

The Fox 19

Chapter 19: Brothers

The next day, even before the sun had risen, Joseph had already developed the habit of waking up early. In this age, there was no internet, no video games, not even electric lights. Most ordinary households couldn't afford candles or oil lamps, so the evenings were pitch dark. In his previous life, Joseph was used to staying up past eleven, but now he had adopted the habit of going to bed and rising early. In fact, most people in this era followed a similar routine.

Joseph dressed and walked out of his room, stepping into the courtyard of the church. The sun had yet to rise, and even the eastern horizon hadn't revealed a hint of pale light. A crescent moon and a few stars still hung in the velvety black sky. It was mid-December by the Gregorian calendar, and though Paris hadn't seen snow yet and the weather wasn't particularly cold, the rooftops and courtyard were covered in a thin layer of frost in the early morning.

A sturdy figure was in the courtyard, swinging an axe to split firewood. Joseph knew him as Father Jacques, who exercised this way every morning.

"Good morning, Father!" Joseph greeted as he approached.

"Ah, Joseph, good morning," Father Jacques set the axe aside and smiled at Joseph. "Heading out for a run?"

"Yes, I'm going to jog around the church," Joseph replied. "Twenty laps, and then it'll be time for breakfast."

"And what about your brother?" Father Jacques asked.

"He's up too, just washing his face. He'll join me for a run later. By the way, Father, we'd like to invite you for a nice meal at noon. I promise there won't be any mishaps this time," Joseph said somewhat sheepishly.

"Sounds good! I'll be there," Father Jacques agreed.

At this point, Napoleon emerged from behind them. His personality was not as easygoing as Joseph's. He nodded to Father Jacques and then followed Joseph out the door.

The two of them began running along the path next to the church. Since entering military school, Napoleon had improved his physical fitness despite still being short. He decided to increase his pace in an attempt to outpace Joseph and win.

But Joseph wasn't willing to let him succeed so easily.

"With those short legs of yours, do you really think you can outrun me?" Joseph picked up his speed as well. After crossing over to this era, Joseph knew that the medical knowledge was far less advanced. Even a minor illness could be life-threatening. Therefore, strengthening his body through exercise and boosting his immunity became Joseph's way of ensuring his survival. Although the Louis-le-Grand School didn't place as much emphasis on physical fitness as military academies, Joseph never neglected his physical training. Moreover, with his longer limbs, he had a natural advantage when it came to running. He wasn't about to let Napoleon, who had always been in his shadow, outrun him.

So Joseph sped up, and in a few steps, he was ahead of Napoleon. In response, Napoleon decided to accelerate as well.

"Damn... If your legs were just a bit shorter... this time..." Napoleon panted and spoke in short bursts, his breath turning white in the chilly morning air.

"You can't outrun me, can you? No excuses this time," Joseph replied between breaths.

Joseph believed he needed to excel in as many aspects as possible to keep Napoleon in check, not out of a sense of competitiveness but to have enough influence to keep Napoleon in check in the future.

"All right, caught your breath?" Joseph asked. "I have something to tell you."

"I'm fine now," Napoleon said as they continued running.

"I just won a major award for my research paper," Joseph announced casually. "The prize money is 600 francs, so we can celebrate with a nice meal at noon."

"Your research paper won an award?" Napoleon was surprised and stopped in his tracks.

"Of course, when your big brother is involved, is there any problem he can't solve?" Joseph said with pride.

"What did you write about? And why didn't I win the award?" Napoleon inquired.

"Because I might have refuted one of Sir Isaac Newton's principles."

"What? How is that possible?" Napoleon stared at Joseph, attempting to find any signs of joking on his face. However, Joseph's expression was nothing but smugness.

"I discovered a phenomenon that suggests light's true nature is closer to Hooke's idea - that it's a wave, not a particle," Joseph explained.

"Is that all?" Napoleon sounded unimpressed. "I thought you had refuted the three laws of motion."

"The three laws of motion won't budge for a while," Joseph shook his head.

"Not for a while?" Napoleon was surprised again. "So, you mean you've found a flaw in them, but you don't have evidence to disprove them yet?"

"No," Joseph shook his head. "There aren't any obvious flaws in Sir Isaac Newton's three laws. I simply refuse to believe them."

"Refuse to believe them? Does that mean you couldn't accept the concept of determinism within those laws? You're a pseudo-believer," Napoleon teased.

"No, it's not that," Joseph shook his head. "I just can't accept total determinism. It makes life seem utterly meaningless."

"What does that have to do with determinism?" Napoleon clearly couldn't grasp Joseph's point.

"Well, my dear brother, you really don't have the aptitude to be a scholar. Based on Newton's three laws, we could consider the universe's current state as the result of its past and the cause of its future. If a wise person had complete knowledge of the positions and forces of all the natural bodies at a certain moment, and if they could analyze these data, they could express the motion of everything from the largest celestial body to the tiniest particle in a single, simple equation. Nothing

would be uncertain to this person, and the future would unfold before them just as the past does. Everything is predetermined, just like Oedipus facing that dreadful prophecy. There's no room for free will because even resistance is a part of the plan. If I truly believed in Newton's three laws, what purpose would life have?"

Napoleon was taken aback by this explanation. He frowned and thought for a while before shaking his head. "I don't see the issue with your argument yet. But there must be something wrong with it. Otherwise, this conclusion is too hard to... Wait! Joseph, aren't you a devout believer? Isn't God the all-knowing, all-powerful one? And yet you can't accept even His omniscience. You're a hypocritical believer."

As Napoleon continued, he burst into laughter, apparently pleased with himself for catching his brother off guard.

"It's not the same thing," Joseph replied. "Besides, from what you're saying, I detect a scent of Calvinism, you heretic!"

Calvin was a prominent leader in the Protestant Reformation and a staunch supporter of predestination in philosophy and theology. France, on the other hand, was predominantly Catholic, and in the eyes of Catholics, Calvinism was heresy. So now, when Napoleon spoke about God's omniscience and predestination, Joseph countered by accusing him of being a Calvinist heretic.

The two bantered for a while before heading back to the church.

After breakfast, Joseph casually checked Napoleon's studies and then showed him the award-winning research paper, along with two related experiments.

"I'm starting to believe your point of view," Napoleon said. "Are there any more issues with this conclusion?"

"Of course," Joseph replied. "Any wave requires a medium for propagation, but there are many questions surrounding what the medium for light's propagation is. For instance, light is incredibly fast, although the exact speed is yet to be measured, it's undeniably very fast. A wave propagating at such a speed would require an incredibly rigid medium, yet we've never felt any resistance from the luminiferous aether. In short, there are numerous issues to tackle, but I believe that with further research, we'll eventually find solutions, even if they're not what we initially imagined."

"Unfortunately," Napoleon sighed, "although I'm quite interested in this, I have to admit that I don't have a clue about it, at least not yet."

"My dear brother, you should know that everyone has different talents. Some people might excel in one area while falling short in another. For example, in mathematics and the natural sciences, I think you'll likely be inferior to me, but in other areas, you might surpass me. If there's a small hole, you can crawl through it, something I probably can't do."

Listening to Joseph's sincere words, Napoleon was actually quite touched. Though he considered himself exceptional and believed he had strong aptitude for mathematics and the natural sciences, he wasn't one to delude himself. He knew deep down that he couldn't match his brother in these areas, and that often left him feeling frustrated. Joseph's words were indeed heartwarming, but then came the comment about crawling through small holes, which made Napoleon want to punch him.

"Joseph, you're not a good person," Napoleon said.

"Haha..." Joseph laughed triumphantly. "Also, considering our difference in height, I bet you won't be able to eat as much as I will when we have meat for lunch."