

## The Fox 31

### Chapter 31: The Corsican Society Survey and Armand's Script

"How do we determine who our friends are and who our enemies are?" Joseph chuckled. "My brother, you've finally asked a question that's not entirely foolish. Well, Napoleon, think about it. What kind of people desire change in their lives? And what kind of people want to maintain the status quo?"

If it weren't for their previous conversation, Napoleon might have immediately responded, "Those brave, adventurous, and heroic souls want change, while the mediocre, aimless individuals hope to maintain the status quo."

But now, Napoleon had grasped Joseph's line of thinking and wouldn't give such a simple answer. So, after a moment of reflection, he replied, "Those dissatisfied with reality and who believe they should have a larger share wish for revolution, while those content with the current distribution hope to preserve the status quo. Is that what you meant, Joseph?"

"Ah, Napoleon," Joseph smiled, "although I often call you a fool, in reality, you are quite intelligent compared to most. Your thoughts are correct. Well, now you should consider who your allies will be in your revolution and who will be your enemies. I think writing 'The History of Corsica' is not a bad idea."

"What do you mean?" Napoleon asked thoughtfully.

"Writing 'The History of Corsica' will provide you with an opportunity to interact with all layers of Corsican society, from the upper echelons to the common people. Through this, you can conduct a comprehensive survey of Corsica, allowing you to gain a full understanding of the island. My brother, you must understand that without thorough investigation, there can be no accurate judgment, and without judgment, there can be no authority."

Napoleon pondered for a moment and nodded. "Joseph, your point is well taken. I'll get started on this."

"Well, let me tell you," Joseph began, ready to offer some advice on conducting a social survey, but he was interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Who is it?" Joseph asked while making his way to the door.

"It's me, Armand," came Armand's voice from outside.

Joseph opened the door to find Armand standing there with heavy bags under his eyes, looking like he hadn't slept or had perhaps indulged in too much "Herb's Elixir." He also carried a bag in his hand.

"Armand, come in," Joseph welcomed him, pulling out a chair for him as he said, "My place is a bit messy; I hope you don't mind."

"No problem. My place is messier," Armand replied with a smile. "Do you have any wine here? I'm parched from the journey."

"I'm afraid not," Joseph shook his head with a smile, "you know I don't drink much. I only have water. Is that alright?"

"Damn! Alright, as long as it's a liquid. I knew not to expect much here," Armand said.

"Oh, Napoleon, would you mind getting the water jug?" Joseph turned to Napoleon.

Napoleon fetched the water jug.

"Is this your brother?" Armand asked.

"Yes, that's my not-so-bright brother," Joseph casually replied.

"I think if he wore ancient clothes, he'd look like the living Emperor Nero or even Alexander the Great," Armand said. "You might be too harsh on your brother.

Upon hearing this assessment, Joseph couldn't help but scrutinize Armand from head to toe several times, leaving Armand puzzled.

"Is there something on my face?" Armand asked.

"No," Joseph replied, "I was just checking if you've sobered up from 'Herb's Elixir.'"

"Ah, do you think I'm rambling because I've never seen your brother before?" Armand responded in a melodramatic tone. "Mere mortals, you should know that the greatest prophets in the world, Apollo's favorites, spoke the truths of the world while under the influence of mysterious intoxication. Do you think I'm babbling because I've never seen your brother? Foolish mortals, you should know that these divine intuitions are at work, and it was in this divine frenzy that I saw the light and the fire in your brother's eyes. In that moment, I even thought of the statue of Alexander the Great! Believe me, my friend, your brother will be extraordinary in the future. Truly!"

At this moment, Napoleon returned with the water jug, and upon hearing Armand's praise, he wore a wide grin on his face.

"Alright, Princess Cassandra," Joseph responded in a similar melodramatic tone, "you do have a point. But tell me, did you foresee my brother's presence here and the need to make this prophecy to him, as if a witch foretold Macbeth's prophecy?"

Cassandra was a legendary Trojan princess and a priestess of the god Apollo. She refused Apollo's advances, and he cursed her to see the future clearly but never be believed when she spoke her prophecies.

"Ah, you still don't believe," Armand said. "But wait and see. As for the reason I'm here, well, I didn't foresee meeting your brother here and making this prophecy. Joseph, do you remember the script we discussed last time? Spartacus?"

"Of course, I remember. Have you finished it?" Joseph asked in amazement. "This isn't like you, Armand. You usually write no more than twenty words a day."

"Well, you're right. But this time is different," Armand acknowledged his usual daily output. "I had a sense of a mysterious force compelling me, and I couldn't stop writing. The ancient Greeks believed that tragic playwrights weren't creating on their own; rather, the gods worked through them. When I was writing Spartacus, I felt that way, as if the Muses themselves were guiding my hand, making me write without pause. Joseph, this is not my creation; it's the Muse working through me. I'm just a vessel driven by divine inspiration. So, even though I've written this play much faster than anything before, the quality surpasses all my previous work. Compared to what I wrote before, it's like comparing the Graces to Helen. Do you want to take a look?"

"Alright, enough self-praise," Joseph interjected. "You sound like a charlatan selling indulgences. Let's see the script."

"Here you go!" Armand handed over the bag.

Joseph took the bag and, inside, found a neatly bound manuscript.

"Feel free to enjoy yourselves, and I'll take a look first," Joseph said while opening the script.

"You go ahead," Armand replied.

Napoleon leaned in to read it alongside Joseph.

Armand, leaning back in his chair, began to playfully engage Louis, who had been rather quiet all this time.

Sunlight streamed in through the window, casting a warm glow on Joseph's desk. As time passed, this patch of sunlight crawled across the table like a snail, gradually shifting from one end to the other. By the time Joseph had finished reading the entire script, the sunlight had already moved from one end of the desk to the other.

"So, how is it?" Armand asked eagerly when he saw Joseph put down the manuscript. He had been keeping an eye on Joseph and Napoleon while playfully interacting with Louis.

Joseph, however, remained silent for a moment before letting out a sigh and turning to Napoleon. "Napoleon, I've told you before that even with talent, one must work hard to achieve success. Look at this example before you. This guy named Armand, he's a complete scoundrel, a playboy who's wasting his life away. You see how good this script is, right? That's because you haven't seen the trash he wrote before. Compared to this, everything else he wrote was utter garbage! If this scoundrel were serious and put in effort, he might even catch up to Aeschylus, or even touch the heels of Homer, Euripides, and Sophocles. But this guy spends most of his time drinking and fooling around!... Speaking of drinking, Armand, your script actually makes me want a drink. It's about time for dinner; why don't you treat us, and we can go out for a drink?"

This transition was quite abrupt, catching even Armand off guard. However, he quickly understood that Joseph held his script in high regard.

"Very well, I'll treat," Armand agreed. "We can drink and chat. I know a place where they serve excellent Poitou brandy."

The group left Joseph's home, hailed a horse-drawn carriage, and soon arrived at a tavern called "Lilacs in May." Armand seemed to be a regular there, as he greeted the owner and the considerably larger proprietress with ease. Then he said, "Prepare a quieter spot for us, and bring another round of brandy!"

"Of course, Armand, and your usual spot where you can see the Seine," the landlady called out. The owner personally led them to their table.

As they sat down at the table, Armand said to the owner, "Philip, just bring us something to drink, and I'm not interested in your age-old menu."

The owner complied and left. Soon, a variety of dishes and a bottle of brandy were served.

"Napoleon, you can have a bit of brandy, but not more than one glass. Louis, you can't have any," Joseph instructed his brothers as he poured himself a full glass.

"It's unfortunate to have a big brother," Armand said.

"Armand, there's a major problem with your script, and it's a big one," Joseph stated.

"What problem?" Armand asked anxiously.

"It's too sharp. If you don't make some changes, it will be banned. But if you do make changes, it will lose its powerful impact," Joseph answered.

## Chapter 32: Revisions

Upon hearing Joseph's words, Armand became rather proud. "What's there to fear? It's just a ban on performing, isn't it? Even Gauny's 'Xi De' was banned once. To be banned just like 'Xi De' is nothing less than... why should we change it? No! Even if it's banned, even if they throw me in the Bastille for this, it's worth it! You must know, this is the immortal laurel crown of Apollo!"

"Well, this play will only be able to perform one or two times before they figure it out," Joseph remarked.

"No, that won't happen," Napoleon interjected suddenly. "Just like 'Xi De,' even if it's banned for a while, it will be performed again one day. And once it's performed again, it will become a timeless classic."

"I like the sound of that," Armand chuckled. "Napoleon, I'll toast to you!"

After saying this, Armand raised his arm and poured a large glass of brandy into his mouth. Napoleon, seeing this, wanted to imitate him, but his arm was stopped by Joseph.

"Armand can hold his liquor; drinking for him is like drinking water. Don't drink like him, or you'll fall before you can even say a few words, and that won't be any fun. When we used to drink with him, he'd drink as he pleased, and we'd just sip along," Joseph advised.

Napoleon glanced at Joseph and then at the thin-looking Armand. He seemed a bit skeptical but decided to follow Joseph's advice, taking a small sip.

"Alright, that's enough," Armand said. "I hope you can give me more sober opinions. So, how does your drinking compare to Joseph's?"

"Not as good as mine," Joseph replied.

"Not much worse," Napoleon almost immediately answered.

"Well, then you've taken a bit too much," Armand laughed. "Joseph can do some fuzzy math after just two glasses of brandy. Since you're about the same, take it slow."

"Lavaux, I have an idea," Napoleon said.

"Oh, you can just call me Armand, like Joseph does. 'Mr. Lavaux' is too formal, and it makes me uncomfortable. So, what's on your mind, Alexander?"

"I think, since this play has become so intense, intense to the point where it's almost certain to be banned, why not make it even more biting?" Napoleon suggested.

"Napoleon, you have a way of seeking excitement without fear of consequences. If we go that route, this play's fate won't be just banned and unbanned. It will turn into a cycle of being banned,

unbanned, banned again, and unbanned again. And Armand will be at real risk of being thrown in the Bastille," Joseph commented as he sipped his brandy.

"Well, that's even better!" Armand exclaimed. "That would surpass Gauny! As for being thrown in the Bastille, compared to such an achievement, what's a trip to the guillotine? Napoleon, what do you think to make it more intense?"

Napoleon pondered for a moment. "Armand, you know, after the Battle of Apulia, Spartacus was killed in action, and Pompey had all six thousand captured rebel soldiers crucified. How about we include an image of one of the crucified rebel soldiers in the play, making him look like Jesus?"

"Oh, that's a brilliant idea! It'll infuriate the clergy!" Armand laughed.

"We can also have three crucified rebel soldiers engage in dialogue, just like in the Bible when Jesus was crucified with two other thieves," Napoleon continued enthusiastically.

"Ah, great idea! Great idea!" Armand agreed. "My previous ending was too sad and gloomy. This change will add a touch of brightness to the conclusion. Maybe I should revive the Greek chorus. In the final scene, Spartacus's lieutenant can rally the other crucified soldiers, saying, 'We may die, but we die as free warriors, not as slaves and puppets for others to play with. The name and legacy of Spartacus will live on forever!' Yes, perhaps I should make a major adjustment, reviving the Greek choir. At the end, Spartacus's lieutenant can shout to the other crucified soldiers, 'Let's sing our war song one last time!' Some soldiers start singing, and the whole choir joins in, creating a grand finale. This is fantastic! Napoleon, you're a genius! Much better than Joseph, really!"

Joseph listened, his lips slightly curved, but he didn't say anything. As for Napoleon, he couldn't help but feel a sense of pride and looked at Joseph.

"The lyrics for this song shouldn't be a problem; you can write them yourself. But can you find a composer good enough to create the music you want? Even if you find a talented composer, it's not guaranteed that they'll be able to compose the suitable music, and you'd also have to worry about whether they'd risk their necks to create it," Joseph cautioned. "With these changes, the fate of the play might shift from being performed soon to an uncertain delay."

In this era, there were indeed some talented composers, such as Haydn and Mozart. However, they weren't in France, and they might not be willing to compose a song for a play that praised a slave rebellion and was considered blasphemous. Perhaps only Beethoven dared to do such a thing, but at this moment, Beethoven was still an unknown teenager. His mature period was still a few years away. Of course, France had some musicians and even revolutionary musicians, like Francois-Joseph Gossec. However, compared to other countries, especially Austria, France's musical achievements paled. To the point that in 1788, during his visit to Paris, Mozart wrote to a friend, saying, "Regarding music, I am in the midst of savages... Ask anyone, just as long as they're not French, and if they're somewhat knowledgeable, they'll say the same... If I can escape with my life, I'll thank God..." So, finding a composer to meet Armand's demands wouldn't be easy.

"No worries," Armand reassured. "For a perfect play, it's worth waiting. Let's toast to a flawless tragedy... Ah, I'll toast, and you can follow... Haha..."

The concept of a "perfect tragedy" originally hailed from Aristotle's praise of Sophocles' 'Oedipus Rex.' However, Armand's words were a clear revelation of his ambition.

In the following days, Armand frequently visited Joseph, his enthusiasm replaced by a sense of dissatisfaction with the play. He felt that many aspects were inadequate, needing adjustments, even significant ones. After every modification, Armand often found himself unsatisfied with the result, feeling that the previous version was better.

Of course, the most troublesome matter remained the war song. Now, this song played a more significant role in the script, appearing at least three times: when Spartacus and his followers initiated the revolt, when they escaped from the cliff of Mount Vesuvius, and during the final crucifixion scene. The lyrics and music for this song had not been finalized yet. Armand had written more than ten versions of the lyrics, but he dismissed them all.

Joseph's "research" progressed smoothly during this period. He had already published several valuable papers. His collaboration with Lavaux was successful. Although nitroglycerin remained highly dangerous, the on-site production techniques had matured, and they were even being used in the mines owned by the Orleans family. This significantly increased the productivity of the Orleans family's mines, leading to a modest profit for Duke Philip. If France's industrial development could match that of Britain, the Duke would have earned even more.

As Duke Philip made money, Lavaux naturally earned his share and gained more recognition. Thanks to his crucial contribution, Joseph had also made some money, along with Lavaux's gratitude and support. Currently, Lavaux was proposing to give Joseph a provisional membership in the French Academy of Sciences.

This proposal had the support of Lavaux and Duke Philip, which meant that, despite some opposition, everyone knew that, based on Joseph's performance, he would eventually gain a position in the French Academy of Sciences. Even the strongest opponents realized that delaying this matter wouldn't change the inevitable outcome, so the opposition was mostly mild. Therefore, unless something unexpected happened, in a few months, or at most by next spring, Joseph would secure a provisional membership in the French Academy of Sciences.

### Chapter 33: Armand's Friends

It was the chilly month of April 1787, when the willow trees along the Seine River had just begun to sprout tiny buds, no bigger than grains of rice. In other parts, the cold of winter still lingered.

"Do you know, Joseph, I actually prefer April to the full bloom of May," Armand said as he strolled along the Seine's banks, with Joseph walking beside him.

"Why's that?" Joseph inquired.

"Because April is the season of budding, the most hopeful time of all. Though the cold hasn't completely receded, and patches of snow can still be seen on the shaded slopes outside the city, the arrival of spring by the river is unstoppable," Armand explained.

"You make a good point," Joseph replied. "But April can be quite harsh too."

"Why do you say that?" Armand asked.

"Do you know, Armand?" Joseph glanced around and pointed to a bare lilac tree not far away. "Take this lilac tree, for instance. Last year, it produced thousands of seeds. Armand, all these seeds try to sprout in April."

"What's wrong with that?" Armand asked, puzzled.

Joseph walked over to the bare lilac tree, ran his hand along the rough trunk, and turned back to say, "Armand, out of the thousands of seeds this tree produced, how many do you think can grow even a small shoot? And of those fortunate enough to sprout a tender bud in April, how many can grow into a magnificent tree that blooms with flowers in spring? Think about it, even in the harshest of winters, all those thousands of seeds are still alive. But in April, most of them silently die in the soil. Think about how many lives quietly fade away in April, how many hopes are crushed. Even now, beneath our feet, in the soil, countless lives may be dying... April is the cruelest month. It resurrects lilacs on barren land, mixing memory and desire, and urges the dull roots to stir. Winter warms us, covering the earth in forgetful snow, sustaining the withered roots for a while."

"Wait a moment," Armand interjected. "Joseph, I must say you're wasting your talents not being a poet. Your perspective is intriguing. However, I've heard a similar sentiment from someone else, though their conclusion differed from yours. They said that in a revolution, many will pay a price, even with their lives. But it doesn't mean there's anything wrong with the revolution. Because without it, if we have an eternal winter, life might fade away a bit slower, but the prolonged harsh winter will eventually wither all life. After all, dry roots can only sustain for so long. Revolution may cause us to lose a lot in the short term, but in the long run, it can bring us more."

"Who told you that?" Joseph asked.

"Marat, a doctor," Armand replied.

"Marat? Is that the one who was assassinated in a bathtub, then briefly enshrined, only to be moved again shortly after?" Joseph wondered. "Is he the author of 'A Study on the Properties of Fire'? I recall your uncle mentioning him."

"Ah, I'm sure my uncle didn't speak kindly of him," Armand chuckled. It also confirmed that the Marat Armand mentioned was indeed the same Marat that Joseph was thinking of.

"Lavoisier only mentioned his views when discussing erroneous ideas. In fact, besides the word 'absurd' to describe his conclusions, Lavoisier had no other opinion about him. Did he have any conflicts with your uncle?" Joseph asked.

"Not really a conflict," Armand replied. "Just academic disagreements. But my uncle did mock him rather harshly, so their relationship wasn't great. Nevertheless, that's between him and my uncle. This person is indeed quite talented. I hope to introduce you to him, as he might be among your friends."

With that, Armand looked ahead and said, "We're almost there. Abel's Tavern is just ahead, and the friends I mentioned are waiting for us there."

"Why choose such an out-of-the-way place?" Joseph questioned.

"It's not for any other reason but the cheap drinks here," Armand explained. "These are all private brews, untaxed."

As they continued walking, they took a right turn down a narrow alley and walked about twenty steps to arrive in front of a building. This area was close to the poor neighborhoods of Paris, so the houses were mostly small and dilapidated, all gray and gloomy, much like the expressions of the impoverished. This particular building was no exception. It had a closed door, with no signs or any distinguishing features. From the outside, it was nearly indistinguishable from the neighboring structures.

Armand walked up to the door and knocked. The door didn't open, but a voice from inside inquired, "Who is it?"

"I'm a friend of Albert's," Armand replied.

The door opened slightly, revealing darkness inside. Joseph could only make out a pair of eyes seemingly assessing them. After a while, a voice from within said, "It's a friend." The door then swung open fully.

Armand, with Joseph in tow, entered the building, and the door closed behind them. The sudden darkness enveloped them, and it took Joseph's eyes a while to adjust to the dim light. He also got his first clear look at the person standing before them.

He was a young man, roughly the same age as Armand, with black, slightly curly hair, and eyes that shone like lightning, even in the darkness.

The young man clearly knew they had just entered and waited for their eyes to adapt, standing quietly. Then, he said, "Armand, and this is..."

"Joseph Bonaparte," Joseph introduced himself hastily.

"In that case, Mr. Bonaparte, please come in," the young man said, turning and walking further inside.

They followed him through a corridor, and he pushed open a door, leading them into a slightly larger room. The room was positioned towards the back of the building and had relatively larger windows, allowing more light to filter in. In the center of the room stood a large round table, and several people were seated around it.

Upon hearing the door open, all eyes turned in their direction. One person even stood up and waved, "Hey, our great scientist and writer have finally arrived."

Joseph recognized the person it was his fellow student, Orlans, who had gone on to become a lawyer and left Paris for a provincial town after graduation. They had kept in touch through letters, but their in-person meetings had been few and far between. It was a pleasant surprise to see him back in Paris.

"Orlans, you're here too? You didn't send me a letter in advance," Joseph exclaimed, pleasantly surprised.

"Because this trip to Paris was a last-minute decision due to some work-related matters. I thought my messenger might not be as fast as I am. After finishing my work, I intended to come find you, but Armand said you were coming here today, so I decided to wait for you directly," Orlans explained. "Joseph, welcome."

After welcoming Joseph, Orlans and Armand began introducing the others present.

"This is our esteemed lawyer, Danton," Orlans began, introducing a slightly overweight man in his twenties, seated next to him. "He was one of my mentors and has taught me a great deal during this time."

Joseph knew that this was Danton, one of the later-to-be-famous Jacobin giants. He couldn't help but observe him closely.



Danton had an unrefined appearance, wearing a loose, bright red overcoat with an open shirt revealing his neck. The coat's buttons were missing, and he wore high boots. His hair was untamed, and his wig was visibly made from horsehair. His face had a few blemishes, but a friendly smile played on his lips. He had thick lips, large teeth, powerful fists, and bright eyes.

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Joseph said, giving a slight bow.

"It's an honor to meet a future great scientist," Danton replied.

Joseph also noticed that, indeed, as Armand had mentioned, Danton was quite the unrefined character. He couldn't help but glance at him a couple more times.

"This angelic-looking fellow, who can make me jealous to the point of sleepless nights with a single glance, is our friend, Louis," Armand introduced the young man who had brought them inside.

"Joseph, Louis is just like that even a simple glance from him is enough to steal any maiden's heart. But he rarely smiles."

"Hello, I've read some of your works, and if you have time in the future, I'd like to seek your guidance on some mathematical questions," Louis said. Joseph responded with a greeting while noticing that, indeed, as Armand had described, Louis had the face of an angel. His slightly wavy flaxen hair, velvety skin, and crystal-clear, lively blue eyes were striking. Even if he were to offer a slight smile, just like a gentle breeze in May, it would be enough to sweep any maiden's heart away. But Louis's face was almost devoid of a smile, resembling a marble sculpture.

"If he were born in a later era, he wouldn't have to do anything just with that face, he wouldn't have to worry about food," Joseph thought, feeling a touch of envy.

The story of their gathering continues, and the group's discussion, laughter, and shared camaraderie unfold as they explore the dynamics of this unique assembly of friends.

#### Chapter 34: Amateur Scientist Mara and Color-Blind Danton

If Louis was the epitome of beauty, almost as if the golden apple had been handed to Prince Paris of Greek mythology by the goddess Aphrodite, or like the Archangel sounding the trumpet of the Last Judgment descended with fire and thunder from the clouds, then the next friend introduced to Joseph by Armand was the complete opposite in terms of appearance.

He was a short, skinny man with a waxen-yellow face. His eyes were of unequal size, and his nose was large but flat, as if someone had slapped it forcefully, flattening it. His forehead was also flat, but his jaw was strong and protruding, making his mouth appear unusually large and to some, like a toad. With his skinny frame, slightly protruding finger joints, and dry, flaky, black-yellow skin due to some skin condition, he looked like a creature that had escaped from a nightmare.

"Joseph, this is my friend Mr. Mara," Armand introduced.

"Pleasure to meet you," Joseph nodded, extending his hand.

Mara also extended his hand but with a light, almost imperceptible grip on Joseph's fingers. Joseph noticed that Mara's hand was quite cold.

"Mr. Bonaparte, I've read your paper. You believe that light is a wave?" Mara said calmly, his voice as cold as his handshake.

"It's not just my belief; the existing evidence leans toward that conclusion. I don't have a bias toward whether light is a particle or a wave. I rely on experimental evidence and mathematical explanations," Joseph replied.

"Why don't you confidently support your own view instead of using such a weak statement to hide your position? Is it because you lack confidence in your judgment?" Mara said with a mocking tone.

Joseph couldn't help but furrow his brows, a thought crossed his mind, "Ugly people often act peculiarly." Indeed, ugly individuals often faced discrimination, which could make them angry and prone to hostility. Joseph saw Mara as a typical example of this.

However, Joseph didn't want to offend Mara at this moment, as he appeared to be quite dangerous. Although Joseph wasn't very knowledgeable about the history of the French Revolution (after all, wasn't this foreign history before his time travel?), he knew that Mara might be responsible for many horrifying acts during the revolution, some of which might be motivated by personal vendettas. Joseph didn't want to provoke such a madman.

"Anyway, this guy won't live for long. Let's just give in for now," Joseph suppressed the urge to retort and told himself that.

"I have no strong opinion on whether light is a wave or a particle. My viewpoint is that it depends on experimental phenomena and mathematical explanations. If we can explain interference phenomena from a particle perspective, I would be equally pleased. In a world so complex, the only reliable thing is mathematics," Joseph explained.

"Ah, Joseph, your view has a touch of Pythagoras, doesn't it? 'All is number,' isn't it?" Danton chimed in.

Pythagoras was a famous ancient Greek mathematician who founded the Pythagorean school. A fundamental belief of the school was that "all is number." They believed that mathematics was the only way to describe the essence of the world and that everything could be explained using numbers.

"I'm not as enthusiastic as they were," Joseph smiled slightly, "I wouldn't throw someone into the sea just because they discovered irrational numbers. But, my friend, perhaps you should consider this as well. Is our vision reliable? Not necessarily. For instance, some people claim to see colors differently from others."

"Wait... What did you just say? You said some people see colors differently from others? Are you sure such people exist?" Mara interrupted.

"Yes, what's the matter?" Joseph asked.

"This might be a new disease that people haven't noticed before," Mara said. "Can you tell me how you discovered this?"

"When I was a child, a friend of mine came running to tell me that the hibiscus flowers in my garden appeared different colors during the day and evening. In the daytime, they were sky blue, but in the evening, they turned bright red. However, to me, those hibiscus flowers were always pink. When I told him, he was astonished and even suspected that my eyes were the problem. So, we asked a few more people, and everyone, except his brother, agreed that the hibiscus flowers were pink. Later, we found that his uncle also believed the hibiscus flowers were blue during the day and

bright red in the evening. But I was envious of them because they could see two different colors in the same flower."

"Can your friend bring them for me to see?" Mara asked.

"He's from Corsica, and it's not easy for him to come here now," Joseph said with an open hand.

"Ah..." Mara sneered sarcastically, "Mr. Bonaparte, do you know I have a friend with extraordinary jumping ability? He can jump directly to the moon."

Joseph quickly told himself not to engage in a verbal battle with this guy and held back the urge to retort. However, at that moment, Danton spoke up:

"Could it be that hibiscus flowers don't change colors during the day and evening? Is it just my eyes? Is my vision the problem?"

Everyone's attention turned to Danton.

"Why are you all staring at me?" Danton asked.

"Danton, do you see the hibiscus flowers change color during the day and evening?" Mara fixed his gaze on Danton, as if observing a precious specimen.

"Yes... Isn't that what you see?" Danton replied.

"What color do you see?" Mara asked again.

Danton widened his eyes, stared at Armand's hat for a while, and said, "It's green, of course."

"Take another look," Mara said.

Danton looked intently at Armand's hat and then said, "It's definitely green."

"My God! There really are people whose eyes see colors differently from others! Armand's hat is obviously a light red!" Mara clapped his hands and then turned to Joseph. "Mr. Bonaparte, do you realize how dull you are? Don't you know this is a significant medical discovery?"

"I'm not a doctor after all. I'm almost illiterate when it comes to medicine," Joseph smiled. "Let's go back to our original topic. I believe our vision is unreliable, just like our hearing. Some people claim they can hear sounds that others can't..."

"That's just a trick used by charlatans," Mara interrupted.

"Even ordinary people experience this at times," Joseph said. "For example, when we dream, we can hear many sounds that don't exist, see things that aren't there. Our vision can deceive us, our hearing can deceive us, and even our imagination can deceive us, such as 0.9999... equaling one. But mathematics doesn't lie. I remember a certain priest once said, 'When the world is turned upside down, the cross still stands.' Whether the 'cross' stands is debatable, but I'm sure that even if the entire solar system is in chaos, two points can still define a straight line. So, when everything else is unreliable, I can rely on mathematics

## Chapter 35: Arrangements for the Brothers

Adhering to this principle, after that, Joseph adopted a policy with Mara's eccentric discussions, not only not opposing but even praising them.

However, anything is easier said than done. Deciding to follow the policy of "agree with him, encourage him, and cultivate him into a great know-it-all" is not difficult, but going against your own conscience to support a rather absurd perspective is truly uncomfortable. Joseph even remembered a joke he had heard in his previous life about the Republic-era poet Zhang Zongchang.

It was said that General Zhang compiled a collection of his own poems (such as the masterpiece that went, "Great Bright Lake, Bright Lake Great, On Great Bright Lake, there are lotus flowers, and on the lotus flowers, there are toads. Poke one, and it leaps."). He then sought out an old scholar to have him appraise it. This old man, unaware that Zhang Zongchang was the author, read the poems and blurted out, "Incomprehensible nonsense!"

General Zhang, upon hearing this, was furious: "Dare you call my poems 'incomprehensible nonsense'? I think you're looking for trouble! Guards, take this old man away and execute him!"

The old man, realizing he was in deep trouble, quickly knelt down and begged, "General, General, my eyesight is failing, I didn't see it clearly earlier... Let me take another look..."

Zhang Zongchang let the guards release the old man temporarily and, patting the small cannon at his waist, said, "Old man, you'd better look carefully this time!"

The old man carefully read Zhang's poetry collection twice and then sighed, put down the collection, and stood up, saying to Zhang Zongchang, "General, you should have me taken away and executed."

Now, Joseph couldn't help but think that he wanted to say something similar to Mara, who was spouting nonsense.

Fortunately, Danton seemed to have a rather dismissive attitude toward Mara, so he stepped forward to argue with him. This led Mara to spare Joseph, focusing his energy on debating with Danton.

Armand introduced Joseph to the others, explaining that Joseph was a rising star in science and had a keen eye for art. He mentioned that some of Joseph's suggestions had even influenced his unfinished work, "Spartacus."

So, they all engaged in conversation. When young French people gathered, their discussions typically revolved around women or politics. Joseph was surprised to find that the future Jacobin leaders (excluding the most famous one, Robespierre) present at the meeting didn't have extremely radical political views at this time.

Mara advocated for constitutional monarchy - probably influenced by his time studying in England. Danton, on the other hand, was more conservative, believing in an enlightened monarchy, aligning his views with those of Voltaire. Louis leaned more towards Mara's views but seemed to have a particular dislike for him. Their host, Abel, didn't seem to care much about the specific political system. He was more concerned with protecting the rights of the common people.

In reality, there was almost only one person who supported a republic, and that was Orlans, albeit not very firmly. In his view, if a republic couldn't be established, a constitutional monarchy was an acceptable alternative. In general, if they were suddenly transported a few years into the future, they would undoubtedly be labeled "counter-revolutionaries" and face the guillotine or even being hung from lampposts.

"It's normal that they're relatively moderate now. In fact, at this time, even the most radical young people are only this radical," Joseph thought to himself. "So the Duke of Orleans and his associates think they can use these people and their spark in the powder keg to propel themselves to the throne. They don't realize that once the fire starts burning, the situation may become uncontrollable. They are playing with fire."

Handling such gatherings was not too difficult for Joseph. He had come from the future, where he had seen a plethora of political theories, systems, and experiments. Dealing with these immature future leaders was not a problem. His casual ideas inspired these young men, even making the usually stoic Louis exclaim, "There are actually people as talented as Bonaparte in the world."

Initially, Joseph was somewhat hesitant about accepting Armand's invitation to attend these gatherings with the "radicals." These individuals had a tendency to lose their heads during the impending revolution, figuratively and literally. Being too involved with these dangerous elements could indeed be perilous. However, considering that the great revolution was inevitable, not knowing these radical figures and having no association with them would be equally dangerous. So, Joseph decided that he must engage with these people, but with some distance. He needed to maintain a favorable impression without getting too entangled in political struggles.

In general, Joseph felt that his performance was quite good. Even Mara's attitude toward him improved after Joseph handed over the study of color blindness and the honor that came with the discovery to him. Although Mara continued to use a habitual mix of praise and criticism in his speech, Joseph felt that Mara didn't hold much malice toward him.

In this era, outstanding scientists were somewhat akin to ancient Chinese Confucian scholars. While they might not wield political power, associating with such individuals was an honorable endeavor. So, everyone sincerely invited Joseph to attend their gatherings more frequently. However, this didn't align with Joseph's plans. Therefore, he had to apologize to everyone, explaining that he wished to attend their gatherings but was currently engrossed in an important mathematical problem.

"Mr. Bonaparte, what kind of problem have you encountered?" Mara was particularly interested.

Joseph raised his hands and said, "This problem may sound simple, but it becomes quite complicated when you delve into it. Perhaps, I need a spark of inspiration to tackle it. Well, a student mentioned to me that it seems that all maps can be colored using only four colors to differentiate different regions. However, he doesn't know how to mathematically prove it. I found this problem quite intriguing at the time, and it didn't seem too difficult. I attempted to prove it, but so far, I've made no progress."

This problem was the famous "Four Color Theorem," considered one of the four great unsolved problems of mathematics in Joseph's future time. It sounded simple, and even a child could understand it. However, proving it was incredibly challenging. Even in Joseph's time, it took the use of electronic computers to confirm the theorem after performing around a hundred billion individual checks. In this era, it was almost an unsolvable problem.

Joseph brought up this problem partly as an excuse, and partly to bait the pseudo-scientific Mara. Usually, problems that sounded easy and could be solved with a spark of inspiration were the kind that pseudo-scientists loved.

As expected, Mara immediately became interested in the problem. "Is this problem difficult?"

"Yes, it's quite difficult. In my opinion, its difficulty is on par with cubing the cube, squaring the circle, and trisecting an angle. I've already presented this problem to the Academy of Sciences and suggested that if no one can prove it in a short time, we should make it a public problem and offer a reward."

Mara's eyes lit up with excitement. He took out a notebook and a pen and said, "Mr. Bonaparte, could you please repeat the problem?"

...

Using this excuse, Joseph could maintain a certain distance from these individuals. Besides, apart from Napoleon, both of his brothers were with him now, and he needed to focus more on their education.

Louis was still very young, not even ten, so it was too early to give him specialized training. However, Lucien had already begun to display some talent in public speaking and the arts. Joseph, not being a history enthusiast in his past life, didn't know that Lucien had once been the President of the "Five Hundred People Society" during the events leading to Napoleon's rise to power. But since Lucien had already shown promise in these areas, encouraging him in this direction seemed like a good idea.

"In the future, Napoleon will be devoted to the military. As for me, I'll ensure the family's good name and the overall direction of French development. The greatest advantage of time travelers lies in knowing the broad course of history, right? As for Lucien, if he has a talent for oratory and the arts, he can handle public relations and propaganda in the future. In a way, a rose is also a weapon of war."

Joseph didn't have much connection with the world of art, so he had to rely on Armand for many aspects of this plan. However, he was concerned about Armand's lifestyle. Lucien was at a critical stage in forming his values, and having him learn from Armand was... Well, Armand's company had improved somewhat recently after mingling with those radical elements, so that was a relief.

#### Chapter 36: Troubled Waters in the East and the Shadows of Revolution

Joseph submitted the "Four-Color Problem" to the Academy of Sciences, and sure enough, it left everyone, including Laplace, stumped. They studied it for a while but couldn't come up with a solution, not even a viable approach. Everyone, including Laplace, had their own research to attend to, and they couldn't afford to spend all their time on such a problem. So, as Joseph suggested, the Academy decided to make the problem public and solicit solutions from all around the world.

Joseph originally posed this problem to trap Marat. Based on his past experiences, he knew that amateur scientists were more inclined towards physics and chemistry than mathematics. However, he didn't anticipate that in the future, the mathematical problems would become so complex that amateurs wouldn't understand them. So, the scarcity of amateur mathematicians in the future wasn't due to their reverence for math but because they couldn't comprehend the problems.

However, the "Four-Color Problem" happened to be a question that everyone, including amateurs like Marat, could understand. So, as soon as the announcement was made, the Academy received a perfect solution from Marat. But when Laplace glanced at it, he found numerous errors, and the paper found its way to the bin where it belonged.

Marat, however, didn't give up and sent the "paper" to Joseph, believing that Joseph would recognize its value. This was when Joseph realized he had dug himself into a hole.

Marat's "paper," like all "amateur papers," was riddled with problems, from incorrect deductions to flawed concepts. Joseph, after a cursory look, found seven or eight issues.

"If this were written by Napoleon or any of my other students, I'd have given them a good scolding!" Joseph muttered through gritted teeth, pondering how to respond to Marat.

"Finding something 'valuable' in this 'paper' is not easy. If I must point out something 'valuable,' it's the audacity. Ignorance truly has no fear," Joseph sarcastically thought.

"However, I can't keep praising his 'audacity' in my reply, right? Marat may take it as a mockery," Joseph reasoned. So, he had to study Marat's flawed paper meticulously to find something praiseworthy. "Well, this section's deduction, while not rigorous, has some interesting ideas. Let's focus on that for now," Joseph decided.

With that in mind, Joseph started composing his response to Marat's letter. In this letter, Joseph dedicated two full pages to praising the small section Marat had analyzed. The tone of his praise gave even himself goosebumps.

"I've sunk to such levels just to make a living. Well, business is business," Joseph muttered while working on his response.

"Now, it's time to change the tone a bit," Joseph thought. So he wrote, "However, this paper does have a few minor issues, such as... Mr. Laplace believes that the logic in this part is flawed, and it overlooks... You may not know this, but mathematicians tend to be quite stubborn about these matters. Mr. Laplace, in particular, is very rigid when it comes to such issues, and he thinks this paper fails to successfully prove this conjecture."

He concluded the "but" section, slyly shifting the blame toward Laplace. With that, Joseph had completed his letter, which he then carefully blotted to remove excess ink and sent back. As for how Marat would react to the letter and how he'd hold a grudge against Laplace, that wasn't Joseph's concern. Considering the headaches Laplace had caused him in his previous life with his theories, Joseph felt that his conscience was clear this time.

This strategy worked. Shortly after, Marat sent a response, expressing gratitude for Joseph's affirmation and expressing anger towards the "conservative old men" in the Academy. He hinted at his future ambitions, saying that one day he would expel these individuals from the Academy and replace them with young, forward-thinking people like Joseph, believing they would revitalize France's scientific community.

"Is this 'If I become the young emperor in years to come, I will repay the peach blossoms'?" Joseph couldn't help but chuckle.

Marat did indeed rise to prominence, but that was a story for another day. For now, Joseph's attention shifted back to his younger brothers.

Napoleon didn't require Joseph's help anymore and had returned to Corsica. He wouldn't be coming back anytime soon. Louis, still a child, attended a decent primary school. Joseph arranged for Lucien to enter his alma mater, the College of Louis the Great.

Lucien didn't shine academically like Joseph, but he did reasonably well. He also demonstrated talent in public speaking and acting. Joseph had left his role as a playwright for the Dragon and Rose Theatre, but he still maintained connections. Using these connections, he occasionally had Lucien play minor roles in the theatre. According to the troupe leader Denard, "He's a natural actor." Joseph had never seen Lucien perform, so he wasn't sure if Denard was exaggerating.

In addition, Joseph hired an Austrian musician named Fraser to teach Lucien the piano. According to Fraser, Lucien started learning the piano a bit late, but he showed promise. With effort, he might reach a level where he could perform on stage.

Joseph didn't expect Lucien to become a piano virtuoso. In his vision, Lucien would handle artistic and cultural promotion, not necessarily mastering all the arts. Nevertheless, Lucien displayed some innate talents, and he recently started creating a few short scripts and composing some melodies. Joseph had seen and heard them; they weren't remarkable but still decent.

Thanks to these accomplishments, Armand invited Lucien to his "Spartacus" creative group. On weekends, they discussed script issues.

Time passed, and before they knew it, it was 1789. In the past two years, France's finances had reached a critical point, forcing King Louis XVI to propose new taxes to prevent a complete government bankruptcy. France was divided into three estates: the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners. The first two estates held a significant portion of the country's wealth but paid minimal taxes. They vehemently opposed any tax increases on them and used their political power to resist. Consequently, the commoners, the third estate, became the primary target for increased taxation.

To address the financial crisis, King Louis XVI reluctantly convened the Estates-General, which had been dormant for 175 years. He hoped to find a solution.

"France's king is a fool! Can't he see the discontent and anger among the third estate? Opening the Estates-General at this time is a ridiculously foolish move!" Napoleon wrote in a letter to Joseph. "Doesn't he realize how much resentment and fury have built up among the third estate? If he doesn't call the Estates-General, these grievances will remain dormant and not pose a significant threat. But now, he's given these opposition groups an opportunity to organize. He's foolishly provided them with a chance to unite, transforming them from crickets into locusts. The king probably believes that the third estate will submit to higher taxes or, at worst, make some noise. Yet, there are others watching from the sidelines..."

Joseph completely agreed with Napoleon's assessment. As the third estate's representatives gathered in Paris, the entire city grew restless. Pamphlets began circulating among the citizens, introducing them to the Estates-General and subtly directing their focus towards the king's intentions to raise taxes. These pamphlets, while informative, were also designed to provoke a specific reaction, feeding the population's worries about their already challenging lives.

Meanwhile, due to a spring drought affecting many provinces in the north, some grain merchants, mostly under the patronage of aristocrats, began withholding grain to hedge against potential crop failures. As more and more merchants joined this strategy, the availability of grain in the market diminished, causing prices to soar. The rising prices further incentivized grain hoarding, making the situation worse and intensifying public discontent.

In these circumstances, Armand once again sought Joseph's counsel.



## Chapter 37: Dress Rehearsal

Armand informed Joseph that his play "Spartacus" was getting ready for a performance in Paris.

Joseph asked, "Is your battle song ready?"

Armand shook his head and replied, "No, not yet. We still don't have a song that satisfies everyone. But everyone agrees that now is the best time to stage this play. Missing this opportunity would be a great loss. So, for now, we'll use Edgar's song."

Edgar was a young "composer" in Armand's circle. Just like in later times, Paris was teeming with struggling young artists who claimed to be "composers," and Edgar was one of them. He had a few songs circulating in the bars of the Saint-Antoine district, but writing a battle song for "Spartacus" was a challenge beyond his abilities.

Joseph commented, "This is indeed the best time from a sensational perspective. However, staging this work at this time might be risky. You might end up... in the Bastille."

Armand waved his hand dismissively and replied, "So what? That would make me a part of history. I wouldn't mind spending a few years in there for the chance to be remembered."

Since Armand had this attitude, and Joseph knew that even if Armand were thrown into the Bastille, he wouldn't stay there for long. The Bastille was stormed at the beginning of the French Revolution, and its prisoners were released. Furthermore, if Armand were to enter politics in the future, having spent time in the Bastille would be a valuable qualification.

Joseph said, "Well, if that's how you feel, then I won't try to dissuade you. When is the dress rehearsal? I'd like to come and see it."

Armand replied, "The day after tomorrow, at the Peterson Theater, starting at 8 in the morning."

The Peterson Theater was located between the Saint-Antoine district and the City Hall, not far from the Bastille. The conditions at this theater were not as luxurious as those in the wealthy districts to the west, but it was more suitable for staging Armand's play.

Joseph agreed, "I'll be there for sure."

Two days later, Joseph took Lucien with him to watch the dress rehearsal of "Spartacus." The rehearsal went smoothly, including Edgar's song. However, Armand appeared troubled, frowning his brows.

Joseph asked, "What's wrong, Armand? Isn't everything going smoothly? The actors are performing well."

Armand sighed and replied, "Yes, they are, damn it! If it weren't for that brilliant idea you had given me before, I'd be completely satisfied now. But whenever I hear Edgar's song, I can't help but feel like... like I'm having a grand feast with unseasoned dishes. It's all your fault, Joseph. Damn it, if it weren't for you, I'd be as cheerful as those fellows... no, even more cheerful. Damn it!"

Armand stamped his foot and then turned to Joseph, half-jokingly saying, "Joseph, you have to help me..."

Joseph widened his eyes and said, "What can I do?"

In all honesty, Edgar's song wasn't bad. Its melody was uplifting and beautiful, but, as Armand had complained before, "It's a bit too light. I need a thundering Urbane cannon, and he gave me a small trumpet."

Armand paused for a moment, then smiled wryly, "Well, maybe there's no solution to this in the time we have."

He turned to Lucien and jokingly said, "Lucien, you're learning music too. How about trying to write a good song?"

To Armand's surprise, Lucien responded, "Sure, after watching today's rehearsal, I was actually thinking of giving it a try."

This answer caught Armand off guard. He was taken aback for a moment, then chuckled, "Well, if you can do it quickly, it would be great. This play is scheduled to premiere in just two weeks."

Unbeknownst to Armand, four days later, Joseph suddenly brought Lucien to him.

"Armand, take a look at this," Joseph said, handing Armand a piece of paper.

Armand took the paper and examined it closely. Then he started humming the melody written on it. Finally, he looked up, grasped Joseph's sleeve, and asked, "Joseph, this is amazing! Where did this come from?"

"The music was composed by Lucien," Joseph said, casting a glance at Lucien, "and the lyrics were written by me. Armand, what do you think?"

Armand exclaimed, "This is incredible! It's like a dream come true. No, it's even better than what I could have dreamed of. I've never heard a song like this, not even in my dreams. I love it!"

Joseph inquired, "Armand, can we use this song?"

"Of course, this is perfect. There's nothing better than this," Armand replied with great excitement.

"But, Armand, I have a request," Joseph said.

"Go ahead, my friend. Right now, I'd agree to anything. Even if you wanted me to run naked in the streets or offer up my chastity, I'd say yes!" Armand laughed.

"Don't be absurd; you're corrupting the child!" Joseph scolded.

"Alright, my friend, tell me your request."

"Until I give my consent, do not tell anyone that I wrote the lyrics for this song, and that Lucien composed the music," Joseph requested.

Armand understood Joseph's request. He didn't mind being thrown into the Bastille, but that didn't mean Joseph felt the same way. If Armand were arrested and put in the Bastille, Joseph would be responsible for his two younger brothers. Moreover, Joseph's main life goal was in the realm of science, and he didn't want other matters to interfere too much with his research. As for Lucien, he was talented, but he was still a child of less than fifteen, and such involvement in a possible Bastille situation was out of the question.

"No problem. I give you my word of honor that I won't reveal it, not even at the Day of Judgment," Armand assured earnestly.

"My friend, there's no need to be so serious," Joseph said with a smile. "I just want to avoid unnecessary trouble."

"I understand. I don't mind going to the Bastille, but I don't want to see any of my friends there," Armand replied.

Armand didn't immediately take the song to the theater for rehearsal because, if he did, even if he didn't disclose the authors, people might immediately suspect something was up since he had recently seen Joseph and Lucien. So, Armand was being cautious.

It wasn't until two days later that Armand finally brought out the song for the theater company to try, and this time, the effect was said to be excellent. However, Armand still wasn't satisfied. He felt that some lines in the play didn't match the song, and there were many areas that needed modification. Actors also had suggestions regarding the stage and performance. So, Armand became even busier.

A week later, Armand invited Joseph and Lucien to watch the dress rehearsal of his play once again. This time, Joseph had to go on a business trip, so only Lucien went to see the rehearsal with Armand. When Joseph returned to Paris a few days later, Armand's rehearsals were mostly completed. At least, in Lucien's opinion, the play "Spartacus" was now on par with the works of Moliere.

However, Armand still seemed dissatisfied. He spent his days at the theater, hesitating over trivial matters, and his cheekbones seemed higher than ever. Joseph knew that Armand was obsessing over things that weren't real problems, and no matter what decision he made, it wouldn't make much difference. Armand was simply trapped in indecision.

"Armand, have you heard this story? There was a man who put two identical piles of fodder on either side of a donkey, equidistant from the donkey. Can you guess what happened to the donkey?" Joseph asked, placing his hand on Armand's shoulder.

"I know, the donkey starved to death standing in the middle. Joseph, you're a wicked man for comparing me to that foolish donkey! But, are you sure the piles of fodder were truly identical?" Armand replied.

"The donkey! If they weren't identical, would you have hesitated so much?" Joseph asked.

"Well, of course they weren't identical. There were some differences between them. I just didn't know which one was better."

"Then it's simple. Let's use this," Joseph said, taking out an irregularly shaped silver coin (Roman denarius). "This side has the image of Bacchus, and the other side has a bunch of grapes. My friend, you know that tragic art originated from the worship of this deity. Let's let him help us make the decision. You'll toss the coin. If the head is up, it means Bacchus approves of this, and if the grapes are up, it means he disapproves. What do you think?"

Bacchus is the Roman name for the Greek god of wine, Dionysus. His divine responsibilities didn't include art, but considering that ancient Greek tragic art originated from the worship of this deity, it was quite appropriate to invoke him for judgment.

"A Roman denarius?" Armand took the coin from Joseph and examined it closely. "This is probably from the time of the Roman Republic. It's possible that Crassus (one of the first triumvirs of Rome

and the general who eventually suppressed the Spartacus slave revolt) once held this coin. It's a pity the condition isn't great; I could barely recognize the head of Bacchus on the obverse if it weren't for the grapes on the reverse. But, it's a nice find. Alright, let's do as you say."

#### Chapter 38: The Premiere in Turbulent Times (1)

After comforting Armand, Joseph left the Peterson Theater and hopped into a lightweight horse-drawn carriage to head home. The two-wheeled carriage moved slowly along the road under the pleasant weather. Joseph folded the roof of the carriage and looked around.

At this point, the carriage was nearing the le de la Cit, the heart of Paris and the birthplace of the city itself. The Notre-Dame Cathedral stood on this island. Joseph looked around and could spot the towering spire of the cathedral and the new bridge that stretched across the Seine. Despite its name, the "new" bridge was, in fact, a bridge dating back to the 15th century and was the oldest one on the Seine.

As the carriage's pace slowed down due to the increasing crowd of people and vehicles on the streets, Joseph understood that this was the bustling heart of Paris, and such congestion was quite normal here. But as the carriage continued forward, the streets grew even more crowded, to the point where people were practically shoulder to shoulder.

The carriage driver reined in the horse and turned to Joseph, saying, "Sir, it seems there's something going on up ahead, and we won't be able to pass through. If you'd like to take a detour and cross the river using another bridge, it'll be quite a distance and take more time, not to mention extra cost. I think it might be better for you to disembark here, walk through this stretch, cross the river, and find another lightweight carriage on the other side. That way, you'll save some time."

Joseph peered ahead, and it was clear that the new bridge was completely congested with people. Joseph knew the carriage driver was right, so he nodded, took out two sous from his pocket, handed them to the driver, adjusted his hat, grabbed his cane, and alighted from the carriage. He began walking along the street toward the other side of the bridge.

As he advanced, the crowd grew denser, and various voices became increasingly clamorous. Joseph noticed that nearly everyone's faces expressed a mix of anxiety and excitement. His ears caught snippets of conversations:

"The Third Estate is what? The Third Estate is France, it's everything..."

"We, the Third Estate, can't be silenced with just one vote..."

"Exactly, we won't let them..."

"We need our own..."

"We must defend ourselves..."

"No National Assembly, no constitution, and no one's taking a sou from us!"

Joseph grabbed the arm of a young man nearby and asked, "What's happening?"

"The king has closed the Menin Hall, and there are rumors he wants to dissolve the National Assembly. We can't allow him to do that!" the man replied.

Before Joseph could respond, another hand latched onto his arm, belonging to a similarly anxious but excited face. "Sir, we can't let the privileged classes trample over us anymore. We're not lowly soil; we are the true France, don't you agree?"

Clearly, at this moment, it wasn't wise to express any disagreement. Joseph immediately replied, "You're right. We can't let them trample us."

"We need a constitution!" someone nearby shouted.

"Yes, we need a constitution. We won't let the king and the privileged class do as they please!"

"The king is preparing to send troops to crush us. I heard he's quietly amassing an army, and he plans to kill us all, just like the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre," another voice suddenly chimed in.

The crowd fell silent, and fear was visible in everyone's eyes.

"They...they are capable of such things..." one person said.

"We can't let them do it."

"The soldiers are also part of the Third Estate; they won't..."

"But soldiers follow orders, and they can buy mercenaries with the money they seize from us. They'll use our own funds to hire mountain people to kill us!"

"We need to be prepared; we can't just sit idly..."

Listening to these cries, Joseph knew that history had finally reached this point.

A few days ago, at the Estates-General, the king had agreed to the Third Estate's request to increase their representation from 300 to 600 delegates. However, he insisted on the traditional one-vote-per-estate system. In France, 98% of the population belonged to the Third Estate, yet they only had one vote. The clergy of the First Estate and the hereditary nobility of the Second Estate also each had one vote. Such a setup practically meant that, no matter how you played the game, the privileged classes could use their numerical advantage to have their way. The interests of the vast Third Estate would receive no protection.

While this voting system was indeed a traditional one in France, at this moment, King Louis XVI was deluding himself to think that the Third Estate, economically empowered and influenced by Enlightenment ideals, would let themselves be manipulated just as serfs were over a hundred years ago. His thinking seemed utterly out of touch with reality.

The representatives of the Third Estate could not accept this arrangement. The entire Third Estate saw this meeting as an opportunity to gain more rights. In simpler terms, they wanted taxes, but they also wanted corresponding rights. They were willing to pay, but they wanted something in return.

When the king called for the Estates-General, the Third Estate saw this as their chance to gain more rights. The news of the upcoming Estates-General had prompted Abb Sieys to publish his political pamphlet, "What is the Third Estate?" where he clearly stated that the Third Estate should have a higher status. The king's insistence on "tradition" had put him squarely against the entire Third Estate.

The representatives of the Third Estate, and by extension, the entire Third Estate itself, could not and would not submit to the king's terms. They took matters into their own hands and declared themselves the "National Assembly," claiming absolute legislative authority and announcing their intention to draft France's first constitution.

This audacious move, of course, wasn't something the king could tolerate. Louis XVI ordered the closure of the Menin Hall, which had been provided to the Third Estate for their meetings, and there were rumors that he intended to forcibly dissolve the "illegitimate" "National Assembly." This news reached Joseph at this moment.

As the days passed, Paris itself began to boil. Almost everyone took to the streets, and people could be seen engaging in spirited debates or hushed conversations. Every street was as crowded as a market, and the bustling atmosphere continued until nightfall when Joseph finally reached his home.

The next day at noon, Joseph heard more news: the "National Assembly" representatives had braved the rain to head to the Menin Hall to continue their discussion on drafting a constitution. However, they were blocked by the king's troops. Led by their first president, Jean-Sylvain Bailly, the representatives decided to defend their nascent National Assembly and gathered at the royal tennis court nearby. The Third Estate representatives there took an oath, pledging to work toward a constitutional monarchy and never to separate from the National Assembly.

Many people were concerned that the king would send troops to the royal tennis court to arrest these audacious Third Estate representatives. However, for several days, there was no sign of any action from the king. In a surprising turn of events, a group of First and Second Estate representatives, led by the Duke of Orlans and the Marquis de Lafayette, joined the National Assembly. The House of Orlans was one of the most prominent families in France, and Lafayette had been the commander-in-chief of the French forces during the American Revolutionary War, playing a crucial role in the Battle of Yorktown. This earned him the title of "Hero of the New World" from the Americans, and his victory was one of France's rare triumphs over Britain in many years. As a result, Lafayette was highly respected in the military as well. The actions of the Duke of Orlans and the Marquis de Lafayette significantly boosted the morale of the National Assembly and strengthened their legitimacy. They could now claim to represent not only the Third Estate but also the entire French nation, including the First and Second Estates.

A few days later, the National Assembly officially changed its name to the "National Constituent Assembly" as they prepared to formally draft the "Constitution of the Kingdom of France." Meanwhile, rumors began to circulate that the king was sending a large number of troops, especially mercenaries, to Paris. Many supporters of the Third Estate started arming themselves in preparation for a potential conflict.

In the midst of this fervor and apprehension, Armand's "Spartacus" finally had its premiere.

## Chapter 39: The Premiere in Turbulent Times (2)

The Peterson Theater was packed with people, all eagerly awaiting the start of the premiere of "Spartacus." Located near the Saint-Antoine district, the theater was rather small, with a narrow backstage. To complicate matters, Armand had included a choir in the script for musical accompaniment, and there was no room for them backstage. In fact, the space was so tight that they had to place some instruments in the dressing rooms. As a result, Armand had no choice but to seat

the choir in the audience area. The Peterson Theater's audience section was also quite modest, with just over three hundred seats, and there were no boxes to speak of. The choir occupied more than twenty seats, leaving not even three hundred for the audience.

Of course, the small size of the theater had its advantages. It filled up quickly. Armand had been boasting about his new script for a while, and his wide circle of friends ensured a substantial audience. In addition to his friends, he'd mobilized some people, and with a little sponsorship from the Duke of Orleans, he had announced free admission. Consequently, what was originally a theater that could only hold three hundred people was now crammed with nearly six hundred, and more people were still trying to squeeze in. To accommodate them, the theater manager decided to remove all the seats and let everyone stand. However, because it was free, the theater was packed to the brim. Moreover, the lower-class audience members weren't too concerned about decorum, so the whole theater buzzed like a marketplace. One woman even brought a live chicken she'd just bought from the market.

And so, "Spartacus" began amidst all this chaos. The first scene opened with Spartacus and a small group of gladiators facing off in the arena, with Spartacus on one side and his friend Enomaius leading another group. The master of ceremonies announced, "The generous Clasus has decreed that the victor who slays his foe in this battle shall become a free man!" The battle for "freedom" began, and the two sides clashed. People fell one by one, and soon only Spartacus and Enomaius were left standing. However, Enomaius had been wounded and could barely stand. He had also lost his small shield in the earlier fights, rendering him almost defenseless. In contrast, Spartacus, his best friend, was almost untouched. The outcome seemed to be a foregone conclusion.

"Kill him, kill him!" shouted the actors portraying the gladiatorial spectators.

"Spartacus, come on, kill me, and you'll be free," Enomaius said. He knew that, even at his best, he was no match for Spartacus, who had won over a hundred battles in the arena. Moreover, he was wounded.

"This is a rare opportunity," Enomaius continued, "Clasus has been unusually generous. If you miss this chance, you won't have another opportunity to become a free man, especially with your new owner, the stingy Aquinus."

"No," Spartacus replied, "I won't kill my friend. If I'm willing to wield a sword against a friend, I might as well be a Roman citizen by now."

With those words, Spartacus ignored the cries around him, sheathed his sword, and prepared to leave.

"Kill him! Or you'll be flogged!" someone yelled.

"You wretched slave!" someone cursed.

"I knew he was a sissy!" an audience member sneered. Louis, a friend of Armand, played Spartacus in the premiere. He had the physique, but his face was too handsome, almost resembling a girl, making him an odd choice for the role of Spartacus.

"Go to hell!" Enomaius suddenly shouted, wielding his short sword and stumbling toward Spartacus, who had his back to him.

Spartacus made a deft move, evading Enomaius's sword and elbowing him in the chest. Enomaius dropped his sword and fell in agony.

"Kill me!" Enomaius gasped.

"No, I won't be fooled. I won't wield a sword against a friend," Spartacus said.

The story continued, with Spartacus and the surviving gladiators receiving lashings and banding together. They questioned why Spartacus didn't kill Enomaius, who would have granted him freedom. Spartacus continued to answer, "I won't wield a sword against a friend." But another gladiator named Cressus coldly pointed out that Spartacus's persistence was futile. Enomaius would soon die in the next round of entertainment combat: "It's said that very few gladiators have a chance to become free or leave the arena. I've never seen such a lucky one, not even you, Spartacus, who's won over a hundred battles, against men and beasts. But do you really think you can survive in the arena indefinitely?"

This statement left everyone silent, and finally, someone said, "Unless we escape!"

"But who can lead us in our escape?" another asked.

In the second act, Spartacus led a group of gladiators in an escape from the gladiator school. They attempted to flee north, out of Rome, but Roman soldiers pursued them. Many gladiators died in the escape, and they were forced to turn south and hide in the mountains of Vesuvius.

During their escape, Spartacus came to a realization: "Mere escape won't truly grant slaves their freedom. Only by overthrowing the oppressive Roman system, which pits man against man and enslaves man, can slaves truly be free. Our goal shouldn't be merely evading pursuit by Roman soldiers; it should be the destruction of Rome, liberating all the slaves. Only when all the slaves are free can we truly achieve our own freedom!"

As Spartacus addressed his exhausted comrades with these words, the orchestra in the background began to play Joseph's new war song. It began with a somber and solemn prelude, much like the dark clouds before a storm, pressing down heavily. Then the melancholic main theme started, resolute and steady. At the end of each segment, there was a weighty accent, like heavy raindrops falling from the sky and the beat of a war drum.

In this musical backdrop, Spartacus's speech continued: "I know, my friends, my brothers, you may have doubts. You may say, 'Rome has so many well-trained, well-equipped, and organized soldiers. How can we, so few in number, stand against all of Rome?'"

"But I say, don't be afraid, my brothers. What do we have to fear? What do we have to fear? For what could be more painful, more frightening, than the days we've spent as pigs, trampled upon like dirt? What is there left to be afraid of? Can we lose anything more? Is there anything in our lives worth clinging to?"

"Friends, brothers, if we have something to lose in battle, then it's only the chains that shackle us. But once we win, what we gain will be the entire world! A new world where no one oppresses or enslaves another. Take heart, my brothers. Rome should be afraid; the vampire slave owners should be afraid. We, we need not fear!"

The theater fell silent. Even the uncultured, lower-class people stopped talking, their eyes fixed on the actor playing Spartacus, listening to his powerful speech, nodding in silence. Someone



whispered, "He's right. What are we, kings? What are we, nobles? Besides chains, what do we have left to lose?"

The remaining gladiators regained their spirits. They continued to raid nearby estates to liberate the slaves, and slaves from other regions flocked to Vesuvius. Spartacus and his friends gained victory after victory. Their numbers swelled to thousands. Even Spartacus's friend Enomaius joined the rebellion. Under Spartacus's leadership, they established a true democracy based on equality for all.

"This is just like a dream, too good to be true," someone in the audience murmured.

"It's as if an archangel is speaking. I get it now, why they chose a girl to play a general," another audience member remarked.

"It's like heaven itself. Nothing can be better than this," another audience member whispered. He quickly crossed himself and said, "Forgive me, Lord."

"Everyone being equal is great, but making men and women equal... Does that mean women can dominate men?" someone else remarked.

However, tension returned to the plot. In an attempt to annihilate them, Rome sent a military officer named Claudius with three thousand well-equipped soldiers to besiege them. With the help of local slave owners, they infiltrated Vesuvius. The rebellion had little weaponry and supplies and struggled to face the Roman soldiers head-on. They retreated step by step, finally ending up cornered on a steep mountain peak, with Roman soldiers in front and a cliff behind them. Spartacus and his rebels appeared to be at a dead end. Even Cressus admitted, "It seems these will be the last days of my life. At least in these days, I'm a free man."

But in their dire straits, a female slave named Agnippe proposed a solution: "There are many wild grapevines on this mountain. We can weave these vines into ropes, and you men can use them to descend from the mountain's rear and attack the Romans from behind."

"Hah, just a while ago, you looked down on women. Without us women, you men would be..." a lady in the audience couldn't help but comment, still clutching the chicken.

Spartacus accepted Agnippe's suggestion. He led his warriors to descend the mountain using these ropes at night, then launched a surprise attack from the rear, crushing the Roman army. Spartacus waved his short sword, leading the slaves in pursuit of the Roman soldiers. He shouted, "Brothers, let's sing our song!"

So, in the midst of the deep and majestic music, the slaves on stage sang a song that went like this:

Debout! les damns de la terre! "

"Debout! les forats de la faim!...

[Note: The lyrics are from "The Internationale," a famous socialist anthem.]

"Stand up, you wretched of the earth"

"Stand up, you prisoners of hunger"

The audience was captivated by the performance, as the powerful words and emotions filled the air. The story of Spartacus was unfolding in a remarkable way, and the audience was swept away by the drama, music, and the powerful message of freedom and equality. It was a night to remember in the Peterson Theater, as the audience was carried away to another world by the performance.

## Chapter 40: The Premiere in Turbulent Times (3)

The choir had been strategically placed in the audience, without any elaborate costumes. So when the song entered its chorus, these individuals suddenly began to sing, leaving the surrounding audience astonished.

In this scene, they had only sung the first part of the song. As the song concluded, the choir members promptly silenced, instantly blending back into the audience.

"Hey, buddy, can you guys sing this song?" A young man with faint freckles on his nose gently tugged on the sleeve of a nearby choir member, whispering.

"Yes, we can sing it," the choir member replied simply.

"This song is amazing!" the young man exclaimed.

"There are several more verses to this song. We only sang one here. I live nearby and have heard them practicing this song for days," another person chimed in.

"Shh, I can't hear the lines!" someone else complained.

Onstage, the drama continued to unfold. Spartacus had become too small to contain the rebel forces. Spartacus and another rebellion leader, Crixus, had different ideas about the future of the rebellion. Spartacus believed the Roman legions were too powerful, and it was no longer sustainable to stay in the region. The rebellion should leave Rome, head north, cross the Alps, establish their own free nation to the north of the Alps, and return to Rome after strengthening their forces to liberate all the slaves. On the other hand, Crixus thought Spartacus was being too cautious and believed that the Roman legions were not as formidable as Spartacus perceived. The rebellion should stay in the area, capture Roman cities, free the slaves, and continuously fight to expand their forces, ultimately eradicating the evil of slavery.

Neither leader could convince the other, so they resorted to a democratic vote. Most of the rebel fighters chose to support Spartacus, leaving Crixus frustrated. In the end, when Spartacus led the army north, Crixus volunteered to be the rear guard. However, once the rebellion began its journey, Crixus and a group of fighters left the main army and launched an attack on a Roman city. Unfortunately, they fell into a Roman ambush, and by the time Spartacus arrived, they had all been killed. The Romans executed all the prisoners in a cruel manner. Witnessing this, the rebel fighters were enraged, and many demanded revenge. Spartacus couldn't convince them and had to hold another vote, where they all decided to stay and fight in Rome.

"Staying in Rome is risky. Why is Spartacus submitting to democracy?" one audience member couldn't help but comment. "What do these slaves know?"

"That's not fair," another person retorted. "If only Crixus could have followed democracy like Spartacus, we wouldn't be in this situation. Besides, you say, 'What do these slaves know?' The priests and nobles would say the same thing about us!"

Spartacus' rebellion remained in Italy, led by Spartacus himself, and they achieved numerous victories. But Spartacus was increasingly worried because he knew that victory was only temporary. The Roman main forces were closing in, and he repeatedly tried to persuade his fighters to head north. Still, his recommendations were consistently rejected.

Crassus led the Roman legions to block Spartacus's path north. As they closed in, Spartacus led the rebellion south and contacted pirates, hoping to escape to Sicily by sea. However, when they arrived at the agreed location, the pirate fleet did not appear. Instead, they found themselves surrounded by Crassus's forces. Crassus sent Spartacus a letter proposing surrender. He promised that if Spartacus surrendered, he would become a Roman citizen and a general. However, when Spartacus inquired about the fate of the other slaves, Crassus replied, "They will return to the estates and gladiator schools as slaves."

Spartacus refused Crassus's offer and led his forces to break through. They managed to escape but were pursued by more Roman armies, forcing Spartacus to confront Crassus in a decisive battle in Apulia.

Before the battle, Spartacus and Crassus met. Crassus once again offered terms to Spartacus, who again declined. They agreed to fight a final battle on the next day.

On the battlefield, the rebel forces, outnumbered, were finally defeated. Spartacus died in battle. His deputy, Enomayi, and over six thousand fighters were captured. Crassus ordered all of them to be crucified.

The final scene of the play featured Enomayi and two other rebel fighters being crucified. They were forced to carry their own crosses and erect them. Then the Romans nailed them to the crosses. The two fighters were crucified on the sides, while Enomayi was in the middle.

"This is a blasphemy against the sacred!" a priest held his cross tightly, muttering with a sinister tone.

Indeed, this scene was an obvious imitation of the crucifixion of Jesus in the Bible. Just as in the Bible, Jesus had carried his own cross and was crucified alongside two criminals, with Jesus in the center.

The two fighters, hanging on the crosses, wept, and even the onlookers were moved. Suddenly, Enomayi looked to his left and right, then shouted, "What's wrong, my brothers? Is death worse than living as slaves? Yes, we may have lost our lives, but we've at least won freedom from this day forward, never to be enslaved again! We may have lost this battle, but in the long run, our cause will never fail. Oppression will be overthrown, and the system of slavery will be dismantled! Spartacus's name and legacy will endure forever! Brothers, let us sing our battle song one last time!"

Enomayi began to sing, "Debout ! les damns de la terre, Debout ! les forats de la faim"

In his singing, the two crucified fighters stopped crying, raised their heads, and joined in, singing, "La raison tonne en son cratre : Cest lruption de la fin."

Roman soldiers with spears were shocked, looking up at these crucified slaves and shouting in panic, "No singing! Stop singing!" One soldier even jabbed Enomayi in the side with his spear, drawing blood.

"This is... this is a dreadful blasphemy! May the Lord unleash his wrath" the priest muttered through clenched teeth.

In the Bible, after Jesus was crucified, a Roman soldier named Longinus, to ensure Jesus was dead, thrust his spear into Jesus's side. Later, this spear became a holy relic in Catholicism, known as the Spear of Longinus. Legends surrounding it claimed that whoever possessed it could subdue anyone

within a range of 120 feet and control the fate of the world, but if they lost it, they would die instantly. These legends even deceived people in later times, with even Hitler fervently seeking it. It was said he briefly possessed the holy spear, but it didn't secure his victory in World War II.

Yet, Enomayi's singing continued, undeterred. This part of the song had been sung before, with a simple melody and lyrics. Many members of the audience joined in this time, carried away by the song's powerful anti-religious message. As the chorus started, even more people joined the choir, stirred by the song's call to rebellion.

Following that came the more explicit and passionate sixth stanza:

By now, the priest had quietly slipped away, disappearing into the streets.

After the song finished, the entire theater fell into a moment of silence. Then a voice broke the stillness, "That was incredible! Can you sing it again?"

Soon, the whole theater was filled with similar requests:

"Sing it again, please! I haven't memorized all the lyrics yet!"

"Please, sing it again."

"Once more, please!"

The curtains had already descended, and the actors and choir were ready to leave. However, in response to the audience's demands, they were compelled to sing the song again. And again. In the end, they performed the song six times in total. Clearly, this debut had achieved unprecedented success.