

## The Fox 20

### Chapter 20: The Invitation

During dinner, Joseph told Napoleon that in nine days, he would be participating in an experiment to measure the speed of light at the French Academy of Sciences. He invited Napoleon to join him and see the world if he was interested.

Napoleon's face showed indifference, but Joseph could sense some excitement in his eyes. His words were just a faade. While Napoleon contemplated the invitation, Joseph quickly helped himself to more meat.

After bidding farewell to his brother, Joseph continued his final classes at the School of Emperor Louis. On this particular morning, he had just finished a rhetoric class when he ran into Armand.

"Ah, isn't this our great scientist?" Armand laughed as he approached. "Hey, I never thought you could write such a paper! My days have been quite miserable lately because of you. You see, my uncle keeps praising your talent every day, and my father lectures me about you 24/7... All because of you, my inner peace has been greatly disturbed."

"Ah, Armand," Joseph said, "I sympathize with you, but as I've said before, parents always like to praise other people's children in front of their own. However, when it comes to writing wills and dealing with their inheritance, they always remember their own not-so-bright kids. So, this isn't really a big deal, and you don't need to fret over it."

"I'm not just talking about compensation for that," Armand shook his head. "I've seen this kind of situation before! But, darn it, yesterday, my beloved Fanny actually inquired about you and said she would love to meet you. Even the old man didn't object. My goodness! It breaks my heart... No, you must make it up to me."

Fanny was Armand's sister, and Armand doted on her. He loved to flaunt her in front of others. But if any of his friends expressed a desire to meet her, he would immediately turn against them. Armand knew that his friends were just as unreliable as he was, and they should have the self-awareness to know which kind of girl they shouldn't approach. So, when Armand's friends, knowing that Fanny was Armand's sister, dared to express a desire to meet her, it wasn't just a matter of ill intentions towards his sister; it also meant they didn't consider Armand a true friend. Thus, Armand would unhesitatingly sever ties with such individuals.

"My friend," Joseph said, "Since this involves your sister, it's a reasonable request. Alright, tell me what kind of compensation you need."

"Is it that easy?" Armand widened his eyes, grabbed Joseph's shoulder, and suddenly asked, "You want to meet my Fanny?"

"No, not at all," Joseph immediately replied.

"Hmm," Armand let go of his shoulder, but then he suddenly realized and said, "You're not honored? You don't want to meet the lovely Fanny?"

"You're insane!" Joseph retorted.

"You're right, my friend," Armand didn't argue but sighed instead. He continued, "I know I have issues with my attitude in such matters, but I can't help myself."

"It's not a big deal, Armand," Joseph consoled him. "You can change. Don't give up on yourself. Actually, I wanted to say that your sister is lucky to have a brother who cares so much for her. But in this age, there are too many irresponsible playboys."

"But I have to admit, among my friends, you are a rare one. Not too much of a scoundrel or a danger, more like an upright person. So, if you get a bit closer to Fanny, I might tolerate it a little..."

"That's not like you, Armand," Joseph said. "Aren't you the one who hates 'upright' people? Haha..."

"Alright, I'm inconsistent," Armand didn't argue but sighed again. "I know, it's just hard to control myself."

"It's not a big deal," Joseph comforted him. "You can change. Don't give up on yourself. Well, what do I need to bring as a gift?"

"No need, no need," Armand said. "Your presence is enough."

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Regarding the invitation from Armand's father and the subtle hint from Armand, Joseph carefully considered it, and it made sense.

The Lavasse family was a noble family in Paris, although their title was not high, just a viscountcy. However, Parisian nobles were known to be proud. Even "provincial nobles" were considered ignorant country folk in their eyes. If this had been a few decades ago, someone of Joseph's status would never have been qualified to be a guest in their home.

But times had changed. In recent years, France's economic situation wasn't great, which affected the nobility's income. Living in the expensive city of Paris was a real challenge. Even Parisian nobles, especially minor ones like Armand, were struggling. Armand's father was a cousin of the famous chemist Antoine Laurent de Lavoisier. Compared to the successful chemist, the financial situation of Armand's family was less stable, and their limited land holdings couldn't support their expenses, especially with two spendthrift sons. If not for regular assistance from their cousin, Armand's family might have been buried in debt by now.

Armand's younger sister Fanny had grown up. In noble families of this era, to secure the family's property and status, sons other than the eldest often received no inheritance and had to make their living as lawyers, businessmen, or artists. As for daughters, their future was even more uncertain. Noble families had to provide substantial dowries for their daughters to marry men of equal status, and this was a heavy burden for many noble families. To save on dowry expenses, some noble families married their daughters off to commoners in the provinces or sent them to convents.

From previous conversations, Joseph knew that Fanny was beloved in the family. In noble families of this period, to find a suitable husband for their daughter was a major concern. If Armand's family wanted to marry her into a family of equal status, they wouldn't be able to afford a large dowry. However, Joseph was a noble, and his future prospects were promising. If Armand's family married Fanny to him, they wouldn't have to provide a substantial dowry. Moreover, Joseph was a trustworthy person known to Armand, and he had the endorsement of the great chemist. All this considered, Joseph thought that Armand's invitation was quite reasonable.

Two days later, Joseph dressed in his only suit, took a public carriage, and arrived at Armand's house on Le Pardieu Street. Not far from Armand's house, he spotted the ruins of the famous Royal Opera House.

This opera house was the same one featured in the famous musical "The Phantom of the Opera." It was built in 1671 but burned down in 1763. It was only rebuilt during the Second Empire. Now, it stood as a charred ruin.

Armand's house was right next to these ruins. Being a noble, their residence was rather spacious, with a two-story building and front and back gardens.

Joseph followed the address and arrived at the entrance. By this time, music was faintly heard from inside. A servant was waiting at the door to greet guests. Joseph approached him and announced his identity. The servant immediately went inside to announce, and soon Armand appeared, wearing a smile on his face.