clippers were predominantly used on routes from North America to Europe. These vessels could brave the rough winds and high waves of the Atlantic Ocean, and their seaworthiness was not bad. However, due to their high frequency of rocking and the significant waves on deck, they were extremely uncomfortable. Even for slave transportation, they were not the vessel of choice, as the high death rate among the slaves resulted in diminished profits.

"Well, the sea trial of this ship can be considered a success. We should give it a name. Captain Sparrow, as the first captain of this ship, you should be the one to name it," Joseph suggested.

Captain Sparrow gazed at the dark gray vessel and thought for a moment. "This ship is entirely black. How about we call it the 'Black Pearl'?"

Chapter 122: Turmoil in Paris

The maiden voyage of the "Black Pearl" had been a resounding success, and in the following weeks, they conducted several more trials. However, the revolutionary situation did not allow for a leisurely pace. As soon as the Committee of Public Safety received word of their initial success, they demanded the mass production of this type of ship.

So, less than half a month after the first voyage, the ship's blueprints were dispatched to several naval shipyards, and rapid production began.

As for the experimental ship "Black Pearl," it was sent on a real combat mission to Spain, smuggling caustic soda.

In fact, the "Black Pearl" was a bit overpowered in terms of speed, but its limited cargo capacity hampered its efficiency. Joseph shifted his focus to further refining these ships to achieve a better balance in performance.

Time passed quickly, and spring arrived. On the day of May's flowering chestnut trees, Joseph received a special guest - Joseph Fouch. As a special envoy, Fouch had the authority to discuss matters related to the Naval Research Institute with Joseph. In fact, many things at the institute required Fouch's cooperation, and he had been a great help to Joseph in many ways.

Fouch had come to inform Joseph that he had received orders to return to Paris to report to the National Convention. He also informed Joseph of recent political changes in Paris - conspirators like Eberl had been arrested by the Revolutionary Tribunal and, after swift trials, dozens, including Eberl and Chom, had been sent to the guillotine.

Joseph was well aware that Fouch's words were the official narrative. It was possible that Eberl and others were involved in other activities, but the idea that they were conspiring to restore the monarchy was laughable. If Robespierre had once supported constitutional monarchy and said, "What is the Republic?" then Eberl, who inherited Marat, was the staunchest opponent of monarchy from beginning to end.

Fouch knew he was seen as an associate of Eberl, and now that Eberl's faction had become a target, his return to Paris would likely not end well. He had come to Joseph, seeking support.

"Mr. Bonaparte, your family knows me very well, and they are aware of my loyalty to the Republic. But the current situation is baffling, and the rumors are frightening. I know General Carnot is capable of stabilizing the situation, but it seems he has some bias against me. Well, of course, it's because of my previous radical actions... but I still hope to have the opportunity to meet with General Carnot and explain."

Joseph found this request quite challenging. He knew that the Reign of Terror was reaching its climax, and intervening at this moment could be very dangerous. However, he also knew that the climax signaled its end, and without action at this time, there would be no share of the spoils. Acting now might be grabbing the chestnuts from the fire, or it could be plucking ripe peaches from a tree.

Joseph's understanding of the history of the French Revolution from his past life was not the best. But regarding the fall of Robespierre, he vaguely remembered from his history books that the struggle within the Jacobin faction had been intense, and Robespierre had suppressed both the left and right wings. This undermined his own power base and led to the collapse of his regime.

Back then, Joseph had memorized this for exams, but now, looking back and comparing it to the present, he found the connections clearer.

"The left-wing within the Jacobins, that would be Eberl. The right-wing, apart from Danton, was Carnot. It appears Robespierre dealt with Eberl first. Next, it will be Danton's turn. Well, Carnot is on the right, but considering that the Carnot I'm more familiar with from my previous life, the Carnot of the Carnot cycle, isn't born yet (Sadi Carnot was born in 1796), he should be fine. As for Fouch..."

Joseph didn't know what kind of character Fouch would become in this world, but he did know that he was a person with remarkable abilities, someone worth recruiting.

"Mr. Fouch, you know that, under my current circumstances, I cannot easily write letters."

Fouch looked disappointed but didn't say anything. He merely nodded, well aware that he had seen many people in similar situations. Besides, his relationship with Joseph was only an acquaintance.

"However, General Carnot has a mathematical problem that we discussed. Recently, I had a new idea and put it in writing. If you happen to be going to Paris, I hope you can deliver it to General Carnot."

Fouch stood up, and since there was no one around, he grasped Joseph's hand. "General Bonaparte, thank you. Thank you. You are a good man, and you will surely receive the Lord's blessing."

Fouch knew that, in this era, speaking of divine blessing was politically incorrect. Christianity was under attack, and Robespierre was promoting his rationalist creed, removing Christian icons from churches and replacing them with worship of "reason" and historical figures. Saying "God bless" at this time was highly improper.

But Fouch knew that Joseph had a close relationship with the church. The Bonaparte family had never made any anti-church statements. He took the risk of saying this to further gain their trust.

"No need for that, Commissioner Fouch. In fact, I have a personal favor to ask of you. I have a friend named Armand, Armand Lavoisier. He's a bit of a fool, but he's also my friend. If possible, I hope you can look after him."

Fouch readily agreed, at least on the surface. He showed gratitude and left. Joseph, however, grew increasingly anxious and couldn't sleep. He got up, lit a candle, and began further perfecting his escape plan.

Joseph's escape plan also involved a ship. This was a design called the "High-Speed Communication Ship," ostensibly for delivering crucial orders and information to overseas colonies. But in reality, Joseph's primary purpose in designing it was to serve as an escape vessel for his family. In this world, no other ship could catch up to it, not even the "Black Pearl."

So, this ship was entirely different in design from the "Black Pearl." It was a catamaran.

Each hull of the ship had a torpedo-shaped float underneath, fully submerged in the water. They were connected to the upper hull by several solid masts. This configuration reduced the ship's waterline considerably. Most of a ship's resistance when moving through water came from the bow wave it created, which consumed a great deal of energy. A ship with a small waterline like this one would create smaller waves and thus consume much less energy. As a result, it could travel faster than the "Black Pearl."

The catamaran's twin-hull structure also provided superior stability, seaworthiness, and comfort compared to the "Black Pearl." If there were any drawbacks, it was that the design required high-quality materials, making construction more challenging, and the ship couldn't be built very large.

"But what's the use of that? It's like King Louis XVI's 12-horsepower four-wheeled carriage. Speed is what matters most."

Joseph thought as he contemplated the design. After leaving Joseph's, the next morning, Fouch set out on his journey to Paris. On the way, he carefully analyzed the situation. First, he believed that Robespierre was unlikely to spare him. With Eberl's faction in ruins and Fouch isolated, only General Carnot had the power to influence the situation. However, Carnot was not surrounded by many allies, at least not in politics. Fouch decided that he might need to find a way to reach out to Danton.

Fouch had clashed with Danton in the past, and they had been on opposing sides in politics. But Danton was a rational man, capable of letting his reason triumph over his emotions. Fouch believed that Danton wouldn't overlook the danger he faced.

"Perhaps it's better to repair my relationship with Danton and join his ranks. Of course, mending ties with Carnot is also necessary."

Fouch thought as he sat in the carriage. Then he remembered Joseph Bonaparte's mention of a friend named Armand. He knew a bit about this person.

"Armand Lavoisier has a good relationship with Demoulin. Demoulin is a close friend of Danton. If I can get in touch with him, it could be a good connection."

While Fouch pondered how to establish connections with Danton and join his faction, Danton had just been woken up.

"Mr. Danton, you must escape!" The person waking him up shouted, "Mr. Demoulin and others have been arrested! Robespierre, Robespierre, and Saint-Just, they have come after us! You must run for your life. I've prepared a horse for you; hurry!"

Danton was initially startled but quickly calmed down, at least on the surface.

"Demoulin has been arrested?" Danton inquired.

"Yes, along with his wife," the person replied, then urged, "Hurry, Mr. Danton! If you don't run now, it'll be too late!"

"Run?" Danton suddenly chuckled. "How can I run? Escape to another world like Condorcet, or flee to another country like Talleyrand? Can I even take my homeland with me under my shoes? No, I won't run."

"You'll be executed!"

"Then let them execute me. I think my head is still worth showing to everyone."

Danton's brave words echoed through the room, signaling the turbulence and perilous times in the history of France that lay ahead.

Chapter 123: Fouché's Decision

When Fouch's carriage arrived in Paris, he realized that all his plans during the carriage ride had been in vain. Both Danton and Desmoulins had already been sent to the guillotine. That night, the lights in Fouch's residence stayed on, and no one knew what he was up to.

Early the next morning, Fouch headed to the National Convention. He was one of the first to arrive, finding the hall almost empty, except for a janitor tidying up. The entire hall was silent, and the delegates didn't speak to him or greet him. This eerie silence was unusual for the National Convention, which usually buzzed like a marketplace. Delegates whispered to each other, discussing the current situation or a socialite's appearance. When someone gave a speech, applause, hisses, and even the sound of shoes on the tables echoed through the hall. But now, the hall resembled a solemn and eerie graveyard.

As time passed, it was time to start the session, but a significant portion of the seats remained empty. Many familiar faces were absent, including Robespierre, Danton, Desmoulins, Saint-Just, and others. Fouch noticed this, and his heart sank. He also spotted Robespierre in the hall, a man with a pale, waxy face and beady eyes, who smiled at Fouch like a predator eyeing its prey.

Fouch's heart tightened as he saw the malevolence in Robespierre's smile. He couldn't help trembling, cold sweat trickling down his body. Fouch felt oppressed in this society, like a hapless chameleon in a world filled with relentless predators. He had to fight back tears, although his large eyes almost betrayed him. Hell felt empty, and demons roamed the earth.

Fouch knew he couldn't wait any longer. He stood up and addressed the presiding officer, "I am Citizen Joseph Fouch, special envoy from the Marseille region, tasked with reporting to the 'Committee of Public Safety.' However, I believe it may be better to address these matters here."

Fouch's move was a challenge. He had been sent by the 'Committee of Public Safety' to report to them, not to the National Convention. By requesting to speak before the National Convention, he was defying the 'Committee of Public Safety,' a challenge to Robespierre.

He met the presiding officer's gaze, and the officer hesitated for a moment, then looked towards the seating area probably in Robespierre's direction. Finally, he said, "Very well, Citizen Fouch, you may take the stage and speak."

Fouch ascended the stage, surveyed the room, and noticed Robespierre still eyeing him, much like a cat staring at a caught mouse.

Fouch took a deep breath and began his speech. Although it was emotional and lengthy, if summarized, it came down to one simple message: "I shed blood for the Jacobins, I contributed to their cause, and I want to continue serving them. You can't..."

The assembly listened in silence, no applause, no jeers, no pounding of shoes on tables. Fouch's voice echoed through the empty hall, resembling an echo in a desolate cemetery.

When Fouch concluded his speech, the silence persisted. It seemed as though all the delegates had turned into lifeless puppets.

Fouch didn't know how he managed to step down from the stage, but he returned to his seat, trembling with fear. He knew he had lost this battle. The National Convention was no longer the vibrant assembly he once knew; it had lost its courage amid the turmoil.

Robespierre stood up. Fouché paled, trembling. He was sure that Robespierre would denounce him, label him a traitor, and demand his arrest. Then the cycle of arrest, trial, and execution would begin.

"Regarding Citizen Fouché's report, I suggest that the National Convention entrust this matter to the 'Committee of Public Safety,'" Robespierre said.

This suggestion surprised Fouché, as Robespierre could have simply declared him a traitor, and the delegates would have applauded. However, Robespierre proposed this...

Fouché was left to wonder about Robespierre's intentions. He had two guesses. One, Robespierre did want him dead, but he wanted to savor Fouché's fear and despair first before delivering the final blow, like a cat toying with a mouse. The second possibility was that Robespierre wanted Fouché to submit, to repent, and then to serve him obediently, like a loyal dog.

Fouché thought the first possibility was more likely, given what he knew of Robespierre. Nevertheless, he believed he could be useful as a dog. Fouché was a man of action. He couldn't afford to panic. He knew he had to fight to the last moment.

In the dark and cold streets of Saint-Honor, Fouché's footsteps gained resolve. He couldn't wait for his execution; he had only one choice to behead Robespierre before Robespierre could behead him.

Chapter 124: Fouché's Last Stand

Fouché had rushed to visit Carnot under the cover of night. Carnot eyed him with disdain, but Fouché, unfazed, pointed out the significant regression in the principles of freedom and democracy that Paris once held dear, and he believed it was abnormal and unsustainable.

Carnot, not a fan of Fouché due to his unpredictability, wasn't too fond of his presence. However, he knew Fouché wasn't entirely wrong. Still, he replied, "You may have some valid points, but you've arrived too late. The army, the police, the Committee of Public Safety, the Committee of Public Security, the National Convention, and the Jacobin Club all bow to him, and they're all scared of him. Many legislators don't even dare sleep in their homes at night anymore. His power now is unshakable."

"No, General Carnot, I see it differently," Fouché responded. He had walked to Carnot's place, analyzing the situation thoroughly during the journey, trying to find a crack in the dark storm clouds. Now his task was to point out this gap for others to see and encourage them to work together to let some sunlight through.

"You said that many parliamentarians in Paris, many influential figures, dare not sleep in their own beds at night. They fear that when they wake up in the morning, their first sight will be an arrest warrant bearing the crimson stamp of the Committee of Public Safety or the Committee of Public Security. Fear may bring compliance, but it also breeds hatred!"

Fouché paused, gazing at Carnot, before adding, "But, General Carnot, you're a scientist. You're familiar with Sir Isaac Newton's three laws. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Fear is a force, and it has its own reaction!"

Carnot asked, "So where is this reaction?"

"Earlier, you mentioned that many legislators and influential people in Paris are afraid to sleep at home and opt to find other places. They fear that if they sleep in their own beds, they might wake

up to a warrant from the Committee of Public Safety or the Committee of Public Security. Fear brings compliance, but it also breeds hatred."

Fouch took a deep breath and continued, "Now, if a person lives for months, or even longer, in endless fear, depriving them of sleep, weakening their spirits, crushing their will, making them feel like lifeless zombies, wouldn't that person harbor hatred? Would you forgive them? Those who dare not sleep in their beds every day, wouldn't they loathe Robespierre?"

Fouch stopped and stared at Carnot. After a moment, he said, "Furthermore, Robespierre, is he really that powerful? If his allies were still with him, then yes, he would be formidable. But he executed Danton. I know you had your disagreements with General Danton's views but it was Danton who secured support from the common people. A few months ago, if anyone had wanted to overthrow him, he would've called upon the common people, and they would have encircled the National Convention, forcing them to submit. But now, the common people have suffered because of some issues, and he couldn't resolve them. Now, the common people merely grumble, and he, out of incompetence, resorts to handling them the same way he dealt with Danton. Now, the common people don't see him as a traitor; they don't want to shed blood for him anymore. If Danton were still here, as his friend, he could pacify the National Convention and shift all the hatred onto Danton and the common people. But he crushed the hopes of many others with his own hands. Robespierre is now a giant with clay feet, and if we unite to oppose him, he has no extraordinary power. If we can make everyone aware of their shared resentment towards him, his end is near!"

"But how will you make everyone aware?" Carnot asked. "If you attempt to address the Convention directly, it won't end well. You must provide me with evidence that you can indeed achieve this."

"General," Fouch said, looking into Carnot's eyes, "I have been tasked with returning to Paris to report to the Committee of Public Safety. In a few days, the Jacobin Club will hold its new presidential election, traditionally an anonymous vote. If you can assist me in delaying my report to the Committee until after the Jacobin Club's election, I will be able to provide you with evidence."

"Very well, I look forward to your proof," Carnot agreed.

Fouch knew that he had accomplished his mission at Carnot's residence that night and took his leave. As he departed, Carnot unexpectedly warned, "Citizen Fouch, you'd do well to change your sleeping location every day."

Carnot cited some technical reasons to delay Fouch's report.

Robespierre did not object to this. Perhaps in his view, it was just a minor matter. Robespierre had always held Fouch, a morally bankrupt chameleon, in low regard. He couldn't see, or chose to ignore, Fouch's qualities. As a result, in Robespierre's eyes, Fouch was nothing more than an inconsequential figure. The reports of Fouch's recent mysterious activities did not raise much suspicion.

However, Fouch wasn't planning to flee, and he had never considered it. Fouch continued to change his residence, alter his appearance, and impersonate various roles, such as a laborer, a merchant, an elderly man, or a woman. He eluded the spies from the Committee of Public Security, one by one, and met with members of the Jacobin Club. He persuaded them to vote for him in the presidential election.

"Votes are anonymous; nobody knows who cast them. Robespierre's anger and oppression may be directed at me, but you can use this to gauge how many share your sentiments. Isn't it worth a try?"

Many people found Fouch's words compelling and inspiring.

A few days later, following the regulations, the Jacobin Club held its presidential election. Robespierre was personally present and was shocked to see Fouch's participation. At this point, Fouch had not been apprehended and was a legitimate member of the Jacobin Club.

Voting commenced, with members writing their choices on ballots and placing them in a box system created and perfected by Robespierre and Saint-Just.

After all members had cast their votes, one member lifted the ballot box and shook it vigorously to mix the ballots. Then, in full view of everyone, the box was opened, and the counting began.

"Joseph Fouch."

"Joseph Fouch."

"Joseph Fouch."

After reciting a dozen "Joseph Fouch" votes in a row, they finally found one "Maximilien Robespierre."

Everyone was both startled and excited, exchanging glances. Robespierre, on the other hand, had a grim expression. It was the first time he realized he had underestimated Fouch, the ever-changing chameleon, the snake with a forked tongue. For the first time, he felt a shiver of fear and apprehension as he recognized that his foundation had been hollowed out.

The final results of the vote were announced: Fouch had an overwhelming victory over Robespierre, becoming the new president of the Jacobin Club. Not a single vote was cast in favor of Robespierre!

If even the Jacobin Club, seen as the heart of Robespierre's support, had so many dissidents within, how could he continue to dominate everything?

Following this night's vote, Carnot, who had been silent for a long time in the Committee of Public Safety, suddenly became vocal again. He openly opposed some of Robespierre's policies, beginning with his military decisions and eventually extending to numerous political measures.

With Carnot leading the charge, those who had previously unquestioningly followed Robespierre suddenly started forming their own opinions. Several of Robespierre's proposals were consistently voted down. In the Committee of Public Safety, only Saint-Just and Couthon remained firmly in Robespierre's camp, but their numbers were insufficient to push through any resolutions.

Robespierre seemed to have lost significant control over the entire situation.

The night's victory for Fouch was indeed astonishing. After seeing the evidence he had presented, Carnot's silent Committee of Public Safety suddenly became emboldened. They began openly challenging Robespierre's policies, starting with military matters and later expanding to his political decisions.

If even in the heart of Robespierre's domain, the Jacobin Club, there were so many who secretly disapproved of him, how could Robespierre continue to maintain his absolute control? After this

night's vote, a deep fissure had formed between Robespierre and the Jacobin Club, a chasm of mutual distrust. This was the proof Fouch had given to Carnot.

Chapter 125: Robespierre's Counterattack

The series of blows seemed to have dazed Robespierre. In protest of the Committee of Public Safety's perceived defiance of him, he decided to feign illness and stop attending their meetings. Meanwhile, his key supporter, Saint-Just, was dispatched as a northern commander due to the growing threat of an attack by the anti-French coalition forces. In the Committee of Public Safety, Robespierre's loyalists dwindled down to just Couthon. To many observers, it appeared that Robespierre was losing his grip on power.

However, those who truly understood Robespierre knew that he would not surrender easily. He was undoubtedly planning a formidable counterattack.

Robespierre wasn't actually sick, and during the day, he could be seen smiling as he moved about various impoverished neighborhoods, conversing with and inquiring about the lives of the common people. In the evening, he would return to his modest attic, write letters, and meet with people who came secretly to see him.

Normally, Fouch would have kept a close watch on Robespierre, monitoring his every move to uncover his schemes. But in this critical moment, a crisis struck Fouch's own home.

Fouch's six-year-old daughter fell seriously ill, possibly with pneumonia.

In those times, pneumonia was a deadly killer, claiming more lives than even the guillotine that Robespierre wielded.

No matter how future generations would satirize and criticize the chameleon Fouch, such as Chateaubriand describing him as a "man without tears and a heart," they still had to acknowledge that, for his wife, Fouch was a good husband, and for his children, he was a loving father.

Fouch remained faithful to his wife throughout his life, even though she was just a "poor, humble, plain, and short" commoner. After achieving a prominent position, many like him would often indulge in countless extramarital affairs, even swapping mistresses with one another, as Paul Barras did later. But Fouch, who had long held high office, had never been involved in such affairs.

Fouch also kept his children sheltered from the tumultuous politics outside, shielding them from these harsh realities. While outside, he exuded a stern and imposing presence, his face devoid of any hint of a smile. A single glance or gesture from him was enough to send shivers down the spines of countless people, leaving them sleepless as they speculated about the meaning behind his enigmatic expressions.

Yet, even in the most perilous and challenging moments, when he returned home, that perennially icy poker face melted away, and he revealed the warmest smile in the world.

He would cradle his children, his bristly face brushing against their small cheeks, making them giggle with delight. He called them "my little darlings," "my sweethearts," and indulged them in the silliest of games, thoroughly enjoying every moment. He never brought the concerns of the outside world into his home, but as soon as he stepped out the door, he transformed back into the sinister, unpredictable head of the secret police.

His daughter's illness disrupted Fouch's life, and although his reason told him he couldn't let his guard down at this crucial juncture, his emotions and knowledge reminded him that his daughter might not have much time left, and he might soon have to prepare a small coffin for her.

"Perhaps there won't be any abrupt changes," Fouch reassured himself, knowing he was deceiving himself, but for the first and only time in his life, he allowed himself this irrational behavior.

He delegated more of the responsibilities to others and found time to be by his daughter's side during her final moments. To prevent contagion, he kept his wife and other children at a distance and cared for his daughter alone. The people who took his place in various roles were far from matching his capabilities, which allowed Robespierre's actions to go unnoticed.

During this period, Robespierre met with many members of the Jacobin Club. He warned them that if he were to fall, the oppressed forces from the days of the Jacobins, the Feuillants, the Girondins, and even the Dantonists, would rise and seek revenge. Would they spare those who now inhabited the Jacobin Club?

"Blood has been spilled, heads have rolled, hatred has festered. Each of you has blood on your hands. Do you really think you can change allegiances at a time like this? If I fail, their fate from the past will surely be repeated in your lives!"

These chilling words frightened the assembly, and they knelt before Robespierre, tears streaming down their faces. In their prayers of repentance, they used the most venomous language to curse the snake known as Joseph Fouch, who had tempted them into his web of deceit.

A few days later, during another Jacobin Club meeting, former President Robespierre suddenly appeared. He declared his intention to expose a viper, urging everyone to see its true face.

The name of this snake was none other than "Joseph Fouch." This man concocted a litany of baseless accusations against Fouch, including organizing orgies with numerous men and women, fathering a horde of illegitimate children, and recounting sordid tales about Fouch and his illegitimate daughters, without realizing how young those daughters must be, given Fouch's age.

Stunned, Fouch hadn't had the chance to refute when Robespierre joined in. He claimed that scoundrels like Fouch had infiltrated the Jacobin Club, which was a disgrace to the club's honor. He suggested an immediate vote to expel this morally corrupt impostor and snake from the Jacobin Club.

So, the Jacobin Club swiftly held a vote, and the result was a resounding victory for Robespierre's faction, expelling Joseph Fouch from the club.

It was a thunderous blow. Fouch's previous advantages in his machinations had almost entirely evaporated in that moment. The guillotine, once far from his reach, seemed to inch closer again. Considering that just one day before beheading Danton, Robespierre had also executed Danton's wife, and Robespierre had been their wedding witness and the godfather of their daughter, Fouch could hardly imagine what fate awaited his own wife and children if he were sent to the scaffold.

Having regained control over the Jacobin Club, Robespierre knew how precarious his situation was. He was fully aware of the growing resentment toward him and that his base of support was unstable. He couldn't trust anyone, not even those who groveled at his feet, confessing their sins and begging for forgiveness, whether they were from the Jacobin Club or the Committee of Public

Safety. He knew that should he reveal any vulnerability, they would undoubtedly betray him. Once a traitor, always a traitor!

So, Robespierre needed a reliable foundation. He believed that the only potential foundation for him could be the sans-culottes, the working-class people.

As a result, Robespierre controlled the National Convention and passed increasingly extreme laws favoring the sans-culottes. He didn't mind disrupting the entire economy, even if these laws were detrimental to the interests of the "respectable" citizens. Robespierre knew that his actions would only fuel more resentment from those in the National Convention and the Jacobin Club. However, these people had proven to be unreliable, even if he were to take their interests into account. Would they truly remain loyal to him?

"You've betrayed Robespierre once," Fouch whispered to Paul Barras. "Robespierre will never trust you again. That's why he's courting the sans-culottes. He's not sure if they're still on his side as they were before. But let me tell you, people have short memories, especially when they're bribed with material wealth. If the sans-culottes stand by him, you and everyone else will walk the same path as the Dantonists!"

"But everyone is too afraid to take action," Barras replied.

"So, let's make them even more afraid. That fear will eventually drive them to action," Fouch said in a low voice, wearing a sinister smile, "Monsieur Barras, do you know of someone, like a Charlotte Corday, who can perform the task of assassinating Couthon? The assassination must be in a public place, the attempt must fail, and the assassin must take their own life immediately."

Barras fell silent. After Fouch voiced this request, Barras understood the implications. If the assassination failed, it would still cause significant repercussions. If an investigation were conducted, it would put everyone from the sans-culottes to the National Convention on edge. Threats and blackmail would follow.

"Perhaps you should speak with Tallien; he may know someone suitable," Barras suggested.

Tallien, a lowly-born revolutionary, was once a trusted aide of Georges Danton. When the Dantonists were executed, Tallien was fortunate to escape. He had connections with criminal elements before the revolution, and his loyalty to Danton made him a potential candidate for this dangerous mission. In these circumstances, he was the best option.

Chapter 126: A Dark Heart, Two Kinds of Preparation

As the struggle in Paris was reaching its boiling point, Joseph decided to take a day off in Toulon. He brought his mother and all his siblings to Fort Malgrve for a day of fishing to celebrate the family reunion. A few days earlier, Napoleon had arranged for Louis to be brought to Paris from Toulon.

Since the last punishment meted out to Lucien, Joseph's standing among his brothers and sisters had considerably improved. However, he could sense a slight distance growing between them.

This was a common occurrence as the saying goes, "Those who are amiable need not be revered, and those to be feared cannot be made dear. To not inspire aversion is difficult, but to inspire affection is even more challenging." Being the eldest, Joseph understood that if he remained an

object of fear in the eyes of his siblings, it could lead to resentment. To rebuild an image of himself as amiable and dear, Joseph decided to arrange this family gathering.

Of course, following Joseph's habit, this family gathering had its private motives. Therefore, though it was portrayed as a family get-together, it was documented in many places as a "technical experiment" to claim reimbursable expenses.

Naturally, the experiment's description couldn't be about fishing and grilling fish but had to be about "high-speed navigation of a high-speed communication ship at low speed, and related experiments to enhance maritime self-sufficiency."

By looking at the experiment's name, one could tell it would be conducted on this newly built, compact ship. Although it appeared rather short from a distance, it had two hulls, and a deck extended between them, making the deck quite spacious. From a bird's eye view, the ship's square deck even resembled a raft.

However, this ship was far from the cost of a raft. It was more expensive than even the larger "Black Pearl."

For instance, the connecting structures supporting the two large pontoons beneath the water's surface, all had to be cast in bronze to ensure durability and resistance to seawater corrosion. The cost of casting molds and creating these structures was significant. Additionally, the pontoons were constructed using lightweight wood, known as "lightwood," which had half the density of ordinary timber and excellent corrosion resistance. This wood provided substantial buoyancy.

Lightwood wasn't particularly rare, but it originated from South America, and the French didn't have significant stockpiles of it. Smugglers were involved in bringing it in from the Spanish. Even among the Spanish, it was uncommon to find unprocessed, well-dried lightwood. The unscrupulous smugglers sold it at prices even higher than Brazilian mahogany. Each pontoon was then coated with a layer of copper to reduce resistance, which added to the overall cost.

The ship's planks and materials were of the highest quality, regardless of the slight performance improvements they offered. Joseph didn't mind the cost; it wasn't his money, after all.

The entire family boarded the ship, unfurled the sails, and sped off like an arrow.

Napoleon asked, "How fast can this ship go?"

"Over fifteen knots," Joseph replied. "Faster than any other ship out there. No ship can catch us at sea. And this ship is relatively easy to handle. It only needs two people to control, or even just one. Besides, have you noticed? This ship may be small, but it's more stable than many larger ones."

As they talked, the ship sailed into the bay beneath Fort Malgrve. Lucien volunteered to help furl the sails and watched as the sailors dropped the anchor. Then, everyone took out their fishing rods and began fishing. It was, in essence, an "experiment to enhance maritime self-sufficiency."

Napoleon's thoughts weren't focused on fishing. He absentmindedly threaded a small herring on a hook and cast it into the sea. Then he turned to Joseph and said, "Joseph, something doesn't seem right in Paris lately."

Indeed, the situation in Paris was alarming. As per the information they had received, Robespierre had initially joined forces with Danton to eliminate the radical Jacobins like Hebert. Later, he turned

against Danton, instituting a series of extreme economic policies that even surpassed the Hebertists' extremism.

"Something is amiss," Joseph agreed. "In theory, our 'Incorruptible' is close to his downfall. Napoleon, have you heard the saying, 'Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad'? Do you know why he's going mad?"

"Why?" Napoleon asked.

"Because he's run out of options," Joseph explained with a smile. "He eliminated Hebert, losing the support of the Enrags. Then he got rid of Danton, losing the backing of the merchants and industrialists. Now, he can only rely on terror to maintain his rule. So, he's gone mad out of necessity. He's surrounded by enemies everywhere, and if he shows the slightest sign of weakness, they'll pounce and tear him to pieces. With his current madness, he won't last long. But if he doesn't go mad now, he might not even survive today."

"Then why don't you go back to Paris?" Napoleon inquired.

Before Joseph could respond, Napoleon chuckled. "Ah, Joseph, I forgot, you're not me. If I were in your place, I'd go back at a time like this. You, on the other hand, avoid risks at all costs."

"It's not the right time to return yet," Joseph replied. "It's not about taking risks or not; it's about risks outweighing the rewards. Napoleon, first, we must admit that Robespierre is indeed a formidable character. I assume you wouldn't disagree with that?"

Napoleon stayed silent.

"Formidable characters are formidable because they excel at utilizing their limited resources to achieve extraordinary results," Joseph continued. "Robespierre's current madness is fueled by his lack of economic resources to support his policies. His actions are driven by a desperate attempt to appease the lower classes, but his policies are unsustainable, meaning he'll soon face economic resource depletion. Without funds, it's like not being able to solve a math problem; it's impossible. He'll inevitably take massive risks before his financial support collapses and attempt another round of purges. If he succeeds, the resources gained will sustain him for a while longer. So, going back to Paris at this moment carries significant risks."

"What about the rewards?" Napoleon asked.

"Don't you see?" Joseph raised an eyebrow. "If you return to Paris now, could you become the most prominent figure in overturning him? Do you have enough resources to control the government in turmoil? You don't. So, why rush back? Napoleon, do you remember what I told you? We don't need to take sides. True powerful people never need to take sides because wherever they stand, that's where the party is. The 'Incorruptible' has reached a dead end. But is there anyone remarkable who can replace him?"

"Ha," Napoleon laughed, revealing his clear stance.

"In that case, don't hurry," Joseph said. "Even if Robespierre wins, he won't be able to manage the current situation. We just need to wait until France needs a real hero."

"Alright," Napoleon said. "But what if Robespierre is defeated?"

"Then we should join the victors," Joseph replied with a smile. "In that case, you'll be able to gain wealth and influence. The key is to be opportunistic without taking unnecessary risks. For now, let's catch some fish. We might need them for our 'maritime self-sufficiency' experiment. I heard that food prices in Paris are on the rise. It's wise to be prepared."

While Joseph and Napoleon discussed the situation in Paris, they continued to fish with their family in the tranquil waters of Fort Malgrve. With every catch they made, they celebrated, laughed, and enjoyed their time together, seemingly unaffected by the political turmoil brewing in the capital.

Chapter 127: The Turning Point

It took Robespierre the entire night to prepare his speech, in which he listed the names of Fouché and over a dozen other members of parliament secretly associated with him. These were the individuals who would soon lose their parliamentary status and find themselves on the guillotine the following morning.

With everything in place, Robespierre retired to his bed. Days of anxiety and internal conflicts within his camp had taken a toll on his health, causing frequent, severe coughing spells. Robespierre had consulted a few reliable doctors who all concurred that his ailment stemmed from a lack of rest. They assured him that with proper rest, in conjunction with the prescribed medication, he would recover. But how could he rest at a time like this? Fortunately, the crucial battle was tomorrow. Perhaps afterward, he could finally find some respite.

On the same night, Fouché and his family embarked on a mission to visit parliament members, not just a dozen, but nearly all except Robespierre and his most loyal supporters. During those days, Fouché informed them that the "Prairial Decree" had been crafted with them in mind. He explained that Robespierre had executed more people in the past month than in the previous year, and at this rate, it wouldn't be long before they too faced the guillotine. He emphasized that Paris' food supply could no longer sustain current economic policies, and unless they were purged and their assets seized, Paris would soon go bankrupt.

Every parliament member listened with dread to Fouché's words, paralyzed with fear. These seasoned politicians knew that while Fouché's claim of "your name is on the next list" might be a bluff, they were well aware that Paris's food supply was indeed in dire straits. They also understood that in this situation, beheading and asset confiscation were virtually Robespierre's only means to navigate the crisis.

Moreover, they recognized the vast divide between Paris and the provinces and the severity of the food shortage in the capital. The former indicated that food scarcity wasn't a short-term problem, and the latter implied that the number of heads to be severed would be exceptionally high.

Even if their own names were not on Fouché's alleged "next list," there was a high probability they'd be on a list sooner or later, as long as reason prevailed.

"The final battle is upon us!" Fouché would say as he bid farewell to each parliament member.

The next morning, accompanied by Saint-Just, Robespierre arrived at the National Convention.

Robespierre first applied for permission to speak, which was naturally granted. He ascended the podium, dressed in his customary sky-blue coat and white knee-high stockings, holding a lengthy scroll his prepared speech.

As Robespierre stood at the podium, he unfolded the scroll with the solemnity of a Roman magistrate unrolling his fasces. All eyes fixated on the parchment, knowing that any name it bore meant an invitation to the guillotine.

Robespierre noted that Fouche was absent. Fouche wasn't known for his oratory skills, especially when compared to the parliament members, so he often avoided such public gatherings whenever possible. Even when attendance was mandatory, he sought the least conspicuous corner.

Robespierre commenced his speech, which, for unrelated listeners, might have induced slumber. But on this occasion, everyone was captivated by his words. He discussed the dire domestic and international situations, the conspiracies of certain traitors to the revolution, and concluded by stating that he possessed a list of republic traitors who followed a shameful serpent, undermining the republic. Here, he paused deliberately, allowing the fear to settle within the hearts of the assembly.

All eyes were fixed on Robespierre, but he saw something different from before in those gazes. Alongside fear, he detected despair and madness.

"So, who is this serpent?" Suddenly, a trembling voice asked. It was Bourdon de l'Oise. A few nights earlier, Fouche had visited him.

"Yes, who is the serpent? Speak his name!" others joined in.

Robespierre realized that he had miscalculated. Instead of a mere ten or twenty conspirators, it seemed almost the entire Convention was implicated in Fouche's web. At this moment, revealing Fouche's name would mean condemning nearly all parliament members to the guillotine.

In theory, the National Convention held the highest authority. All his power stemmed from the Convention's authorization. If the Paris Commune were as strong and united as it was when he and Danton were allies, the Convention wouldn't be significant. However, the present Paris-Provinces rift meant that the food scarcity issue wasn't transient, and many heads would have to roll.

He knew that, even though he might not be on Fouche's alleged "next list," as long as there was reason, he knew the probability of his name appearing was high.

"Investigations are ongoing; I cannot reveal the name at this moment," Robespierre replied.

"Why wait for investigations? Suspicion and inference should be enough!" Tallien shouted, "Don't evade, Robespierre, who is this person?"

"Is it Fouche?" Barere coldly inquired.

Barere's words struck like a chilling wind from hell, freezing everyone's hearts.

"Is it Fouche?" Barere pressed, "Robespierre, tell us, is it Fouche?"

"As I said, I cannot" Robespierre tried to maintain his composure but suddenly coughed violently.

"Tyrant, it's the blood of Danton choking your throat!" someone in the crowd shouted.

At this point, parliamentarians, who had been terrified moments ago, turned against Robespierre in an instant.

Saint-Just shouted, "Please listen"

But no one would let him speak. Barere yelled, "Down with the tyrant!"

Almost all parliament members echoed, "Down with the tyrant!"

Saint-Just tried to lead Robespierre away, but they were blocked.

"I accuse!" someone from the crowd shouted, "Robespierre and Saint-Just have betrayed the Republic, conspiring to restore the feudal system!"

"Let's vote!" Barere rushed to the podium, "Raise your hands to vote, raise your hands to vote! Robespierre and Saint-Just have betrayed the revolution, attempting to restore the feudal system!"

As Barere shouted, he raised his hand.

More hands followed, and eventually, nearly everyone raised their hands.

Facing the forest of raised arms, Barere exclaimed, "It's passed! It's passed!"

"Lock them up, imprison them!" more people shouted.

Suddenly, the individuals who had been paralyzed with fear by Robespierre moments earlier were now turning him into a prisoner. It felt like a surreal dream to everyone.

It wasn't until nearly an hour later that Fouche learned of the events in the Convention. The nightmare that had loomed over him for so long was now imprisoned, awaiting trial by the Revolutionary Tribunal and the guillotine the next morning.

"In which prison are they held?" Fouche inquired.

"They are in the nearest one, the Luxembourg Prison," came the reply.

"That's terrible! The security at Luxembourg is quite lax. Robespierre's allies will" Fouche began, alarmed.

"Well, that's perfect. We can round them all up!" another voice chimed in. Fouche turned to see Barere and Carnot, brimming with determination.

As they expected, Robespierre's allies launched an assault on the prison, rescuing Robespierre, Saint-Just, and others. They sought refuge in the City Hall where the Paris Commune was based, issuing orders to the National Guard to defend the revolution.

However, only troops from a couple of districts answered the call, joining them near City Hall. In contrast, more forces were gathering at the National Convention. Robespierre could only hope for reinforcements from more distant districts.

But by around 10 p.m., no other troops had arrived, indicating there would be no further reinforcements. Even the National Guards who had been stationed near City Hall began dispersing.

Around 11 p.m., the National Convention's forces initiated an assault on City Hall. The National Guards near City Hall refrained from firing a single shot and scattered. Even the cannons, loaded with shells, were abandoned. Loyalists to the National Convention used these cannons to break down the doors of City Hall.

Robespierre tried to take his own life, but a soldier first wounded his arm. This injury caused his shot towards his own head to miss, hitting his face instead. His face was shattered, but he didn't die.

The next morning, without any trial, Robespierre, Saint-Just, Couthon, and over twenty others were transported to the same guillotine that Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, Danton, and Desmoulins had ascended.

Chapter 128: The Jovial Kings

When the news of Robespierre losing his head reached Toulon, Joseph had just completed all the tests for his new ship. The ship's performance was outstanding in every aspect, with one minor issue - it was now rendered obsolete.

The message was personally delivered by Napoleon himself.

"Joseph," he said, "Are the carriages ready for your departure?"

"Everything is prepared," Joseph replied. "A four-wheeled carriage and a detachment of cavalry. I've asked Lecleire to escort you. You should leave immediately."

"Very well," Joseph said. "Wait here; I need to collect something before I go."

Joseph went inside and changed into travel-friendly attire. He emerged carrying a large chest.

"What's in there?" Napoleon inquired.

"Some experimental data," Joseph replied. "It's valuable. Keep it safe, don't lose it or let the little ones get their hands on it."

"I understand. I won't even let Lucien see it," Napoleon assured.

"Better not let him know at all," Joseph emphasized. "Napoleon, what I meant earlier is, you should also avoid looking..."

Joseph was in a hurry to return to Paris for a reason.

Firstly, in Paris, there was no longer a guillotine-wielding tyrant, and he believed it was now safer than Toulon. After all, there were still rebel factions operating in Toulon.

Of course, that was the least important reason. The most significant was that he needed to get back quickly to acquire a treasure that very few would notice at first, but it was the most valuable - the personnel of the "Military Technology Research Institute."

Joseph knew that in the aftermath of Robespierre's fall, Paris was about to witness a period of turmoil. The once-repressed Jovial Kings would surely turn the city into chaos. In such a scenario, even Carnot might not be able to protect the "Military Research Institute." Returning early could secure the most precious treasures.

As Joseph anticipated, the Jovial Kings in Paris wasted no time causing havoc. They immediately abolished all price controls, causing prices to soar. The people of Paris were in uproar, but individuals like Barras and his associates were profiting handsomely. Barras, who was seen as the key figure in toppling Robespierre, saw his status rise, and with the newfound power, he became a millionaire.

Another hero, Talien, gained a position within the "Committee of Public Safety." Although its power was no match for the Robespierre era, it was still significant.

But among these victors, two individuals who played crucial roles in their victories met unfortunate fates.

The first was Fouche, who played a pivotal role in the struggle against Robespierre. Yet his work was mostly behind the scenes, so his contributions were easily overlooked. What's worse, everyone had forgotten his contributions in toppling Robespierre but remembered his notorious speech in the National Convention, proclaiming his loyalty to the Jacobins while declaring himself willing to be their "lapdog." Fouche was branded as a "surviving Jacobin leader."

Fouche tried to seek Carnot's help, but their mutual disdain and Fouche's straightforward nature hindered their collaboration. Left with no choice, Fouche actually tried to revive the remaining Jacobins and become a legitimate "Jacobin leader." Even though there were still Jacobin sympathizers, most were either planning uprisings or fleeing Paris, fearing Fouche was a provocateur. They refused to trust him or believed he was trying to lure snakes out of their holes.

Fouche was expelled from the National Convention, losing his parliamentary status and income. In the original history, Fouche had no option but to work as an informant for Barras, gathering private information about Barras' political opponents to make ends meet.

As for the second unfortunate individual, Carnot, even with his visible contributions, faced a different problem - he attempted to block others from profiting.

The ongoing war between France and the Coalition offered opportunities for lucrative businesses related to the military. The most profitable of all was anything connected to military production. However, during the tyrannical rule of Robespierre and the Jacobins, they imposed strict quality controls that reduced everyone's profits. These wicked policies had to be abolished immediately. Carnot, however, absurdly argued that these policies were excellent and should be maintained.

Moreover, the Military Technology Research Institute, highly confidential and funded by the state, continued to independently develop essential weapons. Wasn't this against the principles of basic economics? These projects were created by the Jacobins - shouldn't they be shut down?

Carnot was unyielding in his stance, even resorting to threatening to resign.

In Robespierre's time, Carnot had often butted heads with the Committee but was tolerated due to his indispensable abilities. Robespierre had even omitted Carnot's name from the list of individuals who had been secretly meeting with Fouche, except for one - Carnot. Robespierre knew that Carnot was indispensable, and he possessed some political cunning, even in his wildest moments.

However, the Jovial Kings were not as lenient. With Carnot obstructing their path, they had him removed from the Committee, which was a severe blow to his authority and influence.

With Carnot gone, the new "Committee of Public Safety" quickly passed resolutions to eliminate anything blocking their path to wealth. Thus, before Joseph arrived in Paris, the Military Technology Research Institute became a ruin. The contents were divided among the Jovial Kings, and as for the researchers, they had no intentions of paying for the group of scientists. Instead, they generously "donated" these experienced high-level researchers to society.

Lavasie also regained his freedom, while his guard, Charles, ended up in prison. Life's fortunes were strange and ever-changing, but Charles should adapt to prison life quite well.

With his newfound freedom, Lavasie discovered that his property had been seized by Robespierre and his associates. His movable assets were gone without question, but Lavasie had lost several immovable properties. He searched everywhere and spent a considerable sum, but none of his real

estate was returned. Fortunately, with his status, Lavasie managed to secure a decent job at the University of Paris, which he now depended on to support his family.

The various military technologies from the institute were shared without charge with the newly prosperous arms factories. This included even the technology for nitrocellulose. The leak of these technologies became inevitable, and some factory owners suggested selling "petite melons" to neutral countries interested in buying them in exchange for other goods to alleviate France's economic hardships.

This proposal faced staunch opposition from Carnot, but his influence and authority were no longer what they used to be. Despite his protests, the bill passed smoothly. However, the law included a crucial clause: "Prohibited from selling to non-neutral countries."

This gave rise to a new trading method in Europe. Ships would hoist the flag of a neutral country, transport goods to France, exchange them for "Bonaparte's little melons," and then take the cargo to England, Spain, or Italy to sell to the anti-French coalition countries.

Initially, the trade was dominated by English and Italian merchants, but they were soon overtaken by a more competitive group of businessmen - the French.

By the time Joseph arrived in Paris, he was confronted with this new reality.

Chapter 129: Let's Get Rich Together!

Joseph arrived in Paris, and his first order of business was to find Carnot.

He entered the grand building of the War Department and followed the familiar path to Carnot's office. The office door was slightly ajar, and Joseph lightly knocked on it.

"Come in, the door is open," came Carnot's weary voice from inside.

Joseph pushed the door open and, as he walked in, exclaimed, "Lazare, I'm back! Surprise, surprise... Oh, Lazare, you don't look too good. Are you ill?"

"It's nothing, just dealing with those idiots," Carnot replied. "But let's not dwell on that. Why have you returned so suddenly?"

"I heard that Robespierre is done for, and I thought Paris might be in turmoil. I was worried about the Institute and whether it would face any issues, so I didn't wait for orders and came back on my own. Well, Lazare, you'll need to issue a new order for my return to make it official," Joseph said, pulling a chair and sitting in front of Carnot.

"Joseph..." Carnot's expression was strange. "You don't know yet, do you? Ah, I'm sorry; I couldn't save the Institute. It's been shut down! I wish I could drag Robespierre out of his grave to decapitate those rascals!"

"The Institute is gone?" This news indeed caught Joseph by surprise. He had anticipated that some people would try to cause trouble in the absence of Robespierre's authority and might tamper with the Institute. But he hadn't expected them to act so quickly and decisively.

"What happened?" Joseph asked urgently. He needed to understand the situation and minimize the damage.

"It's all those scoundrels' fault!" Carnot's anger flared. "Those who've been causing trouble since Robespierre's fall! They closed down the Institute! Right now, I wish Robespierre could rise from the grave and decapitate them all!"

"Lazare, calm down, calm down..." Joseph said, trying to soothe him. "We need to salvage what we can now. Stay calm. Come, Lazare, have a drink of water." Joseph quickly poured a glass of water and handed it to Carnot. "Lazare, you need to hydrate."

Carnot took the water and drank it all in one go. After a moment of composure, he recounted the situation to Joseph, concluding with a self-deprecating remark, "Joseph, I'm sorry; I couldn't protect our..."

"Lazare, pull yourself together," Joseph said. "We still have a chance to recover. Those scoundrels are just thatscoundrels. They caused destruction but didn't understand what was truly valuable in the Institute: its talents. They've taken our talents and put them to work for the nation. We must bring them back. Lazare, I've earned some money. When I add it all up, it's over a hundred thousand livres, and you know where it came from. You might have less, with your expenses, but we can use it. Also, about Napoleon... I must apologize for not keeping a closer eye on him. He's been involved in smuggling activities in the south, using my smuggling ships, and has amassed over three hundred thousand livres. We can work together to bring these people back and rebuild our own Institute and arms factory in the south. At the moment, it's the best way to minimize our losses."

Carnot considered this and said, "We have no other choice. Joseph, you're remarkable! You've remained calm and quickly found a solution. Actually, you're better suited to oversee everything. If you were in my position from the start..."

"Come on, Lazare," Joseph shook his head. "You know me well. If you can't handle it, how could I?"

"Alright, let's not dwell on that. Let's address the current issues," Carnot said. "We need to expand Napoleon's smuggling operations. It's going to be costly in the initial stages of our plan, so we need more money. We shouldn't restrict ourselves to legal smuggling anymore. We'll smuggle whatever makes money, including weapons, but only to genuine Americans. If we don't, those scoundrels will do it!"

Joseph added, "Besides Americans, we can sell to the Native Americans too."

"Let's get to work," Carnot said. "Secure the Naval Research Institute before those scoundrels get their hands on it. There's valuable stuff in there!"

"I already told Napoleon about it before coming here," Joseph said.

"Good. Let's not waste any time. Here's my suggestion: you have the money ready?" Carnot asked.

"I've got about three hundred thousand livres ready," Joseph replied.

"Excellent. If you trust me, give me one hundred twenty thousand livres, and I have eighty thousand livres. I'll go negotiate with Labas to buy the 'Naval Research Institute' right away," Carnot said.

"Regarding personnel, I have a list of all the staff, but they're scattered now. It'll take time to bring them back. As for you... Joseph, it's a shame you can't be in two places at once. I'd have one of you stabilize the Institute in Toulon, and the other can help me with some tasks here."

Joseph knew why Carnot was concerned about him handling affairs in Paris, which often involved making connections and using influence. Carnot wasn't comfortable with such tasks, and having Joseph in Paris could fill that gap. However, Carnot was also worried that without Joseph in Toulon, there might be potential losses.

"Many things in Paris don't necessarily require our direct involvement," Joseph said. "Lazare, there's someone who can act as our go-between."

"Who?" Carnot inquired.

"Joseph Fouch. I know you don't have a favorable impression of him," Joseph replied. Seeing Carnot's raised eyebrow, he continued, "But Fouch is capable, especially in finding people and using his connections. Let him handle these tasks. Lazare, I respect your abilities, but different people are better suited for different roles. I believe Fouch can handle these matters more efficiently than you."

Carnot nodded, acknowledging Joseph's point. He was proud and a bit stubborn, but he wasn't someone who refused to see the reality. "You're right, Joseph. Fouch is indeed better for these tasks than me. However, I do have some reservations. You know what? Shortly after Robespierre's fall, Fouch came to me back when I was in the Committee of Public Safety. He accurately pointed out the dangers I might face and wanted to join forces with me. But I turned him down. Do you know why?"

Before Joseph could reply, Carnot continued, "I was afraid of him. He played a significant role in bringing down Robespierre, and he excelled in conspiracies and intrigues. Robespierre called him a snake, and I agree. If he secures a strong position within our ranks, I fear he might become even more dangerous than Robespierre. I think Labas and others deliberately suppressed him, but they didn't realize they could achieve what they wanted without Fouch..."

Joseph couldn't help but think of a remark he had come across in a past life while reading "Dream of the Red Chamber": "A person should not lack talent; if one has talent but is conceited about it, they will likely cause harm. Conversely, a person should not lack talent, and if they misuse their talent, they will cause even more harm." The saying seemed to hold true now.

"It's precisely because he's so dangerous that we should keep a close eye on him," Joseph said. "Lazare, do you know where to find him?"

"Yes, that makes sense," Carnot nodded. "I know where he lives. After work, shall we go find him together?"

"All right," Joseph agreed.

At the end of the workday, Joseph and Carnot, accompanied by a dozen cavalymen, boarded a carriage and headed to the Saint-Antoine district.

The Saint-Antoine district was the largest slum in Paris, with narrow and chaotic streets. In recent days, due to skyrocketing prices and the worsening conditions for the lower classes, the area had become even more disorderly. People like Joseph, who preferred stability, wouldn't dare to come here without some protection.

The carriage stopped outside a crooked alley, as it couldn't go any further. Joseph and Carnot got off, and Joseph discreetly gripped the handle of a pistol concealed in his coat. The cavalymen dismounted and surrounded Joseph and Carnot as they ventured deeper into the alley.

After navigating the dirty, meandering alley with a foul-smelling stream running alongside it, they arrived at a dilapidated building. A soldier who had been leading the way said, "This is the place."

Joseph nodded, cast a glance at Carnot, and then approached the door, where he knocked.

Chapter 130: Joining Forces

After a while, amidst the creaking of the door, the door slowly opened, and Fouch appeared before Joseph.

Ever since joining the bells, Fouch had moved his residence to this place. It was mainly to show his camaraderie with those unruly comrades. Plus, since his affiliation with the bells, Fouch had maintained a high level of integrity. If you didn't consider his history of shifting allegiances, during this period, he was almost a moral exemplar, just like Robespierre.

However, after the fall of the bells and the need to deal with Robespierre, Fouch didn't have the time to consider moving. After Robespierre's fall, Fouch lost most of his sources of income, so he had to continue residing here.

At this moment, some people began to gather around, asking, "Joseph, what's going on?"

"Nothing, there's no issue. They're our friends," Fouch replied loudly.

Upon hearing this, the people gradually dispersed. These people were the bells, Robespierre's followers. In their eyes, Fouch was not a treacherous snake but a hero who had avenged the bells.

"Mr. Bonaparte, Mr. Carnot, it's quite a surprise to see you here," Fouch said with a smile.

"Ah, Mr. Fouch, we've always been friends, haven't we?" Joseph replied with a smile. "How about inviting us inside, even if the house is messy?"

"The house is a mess, so please don't mind," Fouch gestured for them to enter.

Several people entered the house, which was dimly lit. It was almost evening by now, and Joseph couldn't see much inside. He could barely make out a few figures and hear Fouch say, "Take the child to the back to play."

After a while, Joseph's eyes adjusted to the darkness.

"Mr. Bonaparte, Mr. Carnot, what brings you to see me?" Fouch smiled.

"Mr. Fouch, the people on the stage now are a disgrace. What do you think?" Joseph said.

"Do you want to start a revolution to overthrow them?" Fouch asked. "If that's the case, as a friend, I would advise you that now might not be the best time for that."

"No, no, my friend, where did you get that idea?" Joseph hurriedly replied. "I just want to help our country recover as much as possible."

Fouch lowered his head, thinking for a moment, then said, "Do you want me to retrieve something from the Military Research Institute?"

"It's not something, it's someone," Joseph said. "Mr. Fouch, you should know the most crucial part of the institute is the researchers. I have a list here, and I hope you can help us locate these individuals. You can inform them that if they are willing to join me in Toulon, their income will be based on the previous standards with a significant increase. The upper limit of this increase is also indicated on the list."

Joseph handed Fouch a list, but Fouch didn't look at it. In fact, it was too dark in his house to see anything clearly.

"So, Mr. Bonaparte, do you plan to rebuild the Military Research Institute? But do you have the government's authorization for this?" Fouch frowned.

"No," Joseph said. "We plan to establish a private research institute. Of course, the scope of the work will be the same as before. Mr. Fouch, considering the current trend where everyone is open about making money, why let those people make money when we can do the same? So, Mr. Fouch, do you have any interest in joining us and making money together?"

Fouch stared at Joseph for a while and then asked, "Rebuilding the institute, establishing a military industry enterprise, is indeed profitable now. However, it requires substantial startup capital. Do you have that money?"

"That's not a problem," Joseph replied.

"Ah, I see," Fouch said. "While I was still in Toulon, you and your brother had already set up a smuggling route to Spain. These months must have been profitable for you. But, since this is business, allow me to ask impolitely, what's in it for me in this deal?"

"If you can find all the people on this list, I will pay you two thousand livres, in silver. Additionally, the difference between the monthly salary you negotiate with these people and the maximum limit I've specified on this list will be your earnings. Besides, there's an even more crucial task: convincing the government to approve my acquisition of the Naval Research Institute. For that, I've allocated two hundred thousand livres. As long as you can help us navigate the bureaucracy within that budget, any leftover money will be your reward. You can choose to receive it in cash, not in bonds, or convert the money into shares and join us."

Fouch asked, "What can I do if I join you?"

"I've already learned about your capabilities in Toulon. You see, the former Military Research Institute relied on the state's power to maintain security and confidentiality. But now, we don't have that kind of power. Even if I use my brother's influence, it won't compare to what we had before. To make the kind of money we're envisioning, we must ensure secrecy. I believe you have a talent for that."

Fouch listened quietly without saying a word.

"In addition, we need to gather intelligence on other manufacturers, which is crucial for our business," Joseph continued. "Mr. Fouch, I understand that wealth might not be your primary concern. But, my friend, with your keen sense, haven't you realized that the times have changed? The era of revolution and fiery speeches has passed. Today, to make a political impact, you need substantial financial support. Mr. Fouch, are you interested in joining us?"

Fouch raised his head and looked at Joseph. Finally, he said, "I can take care of the task you've entrusted to me for now. As for whether to join you, I need to think about it."

"Very well," Joseph said. "At least for now, we're in cooperation. I might be leaving Paris soon, and for the Paris matters, you can contact General Carnot."

"Alright," Fouch said. "Can you provide some advance funds? You know, the tasks you've given me will require money."

Joseph looked around and then said, "That's a very reasonable request. I can pay you a thousand livres right now, and of course, you can choose an equivalent value in pounds or marks."

"Let's stick with livres," Fouch said, "but not in bonds."

"Agreed," Joseph took out a check from his pocket and said, "Could you light a lamp? And do you have a pen?"

"Of course," Fouch quickly agreed.

Fouch lit an oil lamp and brought a pen and ink. Joseph signed the check, dried the ink with blotting paper, and handed it to Fouch.

Fouch took the check, glanced at it, nodded, and put it away.

"By the way, Mr. Fouch, I entrusted you to inquire about my friend..."

"You mean Armand Lavasix, right? He sacrificed himself on the northern battlefield," Fouch said.

"But that's not a bad thing; otherwise, he would have surely faced the guillotine recently..."

The next day, Joseph returned to the University of Paris and found Lavasix, who was now teaching there. He asked Lavasix to go to Toulon to help him rebuild a research institute.

"Is that so?" Lavasix understood Joseph's intention and thought for a moment before replying, "Joseph, you protected me last time, and I'm grateful for that. Otherwise, I might have been executed by Robespierre. However, that was a matter of national duty, and there was an obligation involved. But this time is different, and if..."

As soon as Joseph heard this, he understood that Lavasix wanted to negotiate better terms for himself.

"Mr. Lavasix, you make a valid point, but you should know that this time I don't have government funding," Joseph began by feigning poverty and then presented a proposal.

"Mr. Lavasix, you see, we are now engaged in a profit-driven business, but you know I have many connections. This business should be profitable. Why not convert your technical expertise into money and become a shareholder in our venture?"

"Well, that's an interesting idea, but how much equity would my knowledge translate to?" Lavasix asked.

The two engaged in an open conversation about this issue, exchanging views until Joseph was ready to say that the discussion had deepened mutual understanding and was beneficial. However, Lavasix eventually relented.

"Alright, let's do it as you suggested earlier. After all, you helped me, and without you, I might have faced the guillotine by now. I'm someone who repays kindness..."

Joseph was satisfied with the agreement he reached with Lavasix. In his perspective, using such terms to bring Lavasix on board was a good deal. (After all, Joseph came from the future, and his estimation of the value of knowledge was much higher than that of people in this era.)

As soon as Joseph left, Lavasix immediately called out to his wife, who had been eavesdropping behind the door, "Marie, get ready; we're going to Toulon! Oh, this is too good! To conduct experiments freely and have such high wages, along with a share of the profits... Hahaha... Joseph is such a generous man! We're going to live the life of the wealthy again!"