

## The Fox 51

### Chapter 51: Playing with Fire (1)

By the time the militia besieging the Bastille realized what had happened, the garrison inside had recovered. The previous explosion had terrified them, but it also fueled their resolve to fight back. As a result, the militia suffered further casualties in the ensuing confrontations.

Just at this moment, cheers erupted from behind the militia lines.

"The artillery is here! The real artillery has arrived!"

It turned out that a contingent of the National Guard, prepared by the Marquis de Lafayette, had finally arrived.

The arrival of the National Guard completely changed the situation. While the previous explosion had caused significant casualties among the militia, it had also damaged the Bastille's walls. The already fragile structure couldn't withstand artillery fire any longer.

As the National Guard artillery was brought into position, Monsieur de L'Orne wasn't too worried. He had witnessed the militia's artillery skills earlier and knew they couldn't hit anything beyond the Earth at such a range.

However, when the artillery on the other side opened fire, Monsieur de L'Orne knew he was in trouble. The first cannonball precisely hit the base of the Bastille's wall.

The impact raised a cloud of dust, but fortunately, the wall didn't collapse.

"Did they really hit it? Are they just lucky?" Monsieur de L'Orne widened his eyes.

Yes, Monsieur de L'Orne still attributed the National Guard's successful artillery fire to luck at that moment. But soon, he changed his mind as another cannonball was fired, hitting its mark once again and causing a part of the wall to crumble.

"Quick, raise the white flag! We surrender!" Monsieur de L'Orne shouted. It was evident that the ones firing at them were not mere "militiamen." They could fire so accurately within such a short time, and it wasn't the work of amateur militia; these were professional artillerymen.

The state of the Bastille's walls couldn't withstand further artillery fire. Monsieur de L'Orne only needed to glance at the crack that could fit a fist through, stretching across the entire wall, to understand this. A few more rounds of artillery fire would surely crumble the wall, allowing the tens of thousands of "rebels" outside to storm in. The mere hundred or so inside wouldn't stand a chance. They had to surrender before it was too late; otherwise, they'd face a dire fate.

The white flag was raised, and the gates were opened. The soldiers tossed their rifles down from the walls. The surrounding militia erupted in cheers.

The main body of the militia rushed in through the opened gates, met with the prisoners (in fact, these people hadn't faced any real persecution), and dragged the "king's lackeys" out. They bound all of them and intended to transport them to the City Hall for trial.

However, as the group escorting them had only moved a few hundred meters, more people converged on them. These newcomers shouted insults at the captured prisoners, including Monsieur de L'Orne. One of the men, a cook, was especially vicious.

Monsieur de L'Orne had never been insulted by such lowly commoners. He immediately retorted.

"You damned peasants, you lowly vermin! How dare you speak so rudely to a nobleman! Someday, you thugs will all face punishment! His Majesty the King will hang you all from lampposts like dogs!"

Monsieur de L'Orne seemed to have forgotten the dire situation he was in. He believed that, even as a captive noble, he would receive special treatment. His words incited the anger of the surrounding "commoners," and the cook took out his knife.

"You parasitic scoundrel!" the cook roared. "You've caused the death of so many people, and you want to continue riding on the backs of the people, oppressing them? You want to keep slaughtering the people? Hanging us from lampposts? I'll hang your head high today!"

The cook grabbed Monsieur de L'Orne's hair and forcefully pulled him to the ground.

"You can't do this. I am a noble..." Monsieur de L'Orne shouted. But his voice soon fell silent as the cook pressed his foot against Monsieur de L'Orne's chest, depriving him of breath.

"Help..."

"Kill this wretch!"

"Kill him!"

The crowd was seething with anger.

The cook used his knife skillfully. Though it was a small blade, he quickly severed Monsieur de L'Orne's head. A militiaman with a pike approached and said, "Put his head on the pike for everyone to see the fate of the tyrant's lackeys."

The people cheered in agreement. The militiaman placed Monsieur de L'Orne's head on his pike, raising it high.

"Let's parade through the streets of Paris, so everyone can see the fate of the tyrant's lackeys!"

"And these guys, they're tyrant's lackeys too, they shouldn't be spared!"

In the original historical account, after the Bastille's capture, apart from the governor Monsieur de L'Orne, the surrendered garrison was not killed. But this time, the extensive casualties among the militia due to the accidental explosion resulted in a far greater death toll than in the original history. Over three hundred people died in the explosion alone, whereas in the historical account, there were only around a hundred casualties.

Greater casualties brought more fear, anger, and violence. Dozens of the captured soldiers, most of whom were Swiss mercenaries, were killed because people believed they had come to Paris to massacre and plunder the citizens.

Their heads were severed and impaled on pikes as well.

Lieutenant Yves, the former artillery lieutenant now commanding the National Guard artillery, looked on coldly, neither participating nor preventing the violence.

"One more person deserves to die!" someone shouted.

"Who?" people asked.

"Flesselles! He gave us false information, claiming there was plenty of gunpowder at the Bastille. But the Bastille had so little! He must be a lackey of the king, luring us to the Bastille with some hidden agenda!" someone yelled.

"Let's kill him!"

"Kill him!"

Flesselles was the mayor of Paris, born a noble, and some said he had close ties to Count Artois (Louis XVI's brother, one of the extreme conservatives). Of course, these were mere rumors without any substantiated evidence. However, at this moment, people were inclined to believe these rumors.

Lieutenant Yves and his comrades continued to watch from the sidelines. Flesselles was not a friend of the Marquis de Lafayette, and having someone like him in control of the City Hall might not be favorable especially for the Marquis de Lafayette, who was preparing to consolidate the power in Paris.

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"What are these people doing?" Lucien looked in astonishment at the militia outside the barricades, parading with pikes raised high, each bearing a human head.

"They're venting their fear with terror," Joseph said, covering Louis's eyes to shield him from the gruesome sight.

"Venting their fear with terror?" Lucien didn't understand Joseph's explanation.

"Think about it, Lucien. Where did the recent terrifying rumors most likely come from? Do you truly believe these vivid tales originated from those sans-culottes who can't even write their own names?" Joseph didn't answer the question directly but countered with another one.

"How could that be? The rumors are so vivid, involving many intricate details only known to insiders. Some seem impossible for commoners to concoct," Lucien replied, shaking his head.

"There are even suggestions that the king will come with mercenaries to 'cleanse' Paris. But it's just a scare tactic. France relies heavily on Paris; without it, France means nothing in Europe."

"But the sans-culottes don't know that. They believe it's all true. They're filled with fear and anger, fearing they'll be slaughtered and plundered, yet angry because they don't deserve such a fate," Joseph explained. "This fear and anger are what's driving them. Some think they can harness, control, and exploit this power to achieve their goals."

"What's so amusing?" Lucien asked when Joseph chuckled.

"I'm laughing at those who are playing with fire," Joseph said. "Using rumors to spread fear and then manipulating that fear to make people act. It's a cost-effective strategy in terms of resources, but it gives birth to irrational power. And irrational power is difficult to control, like Mr. Lavoisier's nitroglycerin. Mishandle it, and it can explode, reducing everything to rubble."

"What should we do, then?" Lucien asked.

"We should observe more, think more," Joseph replied.

After the fall of the Bastille, rumors spread like wildfire throughout the city of Paris. People whispered that the king was furious and would soon mobilize his forces to suppress the Parisian populace. It was said that the enraged king had ordered, "The great tree shall be set on fire, the stones shall be sharpened, and people shall be replaced." Paris was gripped by tension, with crowds building barricades in the streets. Some, in their fear, even began to tear down houses (though most of the time, it was the houses of "minions of the tyrant" that were demolished, and the number of these "minions of the tyrant" depended on the amount of material required for the barricades).

Almost overnight, all the carriage drivers for hire in Paris found themselves jobless, as the streets were blocked with barricades. Some inexperienced individuals, in their haste to construct roadblocks and barricades, didn't even consider leaving openings for passage.

To defend against a potential attack, the Parisian militia members believed they should unite under a single banner for a unified command. Representatives from various neighborhoods gathered to discuss the matter.

Every militia member in each district genuinely hoped for unity, a natural instinct of humans as social beings when facing a crisis. However, unity required a command structure, a leader. The militia members soon realized that finding such a person was no easy task.

Because most militia members didn't know each other, and most of them were aware of their lack of military skills. The circumstances of the siege of the Bastille made them realize the vast gap between themselves and the regular army. Although they verbally belittled the King's forces in the Montmartre area, they were actually trembling inside, and some even had nightmares about the guillotine or the gallows.

In this situation, a "good nobleman" who was not even present at the meeting but was considered "honest, kind, loved the people, and was proficient in military matters" was chosen by the majority of the representatives as the commander of this unified militia force. This "good nobleman" was none other than the Marquis de Lafayette.

It was said that during the meeting, some mentioned the name of another "good nobleman" the Duke of Orleans. However, other representatives unanimously stated that His Highness the Duke of Orleans was indeed a "honest, kind, people-loving" good nobleman, and in comparison to the Marquis de Lafayette, he had the "more generous" advantage (because the Duke of Orleans was much wealthier than Lafayette). But the Duke of Orleans had no understanding of military matters. If they let him take command, it would be detrimental to everyone.

Some representatives even said that during the siege of the Bastille, the well-intentioned actions of the Duke of Orleans had actually hindered the effort and caused more casualties than the tyrant's artillery.

"In any case, the Duke of Orleans is a trustworthy man. But when it comes to military command, it's beyond his capabilities." This statement became the general consensus.

After Lafayette was elected, messengers were sent to invite him to take office. This was somewhat similar to a certain uprising in a large eastern country in later years, where the leader of the rebels, who had not participated in the rebellion, was appointed as commander-in-chief. However, the representatives of the Paris militia did not storm Lafayette's home with guns; they simply went to his doorstep and delivered the invitation letter. Lafayette, in contrast to the leader in the eastern

country who hid under his bed and cried, "Don't hurt me, don't hurt me," openly accepted the invitation and became the overall commander of the Paris militia.

Once in office, Lafayette immediately began to reorganize the Parisian militia, with the intention of converting them all into the National Guard.

To do this, he immediately introduced military uniforms designed for the National Guard uniforms that included blue trousers. He also introduced the badges and flags of the National Guard, all of which were composed of the colors red, white, and blue. Red and blue were the colors of the Paris city coat of arms, while white represented the Bourbon dynasty.

These badges and flags clearly displayed Lafayette's political leanings; he was a constitutional monarchist. To be honest, despite the fact that the common people in Paris were constantly calling the king a "tyrant," they actually very much approved of these flags and badges at this moment.

The commoners in Paris had never imagined they could overthrow the king. After capturing the Bastille, they were actually very afraid of the king's potential punishment. They also believed that Lafayette, as their commander, could speak on their behalf to the king.

In their view, Lafayette was the best person for this role. Some even mentioned the name of the Duke of Orleans, another nobleman with similar qualities. However, it was unanimously agreed by the other representatives that His Highness the Duke of Orleans was indeed a "honest, kind, people-loving" good nobleman, but Lafayette was more suitable for military command. When it came to negotiating with the king, nobody would think of the Duke of Orleans.

Lafayette skillfully used this psychological advantage. He assured them that he would defend everyone, as long as they supported his leadership.

The feared massacre did not happen, and the king's army did not launch an attack on Paris. In fact, the king had no faith in his own army, and those around him vehemently convinced him that the army was not reliable.

For constitutionalists like Lafayette, the only way to convince the king to accept constitutional monarchy was to make him believe that the army was loyal to the nation, not to the king personally. To conservative nobles like the Count of Artois, the standing army was not a good thing at all. Why did the nation need a standing army? Shouldn't the king call upon the nobility's private forces when needed? To counter their political rival Lafayette, they also disparaged the French army.

In this particular matter, at least in terms of the unreliability of the army, both conservatives and constitutionalists had found common ground. King Louis XVI was known to be somewhat indecisive, and he naturally believed their words. So the king never even considered using the army to bloodily suppress Paris at this time. In fact, when the "rebels" captured the Bastille, and the Count of Artois' people claimed that the army had actually participated in the rebellion, the king was so frightened that he almost considered fleeing to the provinces. Like the citizens of Paris who were filled with fear of the king, the king was also terrified of the Parisian mob.

However, the common people in the city of Paris were unaware of all this. In their eyes, the legendary massacre had not occurred, thanks to Lafayette. The radicals believed that it was because of the National Revolutionary Army he organized that the king had backed down, while the more moderate ones thought that Lafayette had played the perfect role as a bridge between the citizens and the king.

Lafayette indeed served as that bridge. A few days later, he arrived at Versailles with a detachment of the National Guard to meet King Louis XVI. It was said that the king and his subjects had a pleasant conversation, and Louis XVI even wore the cockade of the National Revolutionary Army that Lafayette had brought with him on his hat.

At this point, it seemed like Lafayette had achieved a resounding victory. An English-style constitutional monarchy for France appeared within reach.

The situation appeared calm, and Lafayette was reportedly busy drafting a historic declaration, inspired by the American Declaration of Independence, while establishing parliamentary and administrative systems influenced by England and North America.

Although the situation had eased, the Paris Military Academy had not returned to normal. So, Joseph continued to stay at home and watch plays.

"If the revolution could stop here, it might be a good thing for France," Joseph looked out the window. Outside, a group of National Guards was busy dismantling the barricades.

"Hasn't the revolution ended yet?" Louis said. "Joseph, I don't like the revolution at all. I can't go out, can't go to school, can't play with my friends, and Aunt Sophie hasn't come, and Lucien makes me do chores... I don't like the revolution at all!"

"At first, when I heard that school was canceled, you didn't know how happy I was! Now that Joseph is at home, you pretend to love studying!" Lucien sat with his chin resting on the high back of a chair, looking at him with disdain.

"That's because you took advantage of Joseph's absence to push all the household chores onto me!"

"It was a fair bet, and I made you both a knight and a bishop. You still lost. What more is there to say!"

So Louis fell silent. However, Lucien spoke up, "Joseph, from what you said earlier, do you think the revolution hasn't ended yet?"

"Ended? How could it possibly have ended?" Joseph sneered. "My brother, this is not the end, nor is it the beginning of the end, or even the end of the beginning. Until those who are dissatisfied with the current reality, yet believe they have the power to change it, or until they exhaust their strength, how could this revolution end? Moreover, on today's stage, there may not necessarily be heroes capable of achieving great things, but there is certainly no shortage of individuals who can't accomplish anything if they do it themselves but are first-rate troublemakers when causing chaos for others. Just wait and see."

## Chapter 53: Intrigue and Manipulation

In the aftermath of the recent turmoil, Paris seemed to have settled down somewhat. Barricades were gradually dismantled, and previously closed shops had reopened. Other than slightly higher prices and scarcer goods, it appeared that not much had changed.

Aunt Sophie had returned, and Louis was finally free from his heavy household chores. Louis had recently picked up chess, and he was getting addicted to it. With the school temporarily closed and no other way to pass the time, he had resorted to playing chess with Lucien.

Lucien took advantage of this opportunity to use household chores as their wager during their chess matches, successfully shifting his share of the work to his younger brother. The Bonaparte family seemed to produce exceptional elder brothers.

Schools had started to return to normal, but curiously, Joseph's Paris Military Academy was still suspended. This wasn't entirely unexpected. Louis and Lucien attended private schools, while Joseph's academy was funded by the state, and the king was far from pleased with the state of the military.

So, Joseph found himself with more leisure time. Seeing Sophie just finishing her cleaning, he struck up a conversation.

"Sophie, in these tumultuous days, I hope everything is alright at your home," Joseph inquired.

Sophie shook her head and replied, "There's nothing good about it. The days are just as tough, if not tougher. Bread prices have risen, and what's worse is that even if you have the money, it's hard to find bread to buy."

Joseph thought to himself that it seemed like some people couldn't sit still. "Sophie, is it really that difficult to buy bread now?" he asked.

"You're a respectable gentleman, sir. You don't need to worry about such matters. You might not know, but I had to run through four different neighborhoods just to buy today's bread. I even tore my apron in the rush. It's unbelievable. Wasn't everything supposed to get better, and our lives easier?" Sophie lamented.

Joseph shook his head. Since the start of the Estates-General, there had been an influx of people into Paris. Not only were there representatives from all over France, but also a considerable number of farmers and vagrants who had come to Paris. This had put additional strain on Paris' already limited food supply.

In such a situation, a revolution had occurred. However, the revolution had not increased the availability of food; it had disrupted existing orders. When established orders were disrupted, and new ones hadn't yet taken hold, the transportation and sale of food were bound to be disrupted, and efficiency would drop. So, rising bread prices and even the inability to buy it became natural consequences.

Moreover, in these conditions, panic buying and hoarding took place, further driving up prices and making it even more difficult to obtain bread. If certain individuals took advantage of this situation and deliberately increased panic, the problem would become even more severe.

Joseph suddenly recalled a historical incident from his time, which had similarities to this situation. In a certain East Asian country, after the liberation of their most important city, there had been a similar surge in prices and economic chaos. How had the first mayor of their city, Chen Leshan, dealt with it?

Chen Leshan had used two strategies: economic measures, such as raising the price of grain and importing it in large quantities from grain-producing regions, and political measures, including seizing and shutting down the currency exchange run by speculators. These actions had quickly stabilized the situation.

However, Joseph realized that these strategies were impractical in Paris. Massively importing grain required efficient control over the entire country, which didn't exist in France. In this era, even if France had such a system, would there have been a revolution? During the Seven Years' War, the French might have experienced the greatest joy in life that Genghis Khan talked about: "The greatest happiness in life is to relentlessly chase your enemies, invade their lands, plunder their wealth, and then hear the lamentations of their wives and children." What revolution would there have been then?

As for the second strategy, it also required a strong, centralized state apparatus. Currently, although General La Fayette controlled the National Guard and parts of the French Army, his grip on these forces was not absolute, and he couldn't employ such measures.

With all this in mind, Joseph said to Sophie, "Sophie, I'm afraid that in the coming days, bread prices may rise even further. If you have any savings, I'd suggest you exchange them for more bread as early as possible."

A despondent Sophie replied, "Sir, you're a respectable man. You don't need to worry about such matters. You may not know that, just to buy today's bread, I had to run through four neighborhoods. I even tore my apron during the scramble. Oh God, I can't understand what's happening! Weren't they saying that everything was getting better, and that everyone's lives would improve?"

Meanwhile, there was someone else in a similar predicament to Sophie, deeply concerned about the rising bread prices. This person was General La Fayette, who had recently gained the upper hand in the political turmoil.

Although General La Fayette had considerable influence in the military, his economic power was limited. He held a high-ranking title, but he wasn't from an ancient aristocratic family, and he lacked substantial wealth or lucrative channels for income. In this respect, the gap between him and the Duke of Orleans was as wide as the gap between the Duke and La Fayette in terms of military leadership.

As a seasoned military leader, La Fayette remained composed despite these challenges. His years of experience in war had taught him that when victory seemed unattainable, it was time to consider a strategic retreat.

"We must control the various atrocities happening in Paris; we cannot tolerate innocent bloodshed any longer. Some people, they are not revolutionaries, they are simply thugs! They chant democracy, but their true interests lie in plunder and murder. They accuse others of being 'enemies of the people' in the name of revolution and then proceed to kill and rob. How many honest shopkeepers in Paris have been hung by these ruffians? Their motives have nothing to do with democracy; they're after robbing others' lawful property. This chaos must be stopped! General, the people of Paris have entrusted you with the command of the National Guard, and one of your main tasks is to prevent potential looting. Are you saying that looting by mercenaries is looting, but the looting by these ruffians isn't?" In a room adjacent to the assembly hall, a representative named Barnave vehemently argued with General La Fayette, who was seated across from him.

"The point you make is valid, but this matter cannot be rushed," La Fayette replied, leaning back slightly. "You see, there are still many weapons in the hands of those ruffians, and they operate in organized groups. There are even sympathizers and members among them within the National Guard. We haven't yet been able to completely remove them from the National Guard."



Barnave inquired, "How long will it take to rid ourselves of these troublemakers?"

"Soon. I don't want to resort to violence to remove them, but their economic conditions won't allow them to stay in military service without working for long. The National Guard has established discipline, and those who consistently miss their duties will be discharged. It won't be long before these ruffians can't remain in the National Guard."

"Even if they're removed from the National Guard, they still pose a threat to order," Barnave argued.

"Do you want us to suppress them immediately?" La Fayette asked.

"Isn't there something we can do to..."

"We shouldn't attempt things beyond our capabilities; it will only weaken our strength needlessly," La Fayette interrupted. "At times, it's acceptable to retreat a little. You all know that King Louis is still indecisive. He doesn't want to let go of the old system and accept the new one, but he also dares not take the path of Charles I. We believed that King Louis was a monarch suited for constitutional rule, didn't we? However, some individuals are intent on delivering him to the guillotine. This prince, despite his revolutionary image, isn't a suitable constitutional monarch."

The assembled representatives nodded in agreement, knowing exactly whom La Fayette was referring to.

"In the current situation, I don't think this prince can remain still either. We should quietly watch his performance. We can use him to exert pressure on the king and, at the same time, use the king to challenge him. I understand him, and he's bound to reveal his flaws. When the time is right, we can take action, which will be more effective than hasty decisions."

After this speech, La Fayette glanced at his friends. They sat in silence, as though he had convinced them.

"There's one more reason I invited you all today," La Fayette continued.

"What is it?" asked Sieyes.

"I'd like to introduce you to a new friend, a progressive bishop," La Fayette replied.

#### Chapter 54: The Chameleon with Convictions

As the Marquis de Lafayette spoke, a middle-aged man of about forty, dressed in a black bishop's robe and with a slight limp, entered the small meeting room and bowed to the others.

"Bishop Talleyrand!" Several people in the room immediately recognized the clergyman.

Bishop Talleyrand was a prominent figure in the salons and social scenes of Paris. He came from a fallen noble family and had been sent to a theological school for his education, a path many noble-born children often followed.

In general, noble-born children had several paths to choose from:

First, they could inherit their family's wealth and live a life of leisure and indulgence. However, Talleyrand's family's wealth had been squandered by previous generations of hedonistic heirs.

Second, they could join the military and enjoy the king's pay as officers. However, a crippled officer like Talleyrand was not in high demand.

Third, they could become civil servants and enjoy the king's salary, embezzled public funds, and bribes from others. But to secure a civil service position, one needed to bribe their way in, and Talleyrand's family couldn't afford it.

So Talleyrand was left with the only option - becoming a clergyman.

The path of a clergyman wasn't all that bad, theoretically speaking. All believers were equal in the eyes of God. But in reality, some people were more equal than others. Typically, commoner-born clergymen would, at best, become parish priests, while clergy above that rank were predominantly from noble backgrounds.

The Church possessed vast resources, and becoming a bishop allowed one to live a comfortable life.

In Boccaccio's "Decameron," there's a story about a devout Christian who tried to persuade his friend, a Jew, to convert to Christianity. The Jew was tempted and decided to visit the Christian world's capital, Rome.

When the Christian heard of this decision, he was horrified, thinking his mission would surely fail because there was no virtue in Rome, only sin and corruption. There, people were deeply mired in wrongdoing.

However, after the Jew's visit to Rome, he immediately converted to Christianity. He thought, "The Catholic Church is so corrupt and depraved, yet it stands strong. There must be true divine power behind it."

Unlike the Jew in the story, Talleyrand was already a devout Christian. He had studied theology at the College of St. Sulpice for five years, although this education didn't bring him closer to God. It made him something of an atheist. But, for the sake of the Church's financial support, he put on a faade of devotion.

With this pretense, he secured the position of Abbot of the Saint-Remi Abbey in Reims and an annual pension of a staggering 18,000 livres (a type of silver coin that later became the franc) when Louis XVI ascended the throne.

With this money, Talleyrand led a secular nobleman's life in Paris. His position as the abbot was merely a well-paid sinecure, allowing him ample free time. He had bought a comfortable house in Paris, alternating between living in Reims and the capital, indulging in drinking, gambling, and the pleasures of the flesh.

Through his connections, he also gained access to bankers who provided him with information about the inner workings of the Church and even the government. In return, Talleyrand helped them find opportunities for profit through financial speculation, amassing wealth.

Talleyrand was no miser; he made money quickly and spent it just as rapidly. With the help of his friends, he came close to usurping the position of the Archbishop of Lyon after the Affair of the Diamond Necklace, only to be thwarted by the Queen's interference.

Though he didn't become the Archbishop of Lyon, he managed to secure the position of the Archbishop of Autun. Since Talleyrand had climbed the ranks through the favor of the king, most people considered him a staunch conservative and a royalist. However, his presence in the current meeting raised eyebrows.

"Gentlemen, it's an honor to see you," Bishop Talleyrand said, addressing the others.

"Bishop, what brings you to our gathering all of a sudden?" asked Sgur.

"Count d'Artois is preparing to leave France with his family for Italy," Bishop Talleyrand replied.

"Count d'Artois?" Louis XVI's brother and a staunch conservative. The historian Tocqueville once commented about him:

"We have seen many leaders in history whose knowledge, culture, political judgment, and value choices remain frozen at some stage of their youth. Regardless of how long they live or how much the world changes, they act as if stuck in a particular moment. They persist with obstinacy, self-confidence, and the delusion of defending certain values that would chart a new direction for the nation. In reality, their beliefs and policies are nothing but outdated relics."

"Count d'Artois is going into exile?" Sgur smirked. "The one who wanted to suppress us relentlessly? Now he's fleeing?"

"He has fled, and perhaps His Highness will be even more delighted," Barnave said, furrowing his brows.

"But this could be a good thing, couldn't it?" the Marquis de Lafayette said. "The king's power is waning, and apart from us, His Majesty has no one else to rely on."

"But we have the same problem as that prince's instigated mob," Barnave remarked.

"Then let him continue his act," Lafayette suggested. "The mob wants things we can't give them. Can that prince give them what they want? He never thought about the fact that when he set fire to his brother's house, it was connected to his own."

"Our houses are adjacent to theirs too," Barnave pointed out.

"Mr. Barnave, you're right," Bishop Talleyrand chimed in. "In truth, the three estates are a false concept. The division into three estates is utter nonsense. It's just that some fools believe in it."

"What do you mean?" Sgur frowned. He had gained fame for his work "What Is the Third Estate?" Now, Talleyrand was claiming that the concept of the Third Estate was false, and it didn't sit well with him.

"Mr. Sgur, please consider our neighboring country to the west, the most successful nation in the world today. Think about what privilege really is," Talleyrand said.

"I don't understand your point," Sgur admitted. He couldn't follow Talleyrand's line of thought, which made him even less pleased with the bishop.

"At its core, privilege is the right to a good life," Talleyrand explained. "Traditional nobility once enjoyed this privilege simply because of their birth. But in modern times, this hereditary privilege has largely become obsolete. Even without a revolution, birthright has transformed into a privilege of wealth."

With a pause to let his words sink in, Talleyrand continued, "Let's take me as an example. I was born into a minor noble family, but my family was impoverished when I was born. Our wealth, except for a noble suffix in our name, had disappeared. Our family's life was no better than that of an ordinary third estate person and was even worse because they were wealthier. Money is privilege."

Talleyrand paused again, allowing everyone to digest his words. After a moment, he continued, "Let's look at the English. Do they have nobility? Yes, they do. Do they have respectable non-noble people? Yes, they do. Do they have a horde of penniless rabble? Of course. Why, then, can they have a 'Glorious Revolution' without bloodshed?"

"Why?" Sgur asked.

"Because the English understand that money is power, and power is money. These two things can be mutually exchanged. A person can be a noble, a clergyman, and a wealthy man simultaneously. There is no unbridgeable gap between these roles."

"Like you, Bishop?" Sgur asked, with a sarcastic smile.

"Yes," Talleyrand replied, unapologetically. "Only poverty creates a profound gap between privilege and the lack thereof. The nobility should realize this and open the gates of power to wealthy non-nobles. The well-off should join forces with the nobility to share power, and the nobility should share wealth. In the end, everyone will get what they want, which is why England is strong and stable."

"I've been trying to convince the king and other nobles for a long time, hoping they would follow the English example and unite all respectable people," Talleyrand continued. "But in France, there are too many fools. In the nobility, you have someone like Count d'Artois, who lives in the Middle Ages, thinking he can rule France as if it's still the Middle Ages and unwilling to share any benefits with the wealthy. He doesn't realize that money is power. The wealthy, or more precisely, the powerful non-nobles, won't allow him to manipulate them."

"Then there's the Duke of Orleans, a self-proclaimed smart fool. He recklessly opened the bottle containing the devil without considering the consequences. Should we really share power and wealth with these unlettered masses? France may be wealthy, but we can't evenly distribute it among the rabble. Yet the Duke of Orleans set them free and let them see their own power. Once they realize their power, they won't hesitate to use it for their benefit. But what they want, we can't provide because they want to live just like us. That's impossible!"

Nobles, as well as wealthy individuals, should naturally form a sacred alliance, Talleyrand argued. Due to their stubbornness, ignorance, and damn arrogance and ambition, they all had gone down the wrong path. An obstinate refusal to progress, even when progress could provide a better life, and an irresponsible release of the devil had plunged France into immense danger. Talleyrand believed that the king could no longer save France, but those present could. That's why he had come to them.

Sgur stared at Talleyrand, wide-eyed, for a long moment. Finally, he sighed, "Bishop Talleyrand, you are the Machiavelli of France, a man without faith."

"No, Mr. Sgur," Talleyrand said earnestly. "You're prejudiced against me. I may not truly believe in God, but I love France."

"Your faith doesn't interest us," Barnave added. "We know you were reprimanded for visiting Voltaire (who had been excommunicated for vehemently opposing the Catholic Church), and you later repented to the Red Archbishop. It was a sincere repentance, they say. But we're not concerned with that. What matters is how we can deal with the devils that have been let out of the bottle. Do you have any guidance for us on that?"

"There have always been two ways to put the devils back in the bottle," Talleyrand immediately replied.

"Which two ways?" Sgur asked.

"The first is Solomon's way, overpowering the devils by one's own strength and forcing them back into the bottle. The other way is the fisherman's way, deceiving them with lies and luring them to enter the bottle on their own."

"As a bishop, you're comparing us to the stories of non-believers," Sgur interjected.

"Seeking the truth, even in a distant land," Talleyrand replied.

"That's another pagan saying."

"France has already allied with the pagans."

"Let's get back to the point, gentlemen, Bishop," Barnave said. "Bishop Talleyrand, which method do you think we can use?"

"Both methods simultaneously," Talleyrand answered. "However, before we prepare to put the devils back in the bottle, we must find a way to deal with the person who released them from their prison due to his ambition. Otherwise, this prince, though limited in ability, has been causing trouble for the king for years. He knows very well how to create chaos in France, and there are few who understand the art of creating chaos in France better than him. If we don't deal with him first, our mission will be difficult to accomplish."

"How should we deal with him?" Sgur inquired.

"Let's not rush. Wait for him to make a mistake," Talleyrand advised.

## Chapter 55: The Tree Wants Peace, but the Wind Persists

In the months that followed, life was somewhat "peaceful," at least compared to the days when Bastille was under siege.

Order had been restored in the higher echelons of Paris. The newly formed National Guard patrolled day and night, ensuring that troublemakers dared not create havoc in these areas. The poorer citizens had been mostly weeded out from the National Guard since they needed to focus on earning a living rather than receiving military training.

But if one ventured outside these neighborhoods and inadvertently crossed into the regions where the less fortunate resided, they would immediately notice that the restoration of order was nothing more than an illusion. The chaos here was even worse than it had been before the revolution.

As Aunt Sophie put it, the streets were now infested with thieves and robbers.

"I wouldn't dare walk the streets with a loaf of bread," Aunt Sophie remarked when Joseph suggested she take some bread for her children. "Mr. Bonaparte, you have no idea how chaotic it is outside these neighborhoods! My word, for a woman like me to walk the streets with a loaf of bread, it's more dangerous than wandering in a forest with tigers. Not just me, even someone as sturdy as you, if you were alone, I'm sure you wouldn't take a hundred steps before someone robbed you. If it were young Monsieur Lucien, well, he wouldn't even make it ten steps before being shot. And as for little Louis, well, he and the bread would both vanish without a trace."

"In that case, how do you bring the bread home?" Joseph asked.

"We go in groups," Aunt Sophie replied. "If you men hadn't stirred up trouble with your Estates-General and kings and meetings and revolutions, we thought, 'Life is already tough enough, a bit of excitement won't make it any harder.' But look at us now... Mr. Bonaparte, they said once the Estates-General was convened, everyone would have enough to eat. But there are some bad folks who won't let us hold our meetings. So we all went to fight those bad folks. But even after we fought them and the meetings were held, bread became more expensive. When the Estates-General wasn't in session, we couldn't afford bread; when it was in session, we still couldn't afford it. What's the use of that Estates-General then?"

Joseph sighed and said, "Aunt Sophie, the Estates-General itself can't produce bread."

In his mind, he added, "And the representatives don't really think about how to ensure the lowest rungs of society have enough bread."

This thought wasn't unfounded. In fact, most of the representatives were wealthy and had no worries about bread. Some even compared French and British wages, concluding that French wages were too high, harming the economy, and proposing legal restrictions on high salaries.

"But wasn't it said that once the Estates-General convened, everyone would have a good life? They can't just deceive people like that," Aunt Sophie grumbled.

"In reality, it's not just you," Joseph sighed. "Even for me, these days are tougher than before. Everything has become more expensive besides salaries. My life has become harder."

While this statement was partly true, Joseph's life would indeed have been challenging if he relied solely on his schoolteacher's salary. Even someone like Joseph, a "skilled professional" (as he self-deprecatingly referred to himself), could find himself in difficulties. For ordinary people, life was even tougher.

However, without the Estates-General and the revolution, even if the lives of ordinary people were slightly harder, there might not have been any upheaval. In Europe, the French, even the lower classes, had relatively decent lives. Compared to British workers with an average life expectancy of less than three years or Russian serfs who lacked personal freedom, the French's standard of living was significantly higher. As for the Germans, Heinrich Heine even claimed, "One percent of the suffering experienced by the German people would be enough to trigger a thousand uprisings in France."

The issue was that the Estates-General's convening had given the lower classes great hope, and all French, even people like Aunt Sophie, were aware of it. Continuous propaganda only inflated this hope, making it seem as though once the Estates-General was convened and the king supported constitutional rule, all problems would be solved. It was almost like, "After the Estates-General, we'll have everything foie gras on the table and a sweetheart to embrace at night."

However, in the face of reality, this hope, magnified beyond belief, burst like a soap bubble. The Estates-General convened, the Constituent Assembly was established, and Bastille was taken, but there was not even black bread, let alone foie gras. The agony caused by this disparity far exceeded the suffering of going hungry and consequently fueled hatred. This is why the grand revolution erupted first in France rather than in the most oppressive nations.

"That's why the king's decision to convene the Estates-General was his biggest mistake," the Marquis de Mirabeau declared at the Royal Palace, conversing with the Duke of Orleans, the host of the gathering.

The Marquis de Mirabeau was quite a character, known for his scandalous reputation. He had spent the earlier part of his life either embroiled in scandals or locked in prison.

The young Marquis had always displayed a penchant for debauchery. His father had sent him to the army for discipline, but he preferred gambling, pursuing women, and even attempting desertion. This ultimately led to his incarceration in the Chateau d'If. After his release, he participated in suppressing the Corsican rebellion, where he excelled and was promoted to the rank of captain before returning to Paris.

Upon his father's arrangements, he married Emily, the daughter of the Marquis de Morieu, hoping to gain access to her substantial wealth. However, the couple was ill-suited for each other, mutually disliking one another and sharing a love for extravagant living that led to insurmountable debt. In an attempt to preserve the family's reputation, the elder Marquis imprisoned him and prohibited him from handling any finances. Nonetheless, Mirabeau continued his reckless behavior and was incarcerated in the Chateau d'If once again in 1774, the same fortress featured in "The Count of Monte Cristo."

In 1775, Mirabeau was released from prison. However, immediately upon his release, he seduced the young wife of the Marquis de Morieu, then eloped with her to Holland.

This behavior led to his father completely cutting off his financial support. Mirabeau was forced to make a living through writing. Mirabeau hailed from the upper echelons of society and was well aware of the corruption within the French aristocracy. Consequently, he became a prominent critic of the old French system.

However, the income he earned from writing wasn't sufficient to maintain his lavish lifestyle. Mirabeau was notorious for his extravagant living and overspending. During this period, he faced numerous financial disputes and was once again imprisoned due to debt. He claimed that the reactionary French authorities were persecuting him.

However, Mirabeau was soon released from prison, and miraculously, he managed to clear his debts, living even more extravagantly. Surprisingly, he didn't get into trouble over financial disputes again. He credited this to his various successful investments, which he claimed brought him substantial returns. He insisted that achieving financial independence was just one small achievement. Many believed that he had found a wealthy patron, someone wholly dedicated to tarnishing the king's reputation the Duke of Orleans.

Mirabeau's continued critique of the old French system gained him a good reputation among the dissatisfied Third Estate. When the Estates-General convened, Mirabeau became one of its representatives and eventually a leader of the National Assembly.

"However, in situations like this, the Parisians have experienced many times before," the Duke of Orleans mused. "Besides, this year's wheat is growing splendidly, and everyone believes that if there are no unexpected natural disasters, we'll have a harvest like we haven't seen in nearly a decade. When that happens, the price of food will surely decrease. This isn't within anyone's control. Once food prices drop, the people's dissatisfaction will diminish, and the flames of the revolution will die down. If we don't seize the moment, the old regime will persist."

The Duke of Orleans furrowed his brow.

Mirabeau chuckled, his jowls shaking.

"Don't worry, Your Grace. With the current situation, how can we wait for the autumn harvest? It's different now. The Estates-General and the revolution have given them hope. If reality shatters that hope, the resulting anger won't be easy to suppress. Moreover, no one can suppress such anger these days. Even in the rural provinces, unrest is brewing. The peasants are desperate to rid themselves of feudal rents and the tithe. They can't wait anymore, and revolts are breaking out everywhere. To pacify them, the Constituent Assembly is preparing a new law. This new law will face resistance from the king, and we'll use it to raise prices. Then we'll redirect the people's anger toward the king. This will work in our favor."

## Chapter 56: The Women's Army

"Joseph, the Constituent Assembly has passed a new decree," announced Lucien as soon as Joseph returned home, shaking a newspaper in his hand.

"Lately, Lucien seems to be getting more interested in politics," Joseph thought. He inquired, "Did they pass the Declaration of the Rights of Man?"

Joseph's knowledge of the history of the French Revolution from his past life was minimal, mostly due to his focus on sports and a lack of interest in history. He knew about a document called the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

"No, it's not that," replied Lucien. "It's a decree that abolishes all feudal rights."

"What? Let me see," Joseph said, surprised. He knew that rural areas were erupting in uprisings and riots. With France nearly on the brink of anarchy, the Constituent Assembly aimed to pacify the peasants, but passing such a significant decree so quickly and with such force was astounding.

"This is absurd!" Joseph exclaimed. "This involves numerous interests and is as complex as the Gordian knot. Without Alexander's sword, no one could unravel it. The Constituent Assembly doesn't have an Alexander the Great, so how did they manage this? Hand it over; I want to see."

Lucien handed the newspaper to Joseph, who sat on the couch and started reading.

After a while, Joseph couldn't help but burst into laughter. "Lucien, why are you laughing?" Lucien asked.

"I'm laughing at the spineless king and the shameless Constituent Assembly," Joseph said sarcastically. Unfortunately, Lucien didn't catch the reference. Joseph continued, "Look at this decree; it treats the peasants like fools. 'Abolish all feudal obligations,' it says, but when it comes to money, like land rents and dues, they must be redeemed, and the entire sum must be paid at once the equivalent of thirty years' worth. If peasants could produce that much money in one go, I'd become a farmer! Moreover, look here, redemption is on a village basis, meaning if one household in a village can't pay, none of them can redeem. And here, redemption requires mutual consent if the lords disagree, even if they have the money, they can't redeem. It's like offering a loaf of bread to a starving person. It's blatantly taking peasants for fools. Do you find it amusing?"

"Well, it is certainly a way to deceive them. But, Joseph, I wonder if some people don't really want to quell the rural chaos. After all, as long as it's not them suffering," Lucien mused. "Besides, this



decree still needs the king's approval to take effect. I doubt he's in any position to address this issue right now."

"Lucien," Joseph exclaimed in surprise, "did you come up with that yourself? Nicely done! You might be catching up to that other dummy, Napoleon!"

Lucien knew it was a compliment, even if it implied that he was still behind the other "dummy." Lucien considered his older brother an absolute genius.

"You once said that some people might not be capable of accomplishing much themselves, but they are adept at causing trouble. This might be the time they want to create chaos," Lucien replied.

As Lucien had suggested, King Louis XVI was facing concerns about the unofficial submission of the "August Decrees" by the Constituent Assembly.

"Your Majesty, you cannot approve such a thing!" Queen Marie Antoinette's face turned pale with anger. "If you approve something so absurd, you'll lose the support of the nobility. This is essentially a death sentence for all of France's traditions!"

"I am aware of that," said the man theoretically the most powerful in France. "But if I reject it outright, it will only incite further violence. Some people are eagerly awaiting such events!"

But this response only infuriated the queen further. "You're always fearful, always afraid! The more you act this way, the less they respect you. Your loyal supporters will lose morale due to your delay and fear, and the rebels will revel in your weakness. You constantly undermine your own side and strengthen the enemy. I genuinely don't understand how someone like you became the King of France!"

"I never wanted to be the King of France in the first place," Louis XVI said in a low voice.

"Yes, you only wanted to be a hunter and a locksmith. Maybe someday, when we've lost the crown of France and are in exile, you can use your locksmith skills to support the family," the queen sarcastically remarked before storming out of the room, slamming the door shut.

Louis XVI sighed and rose from his seat, heading to a small room on the right, where he studied various locks. It was the only place he could find a moment of happiness during these times. After all, this decree was informally submitted by the Constituent Assembly, which meant it could be delayed.

King Louis XVI adopted an ostrich-like policy toward the "August Decrees." He left the Constituent Assembly's submission of the "August Decrees" unacknowledged, neither openly opposing them nor granting approval.

As Queen Marie Antoinette had predicted, some nobles who had been supporting the king began leaving the country to seek European support. They claimed to be doing so to secure European support for the king, but in reality, the departure of these key figures significantly weakened the king's power.

In Paris, food prices continued to rise, accompanied by a barrage of rumors. Among the most widely circulated rumors were these:

The first was that Paris was suffering from a shortage of food due to widespread rural uprisings. The reason for these rebellions was supposedly the king's refusal to approve the "August Decrees."

Another rumor claimed that someone was intentionally preventing food from entering Paris and driving up prices. Who were these culprits? The answer, of course, was the "reactionaries" who supported the tyrant. They were obstructing the food supply to Paris and causing the price hikes.

According to Vicomte de Ver, the key to deception was to tell the truth in most areas, except for the crucial points. Both rumors adhered to this principle.

While it was true that rural areas were in turmoil and there were uprisings, the fact was that the Constituent Assembly did not submit the "August Decrees" for the king's approval until October 1. Thus, before that date, there was no official "August Decrees" that required the king's approval. Moreover, these rural uprisings had already started in July, and the situation in the provinces was not significantly worse now compared to July.

As for someone deliberately blocking food from entering Paris and driving up prices, that was true too, but it wasn't the king doing it. It was a certain nobleman and a group of respectable third estate people who had joined his efforts. They were profiting from the situation while shifting the blame onto the king.

In the midst of this turmoil, it was now October 1789. Typically, July and August were the harvesting seasons for wheat in France. By late August, wheat should have been fully harvested. That year, France had experienced a bountiful wheat harvest, and this news had already reached Paris. People expected that a bumper wheat harvest would lead to a drop in bread prices, yet, by October, bread prices continued to rise steadily and sustainably.

As the nobles supporting the monarchy left one by one, the royal family felt increasingly unsafe. At the end of September, the king moved the Flanders regiment near Versailles. The Flanders region was relatively conservative and had a stronger royalist presence. In the eyes of the people, these troops were more inclined to support the king.

On October 1st, the king hosted a dinner for the officers of the Flanders regiment. It was after this banquet that a rumor spread throughout Paris:

Towards the end of the banquet, the king and his family appeared. The officers of the Flanders regiment cheered for the king and trampled on the red, white, and blue tricolor cockade, symbolizing Paris and the National Guard.

This news quickly spread in Paris, rekindling fear. The people didn't know that the king's power had already significantly diminished compared to July, and he was unlikely to pose a real threat to Paris. In their eyes, after months of careful preparation, the troops the king had called to suppress Paris must be more numerous, and Paris was in danger. They believed it was their duty to stand up and defend themselves with their weapons.

On the afternoon of October 4th, after serving dinner to Joseph and others, Aunt Sophie announced that she needed to take a day off the next day.

"Is something happening in your family?" Joseph asked.

In this era, for the household maids responsible for chores, Joseph was undoubtedly the best employer. He genuinely cared about their well-being.

"Oh, sir, nothing is wrong at home. But us women, yes, some women from the Halles district and the Saint-Antoine district have made arrangements. Tomorrow, we're going to the city hall to request their help in solving the bread issue."

## Chapter 57: Building Up High (1)

Joseph, who had no knowledge of historical details, had no idea how the march that Aunt Sophie was about to attend would leave a deep mark in history. He was just surprised that someone like Aunt Sophie, who seemed quite indifferent to politics, would be willing to participate in a protest march.

"Sophie, didn't you say you have no interest in these things?" Joseph hadn't even spoken yet when Louis chimed in. "Can't you just skip it? If you're not there, Lucien will dump all the household chores on me."

"Oh, my little Master Louis," Aunt Sophie wiped her hands on her apron, "I can't skip it. If I don't go, others will be upset. It's like if your friends invite you to a gathering, and you don't show up, won't they be disappointed?"

"But, Sophie, it's different. Your gathering is a protest, and Joseph says things are quite chaotic and dangerous outside now. The City Hall area is especially messy and perilous," Louis continued.

"Don't worry, it'll be fine," Aunt Sophie reassured, patting Louis's head. "Mayor Bayi and Marquis Lafayette are good people, and I won't be at the front lines. If anything happens, I'll run fast."

Aunt Sophie didn't understand politics, but her simple wisdom told her that if everyone went and she stayed behind at a time like this, she would stand out and become conspicuous. And being conspicuous at such times often came with various risks.

The next day, Aunt Sophie indeed didn't show up. It wasn't until the late afternoon of the third day, after Joseph had already come back from work, that she appeared at Joseph's doorstep, looking excited and exhausted.

"Sorry, Monsieur Bonaparte, I'm back late. But I think it's just in time to make dinner now," Aunt Sophie said.

"Oh, that's not a problem," Joseph welcomed Aunt Sophie inside. "These days, unexpected things happening are no longer unexpected. In fact, if something is completely expected, that's what's truly surprising. Yesterday, when you didn't return, little Louis was really worried about you. Now that you're back safe, that's all that matters."

"Sophie, Sophie..." Louis came running out of the kitchen at this point, shouting, holding a bread knife covered in breadcrumbs, indicating that he was being bossed around by his two older brothers.

"Ah, my little Master Louis," Aunt Sophie quickly went to him, taking the knife covered in breadcrumbs from Louis. "Missed me, didn't you?"

"Yeah," Louis said with wide, curious eyes. "I heard people say you stayed in the palace yesterday?"

"Yes, I did. This morning, I even rolled on the Queen's bed!" Aunt Sophie answered in a boasting tone as she headed towards the kitchen.

"Sophie, tell me, did you see the Queen? Is she beautiful? And is her bed covered in gold, like everyone says?" Louis grabbed onto Sophie's apron, following her to the kitchen, bombarding her with questions.

"The Queen is indeed beautiful, but her bed isn't covered in gold. She's not a dragon, she doesn't like to sleep on a pile of gold coins..."

At dinner, Aunt Sophie went into detail about her experiences from the last two days. It was only then that Joseph realized how important these events had been.

The women had originally gone to City Hall to petition, but when they arrived, they were informed that Mayor Bayi was conveniently absent, and so was Marquis Lafayette.

Aunt Sophie thought that if they couldn't find anyone, everyone would disperse, but unexpectedly, someone in the crowd shouted, "Then we'll go to Versailles to find the King! He can't let us starve like this!"

Many others came forward to support the idea, and a man named Mayar, who was said to have taken part in the storming of the Bastille, stepped up, claiming he knew the way to Versailles and was willing to lead everyone there.

It was said that a bored scientist conducted a rather boring experiment. He removed certain parts of a fish's brain and then put it back into the school of fish. This brain-deprived fish only swam forward incessantly, leading the entire school. It became the leader of the school of fish.

In many ways, crowds of people were quite similar to schools of fish. Often, especially in chaotic and uncertain times, it was not the deeply wise individuals who led the crowd but the ones who acted decisively, even if their actions were rash and thoughtless.

So, everyone followed Mayar to Versailles. The journey from City Hall to Versailles took about four hours, but the women, eager to resolve the food issue, pressed on tirelessly.

After a while, the Mayor and Marquis Lafayette arrived at City Hall. The National Guard quickly assembled, preparing to go to Versailles to defend... the King or the people, who knew? The Paris Commune (yes, after the capture of the Bastille, the new municipal institution was called the Paris Commune. This was version 1.0. The one we're more familiar with is version 2.0.) sent two representatives to accompany Lafayette to Versailles. Their orders were to bring the royal family back to Paris.

The women's march was not particularly fast, so they hadn't arrived by the time the Constituent Assembly in Versailles learned of these events. The Assembly immediately dispatched its president, Mounier, to see the King. The King interrupted his hunting and returned to Versailles. Mounier presented his request for the immediate approval of the "August Decree" and the removal of the Flanders Regiment. The King expressed that he needed more time to consider.

Meanwhile, the Queen urged the King to leave Versailles to avoid the "mob," but the King felt that fleeing Versailles just because some women had shown up would make him a laughingstock. Little did he know that behind those women, the fully armed National Guard had already come to "protect" him.

In the late afternoon, the women reached Versailles. The King received them, displayed great amiability, and promised to ensure the supply of provisions to Paris. Of course, the King had no power to fulfill these promises; he was just appeasing the women.

This statement seemed to have an effect. Some women, upon hearing the King's promise, believed that all their problems were solved, and some even turned to go back to Paris. However, more women stayed behind, exhausted after walking for hours. They would most likely return satisfied the next morning.

But at around 10 PM, Marquis Lafayette arrived at Versailles with the National Guard and the representatives of the Paris Commune. Surprisingly, the National Guard was slower than the women's march. However, it was understandable, as they were carrying cannons. The reason for bringing cannons, of course, was to protect the King. Later that night, at around 11 PM, Lafayette met with the King and presented two representatives who boldly demanded the immediate relocation of the King's family to Paris. Lafayette assured the King of the National Guard's loyalty.

This request took the King completely by surprise. But upon learning that Lafayette had brought a substantial force of the National Guard with him, the King didn't dare refuse outright and asked for more time.

It's said that on that night, someone went to the nearby Flanders Regiment, but they remained passive. This might have been because they hadn't received an official order from the King.

In any case, from that day forward, the royal family found themselves in the hands of revolutionary crowds and were officially prisoners of the Revolution, even though the King still wore his crown.

"Alright, that's it. We brought back the bakery owner, his wife, and the little baker. From now on, we won't have to worry about not getting bread anymore!" Aunt Sophie concluded her story with these words, believing that all problems had been solved.

## Chapter 58: Building Up High (2)

Joseph's grasp of history may not have been great, but he understood that Aunt Sophie's optimism was perhaps a bit premature. There were still plenty of challenges ahead.

On the 19th, the Constituent Assembly left Versailles and returned to Paris.

As soon as the Constituent Assembly returned to Paris, a member named Mirabeau proposed the following idea: "Let the king abdicate and pass the throne to the dauphin. Considering that the dauphin is still young, in accordance with French tradition, a noble and esteemed aristocrat should be appointed as the regent to handle affairs on his behalf."

Everyone knew exactly who this noble and esteemed aristocrat was referring to. The king's two brothers were already in exile, and given their stance on the revolution, they were not viable candidates for this position. So, the only option was the Duke of Orleans.

This proposal gained support from many members of the assembly because they had no faith that the king, who had been forced to return to Paris, would genuinely support constitutional rule. They believed that having such a person on the throne would introduce too many uncertainties into the new government.

For a moment, Louis XVI's position became precarious, and chants of "Long Live Louis XVII" were heard in the streets.

In theory, the Duke of Orleans had been waiting for this moment for a long time. However, something unexpected happened. The Duke of Orleans suddenly accepted an offer from the Marquis de Lafayette and left France to become the ambassador to London.

Conventional wisdom would have expected the Duke of Orleans to stay in France, as leaving the country at this point was almost akin to exile. But it was rumored that after a secret meeting with Lafayette, the Duke of Orleans agreed to this request. Other rumors suggested that the Duke of Orleans had engaged in some unsavory activities behind the scenes, which were discovered by the Marquis de Lafayette. It was said that a priest friend of Condorcet had found evidence of his less-than-honorable actions and relayed this information to Condorcet, who then provided it to the Marquis de Lafayette. However, Lafayette, being an honorable man, chose not to publicly expose these actions and tarnish the Duke's reputation. Nevertheless, Lafayette believed that the Duke's continued presence in France would be detrimental to the nation, and he thus pressured the Duke into leaving.

There were also other speculations, such as the Duke's sense of responsibility and his understanding of the potential disruption he might cause to democracy if he assumed the regency. However, Joseph couldn't help but think that the first rumor might contain more truth than meets the eye.

After successfully deterring the Duke of Orleans, Lafayette turned his attention to Mirabeau. He used similar tactics in an attempt to convince Mirabeau to leave France and become the ambassador to Constantinople. However, Mirabeau stood his ground and refused the offer. Yet, Lafayette struck a heavy blow by rallying the assembly to not only reject Mirabeau's proposal for members of the government to become ministers but also to pass a resolution prohibiting members of the assembly from becoming ministers. This effectively blocked the path for Mirabeau to hold any ministerial position.

At this point, it seemed that Lafayette had gained complete control over the situation. The only significant challenge remaining was the issue of finances.

One of the main reasons Louis XVI had called the Estates-General in the first place was the pressing financial crisis. While the political landscape had changed dramatically, the financial troubles remained.

It was like the problem described by later scientists Clausius and Kelvin in the second law of thermodynamics: there is no way to decrease the entropy of a closed system without increasing the overall entropy. While the royal expenses had been reduced, new expenses had emerged.

First, conservative aristocrats who were unwilling to relinquish their past privileges were fomenting rebellion throughout the country. Suppressing them required more funds. For years, France had been the dominant power on the European continent, but many neighboring countries were now eyeing the opportunity to challenge that position.

For instance, the Habsburg family of Austria had always sought to restore the so-called "Holy Roman Empire" to its former glory. Despite the empire's name, it was neither holy nor Roman, and it was far from an empire. Apart from producing numerous princesses, it had little to boast about.

In the Seven Years' War, Austria and France had been on the same side, but the outcome had been disastrous for France. Interestingly, France had achieved significant success when it had previously allied with the Muslim Turks against the devoutly Catholic Habsburgs and when it had allied with Protestants against Catholic Habsburgs during the Thirty Years' War. However, once they joined

forces with the Catholic Habsburgs, they suffered a crushing defeat. It seemed that, in God's grand design, France was meant to combat Catholics. Although France had imprisoned the Pope, allied with non-Christians against Christians, and joined forces with Protestants against Catholics, Joseph believed he was still a good child of God.

Nevertheless, if France showed any vulnerability, the Habsburgs might seize the opportunity to exploit it.

Additionally, there were the Low Countries, Prussia, and Russia. Nearly every neighboring country on the European continent hoped to gain an advantage should France falter. Not to mention the perennial troublemaker in the west the United Kingdom. If they didn't pounce on France and tear off a few pieces of its flesh while it was vulnerable, they wouldn't deserve the nickname "John Bull, who never meddles."

To protect against these neighbors, France needed to strengthen its military. However, both King Louis XVI and the assembly had doubts about the reliability of the French army.

The high-ranking officers in the French army were predominantly aristocrats, many of whom had fled the country and were now potentially guiding foreign armies against France. Some were even relatives of Princes of the Blood, as Victor Hugo would later describe in his novel "Ninety-Three." For example, the commander of the Republican Army, Guhneuc, was the great-grandson of the royalist Marquis de Lantenac. In "Ninety-Three," Guhneuc was portrayed as a loyal supporter of the Republic. However, in reality, who could guarantee the loyalty of those noble officers in the army? Who could assure that, should the Count of Provence or the Count of Artois return with foreign armies, these officers would not change sides?

Some impatient members of the assembly even suggested that all aristocratic officers be replaced with third-estate officers. But such a thoughtless proposal was unworkable. The so-called third-estate officers were not only few in number, but they were typically junior officers at best few had even attained the rank of lieutenant. These officers, with very few exceptions, were not well-versed in military tactics or strategies. They might be competent at commanding a platoon or a company, but leading a whole army in battle was a different matter altogether.

In fact, even the members proposing such ideas understood the impracticality of this proposal. However, they presented it to demonstrate their loyalty to the people and their willingness to take bold measures to win popular support.

This was a common flaw in a representative system: in order to gain the support of the electorate, you had to appear more radical than your opponents, even if it meant making unworkable proposals. This trend persisted through the generations. For example, if environmental protection was a concern, politicians had to support shutting down dangerous nuclear power plants, dismantling air-polluting coal-fired power plants, demolishing hydroelectric dams that altered river ecosystems and geology, and scrapping wind turbines that caused infrasound pollution and threatened bird populations. Eventually, they had to support "clean, natural, love-powered energy."

To address the unreliability of the military, more funds were required. First and foremost, the army's pay needed to be guaranteed. The reason King Louis XVI had gradually lost control over the military was often due to the failure to pay the soldiers' wages on time. If the assembly wanted to maintain control over the military, they had to ensure that the troops were well-fed and paid.

Secondly, they needed to establish a military force that was loyal to the assembly. The British Parliament's control over the country was largely because they had a "parliamentary army." England's parliamentary army had evolved from Oliver Cromwell's New Model Army. The National Assembly, or the Constituent Assembly, was eager to create its own version of a New Model Army.

The closest thing to a "New Model Army" at the moment was the "National Guard." However, the National Guard was still essentially a militia. Despite Lafayette's best efforts, it was still a ragtag force. Transforming this ragtag militia into a "New Model Army" required not only time but also money.

Then there was the issue of various new and old debts, totaling up to 45 billion livres. The interest alone was a staggering sum. This placed an enormous burden on the assembly.

Defaulting on the debt was not an option, as much of this debt had been incurred from the wealthiest third-estate bourgeoisie, who now formed the backbone of the nation.

Faced with this dilemma, some members had begun discussing privately whether it was time to consider increasing taxes, even though it was a politically incorrect move. However, no one had openly proposed this yet. Lafayette, however, was not concerned because his friend, Bishop Talleyrand, had a solution in mind.

#### Chapter 59: The Victorious Organizer

At the National Assembly meeting on October 10th, the former first-tier representative and now the Member of Parliament for the Orlans district, Bishop Talleyrand, requested to speak.

Amidst a mixture of genuine and feigned applause, the Bishop in his solemn black robe ascended the pulpit. Unlike his equally seminary-educated and ever-mutable counterpart, known for his changing allegiances, Talleyrand excelled at delivering speeches. After all, the skills to sway the faithful from the pulpit could also be applied to sway the masses in a speech.

"Everyone knows that even though a new system has been established, and His Majesty the King has recognized the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' and pledged allegiance to the constitution, France still faces a grave crisis. Some conservative nobles have fled abroad, making connections with other despotic monarchs in Europe, attempting to use their power to overthrow the revolution. At home, there is rebellion, banditry, and insurgents running amok, recklessly damaging our beloved France. These crises are severe. Can we turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to them?"

"We cannot!"

"We cannot!"

The members of parliament chimed in, and from the left side of the pulpit, a voice even exclaimed, "Hang those villains! String them up on lampposts!"

Despite his dislike for the radicals sitting on the left side, Bishop Talleyrand remained composed.

"However, we face another enormous difficulty: we lack funds," Talleyrand continued, "Due to the royal extravagance, France now owes as much as 4.5 billion livres, and just paying the interest will deplete our coffers. Without money, how can we arm our soldiers to defend our revolution?"

"So, what's your solution then?"

"Are you suggesting we can conjure up livres out of thin air?" someone from below shouted.



"Ladies and gentlemen, please, let's calm down," Bishop Talleyrand raised his voice, "I do indeed have a workable solution."

The room fell silent.

Many were thinking, "Is this guy out of his mind, planning to propose higher taxes?"

"Everyone knows that over the years, the Church has accumulated immense wealth," Talleyrand continued, "To my knowledge, the Church owns land worth over 3 billion livres, among other riches. If we can use this wealth for the common good, we will have a solution to our current crisis."

As soon as he spoke, the entire assembly erupted into cheers.

Some shouted, "Yes, those bloodsuckers should've given up these treasures a long time ago!"

Others yelled, "This is blasphemy!"

The latter were mostly representatives of the clergy, but they didn't garner much support. In times of financial crisis, contemplating raiding religious institutions had a long tradition in Catholic France.

Back in the day, one of the three great orders of knights, the Knights Templar, lost the Holy Land and had to return to France. Besides their combat skills, they were masters at making money, and they even invented the European banking system. King Philip IV of France owed them a considerable sum. When they returned to France, they brought back immense wealth, much to the envy of King Philip IV.

Philip IV was known to be a shameless character when it came to money. He never cared for religious fervor. Under his rule, at least two popes met their demise, and he forcibly brought the papacy within France, making several successive popes "prisoners of Avignon."

So, one Friday, Philip IV, using the pretext that the Templars were "heretics," ordered the arrest of all their members in France and confiscated all the Templars' possessions. He even controlled the pope who declared the Templars as heretics and condemned them for their emblematic symbol of two knights, one behind the other. Originally, it commemorated the two founders of the order, but the ecclesiastical courts twisted it into a symbol of homosexual conduct.

In this way, King Philip IV eliminated his creditors and gained a substantial fortune. It is said that the Templars had prepared for this day, transferring or hiding much of their wealth, leading to numerous legends about the Templars' hidden treasures that persist in Europe to this day.

As devout Catholics, the people of France had no qualms about despoiling the Church. However, another voice made them hesitate.

"But we just enshrined the principle that 'private property is inviolable' in the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man.' Are we to trample our own principles so soon? If we can seize Church property today, whose property will be next tomorrow?" someone shouted.

So, everyone fell silent, their eyes fixed on Bishop Talleyrand.

Bishop Talleyrand seemed unfazed by the sudden pressure. He smiled and then spoke slowly, "A gentleman earlier mentioned the principle of 'sacrosanct inviolability of private property.' I wholeheartedly agree with this principle. But may I ask, who does the Church's property belong to?"

This question caught everyone off guard. Indeed, who was the rightful owner of Church property? Certainly not the Pope, and not even the bishops. If someone had to be designated as the owner...

"From a theological perspective, the Church's true owner is the Almighty God," Bishop Talleyrand continued, "But God has no need for earthly riches, and anyone who thinks otherwise blasphemes the divine. Furthermore..."

Bishop Talleyrand intentionally paused, then smiled as he continued, "The 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' protects the rights of humans, and God, truly, is not human. Therefore, this matter lies beyond the purview of the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man.'"

Laughter erupted below. Condorcet laughed as he pounded the table, and Barnave burst into such intense coughing fits he couldn't speak. Even the usually serious Robespierre joined in the laughter.

"This guy is a genius!" Robespierre said.

"This damned heretic!" some priests muttered through clenched teeth. Their voices had lowered as they realized the current situation was unfavorable for them.

"Damn it, why didn't I think of this? Letting this traitor steal the show," some people in black robes thought.

Other individuals dared not propose this idea, as it would surely offend the Church, turning a usually neutral institution into an enemy of the revolution. However, for clergy like Bishop Talleyrand, their actions would only further divide the Church, diminishing its influence. Clearly, Bishop Talleyrand had managed to sell the Church at a good price.

"If Church property belongs to God personally, I find this idea blasphemous then the only legitimate owners of Church property can only be all the faithful. The legitimate owners of all Church property in France are the French people. If that's the case, why can't the National Assembly, representing the French people, manage these assets that rightfully belong to us? Why can't we use these assets for the service of France?" Bishop Talleyrand continued to ask.

Bishop Talleyrand achieved unprecedented success, with his speech repeatedly interrupted by applause. His proposal quickly passed in the assembly. That evening, the resolution and Bishop Talleyrand's speech were disseminated through various newspapers for the people of Paris to read.

The next day, as Bishop Talleyrand left his residence, the surrounding crowd cheered him. Newspapers showered him with lavish praise, almost elevating him to the status of the greatest saint since Jesus. Bishop Talleyrand relished this feeling; he believed his long-desired rise to power was within reach.

Now that the financial issue was temporarily resolved, he could focus on training his "New Model Army." The revolutionaries lacked military expertise, and Joseph had previously excelled in assisting the National Guard's training at the district level. Therefore, he received an invitation to serve as a military instructor for the Paris National Guard. For this occasion, Marquis de Lafayette even wrote a letter inviting Joseph to his mansion for a meeting.

At this time, ignoring Marquis de Lafayette's summons was not an option. Meeting the hero of both continents was far safer than encountering Robespierre or Marat. So, Joseph quickly attended to his domestic affairs and dressed appropriately before leaving his home.

Riding in a light carriage, Joseph arrived at Marquis de Lafayette's mansion.

Lafayette's mansion was now bustling with activity. Since becoming one of the most influential figures in France, his home had become a hub for those seeking favors and connections.

Joseph handed the invitation to the gatekeeper, who inspected it and then addressed Joseph, "Mr. Bonaparte, the Marquis is currently meeting with guests. Please follow me to a sitting room to wait."

This was to be expected. In fact, when Joseph saw the multitude of carriages outside Lafayette's residence, he realized he might have to wait for quite some time.

A servant led Joseph into a sitting room. He noticed another man, roughly in his thirties, wearing a military uniform, already waiting there.

The servant brought Joseph inside, served him a cup of tea, and then left.

Seeing the servant exit, the man in the military uniform rose to his feet and looked at Joseph, his gaze sharp and appraising. He extended his hand and greeted him, "Hello, I am Joseph Bonaparte, a mathematics teacher. It's a pleasure to meet you."

The man quickly returned the greeting, "Hello, I'm Army Captain Lazar Carnot. I've heard about you from my teacher, Mr. Monge, and my friend Robespierre."

#### Chapter 60: The Toughest Way to Keep Yourself Safe

Lazare Carnot, a name Joseph had heard before, but not in his history class. After all, Joseph had studied history with his sports teacher in his past life. In fact, Joseph first heard of Lazare Carnot from his math teacher and his physics teacher.

The math teacher had mentioned him in the context of the "four-color theorem" but didn't provide much information. The physics teacher, on the other hand, mentioned another Carnot - Sadi Carnot - while discussing thermodynamics and went on to mention that Sadi Carnot's uncle was a mathematician and a military strategist, and his nephew even became the President of France (referring to the third president of the Second Republic, Marie Francois Sadi Carnot).

Later, Joseph saw Lazare Carnot's image in a movie about the French Revolution. In that movie, Lazare Carnot was portrayed as a significant figure in a conspiracy against Robespierre. He was the only one openly opposing Robespierre in that group. Strangely, the infamous Robespierre never sent him to the guillotine, or even considered it. In the movie, it was the new government that almost executed Carnot after they had dispatched Robespierre to the guillotine. It was only when someone said, "If we kill Carnot, who will organize our army for us?"

That was the extent of Joseph's knowledge about Lazare Carnot. In comparison, Joseph knew even more about the yet-to-be-born son of Lazare, who would go on to establish the principles of thermodynamics.

However, those who truly understood the history of the French Revolution knew that Lazare Carnot was a pivotal figure in those turbulent times. He was one of the rare individuals who held power steadily from the monarchy to the republic and then to the empire, all while remaining deeply unpopular among the ruling factions.

During this time, there were only three individuals who could stand as firmly as Carnot did. Two of them were famous chameleons who thrived on diplomacy and opportunism.

But Carnot was different. He remained an unlikable republican throughout. He openly opposed Robespierre when he was in power, and he openly criticized the empire when Napoleon declared himself emperor. Neither Robespierre nor Napoleon liked him, but they had to rely on him. The entire French military was organized under his watch. Some even said that without Carnot's efforts, there would be no grand army for Napoleon to sweep across Europe. In a way, Lazare Carnot was the father of the modern French military.

Carnot also had a strong interest in mathematics, and since they had some free time, the two of them began discussing mathematical problems. During this conversation, Joseph realized that Carnot had fallen into the same trap he had set for Marat.

"Monsieur Bonaparte, have you made any progress on the 'four-color problem' recently?" Carnot asked.

Joseph was taken aback because he hadn't thought about the problem since he first posed it. He knew the problem was theoretically solvable, but the proof was exceedingly complex, far beyond what a human could accomplish. (The solution required a computer, which performed a hundred billion checks in the process.) Carnot's sudden question caught him off guard.

"I had some ideas, but I hit a major roadblock in the process, and I haven't made any progress since," Joseph replied. "Otherwise, I would have written a paper and collected the prize. You know, bread was unusually expensive for a while."

"I had some thoughts as well, but I encountered a similar issue right at the start. I was thinking..." Carnot began, dipping his finger into his teacup to draw on the coffee table.

Joseph took a closer look and realized that Carnot's approach wasn't bad. He believed that the essence of the problem lay in the impossibility of constructing five or more mutually adjacent regions on a plane or a sphere. However, he soon found an insurmountable problem: there were too many configurations to deal with, and it was impossible to address them all.

"That's pretty much in line with my thoughts," Joseph said. "But I also have another idea..."

Joseph introduced the concept of "reducibility" and explained it at length. Then he added, "But facing the vast number of configurations, it's nearly impossible to prove them one by one. It's like trying to remove the Alps with a single pickaxe."

They both laughed at this point. They understood that this problem was not going to be solved in the short term. They shifted the conversation to other topics.

During their chat, Joseph learned that Carnot came from a common background. He had graduated from the military academy a decade ago and had earned the rank of lieutenant, now holding the rank of captain.

Becoming a captain immediately after graduating from the military academy was no small feat. Most military academy graduates started as second lieutenants at best. Carnot's rapid advancement showed how exceptional he was during his time at the academy. However, more than a decade later, he had only moved up one rank from lieutenant to captain.

This wasn't due to any other reason, but rather because the French military of that era had a glass ceiling. In general, for a common officer, becoming a captain was the highest achievement. Carnot's promotion to captain indicated his exceptional abilities.

"These days, the National Convention is quite uneasy about the military, especially regarding aristocratic officers. This is when a capable common officer like you becomes extremely valuable," Joseph thought.

They continued to talk for a while. At that point, a servant entered and addressed Carnot, "Mr. Carnot, the Marquis would like to see you. Mr. Bonaparte, the Marquis apologizes for the delay and asks you to wait a bit longer."

Carnot rose to his feet, bid Joseph farewell, and followed the servant outside. Joseph remained in the sitting room, sipping tea as he waited.

This time, he didn't have to wait long. Shortly after, another servant came to escort him to meet the Marquis de Lafayette.

Joseph stood up, straightened his clothes, and followed the servant through a corridor into the formal reception room.

Lafayette's reception room wasn't as grand as the Duke of Orleans' where you could practically host a ball. It was similar in size to the sitting room and lacked ornate decoration. It had an almost plain and down-to-earth feel to it. Joseph wondered if this was by design or had been the case all along.

Lafayette was in the middle of a conversation with Carnot. When he saw Joseph enter, he stood up and came over to welcome him. After Joseph took a seat, Lafayette smiled and said, "Mr. Bonaparte, I've invited you here today because there is something I hope you can help with."

According to Lafayette, he had noticed Joseph's performance in organizing the National Guard in the district. Many of his friends had mentioned Joseph, praising his talent in organizing and training troops. Joseph was modest and explained that he was not being humble but rather honest. He pointed out that he had no military education, despite wearing a military uniform, and was just a technician with a background in mathematics. He questioned how he could shoulder such a responsibility.

Lafayette, however, informed him that the National Convention had already made the decision, and it was him they wanted. Moreover, Joseph wouldn't be carrying the weight alone. The person primarily responsible for this was Lazare Carnot, and Joseph would be his deputy. Carnot had just spoken highly of Joseph during their conversation and believed he had valuable insights into military matters. He had made it a requirement to have Joseph on board. Would Joseph be willing to contribute to France's cause?

At this point, Joseph didn't have much to say. He was concerned that refusing might turn him into an enemy of the powerful Lafayette. He had initially thought of reciting a poem, but he realized that the two lines he had in mind, when translated into French, would have the wrong meter and rhythm. So, he suppressed the urge to summon his magical powers and answered, "I am willing to serve France."

As he left Lafayette's mansion, Joseph couldn't help but mull over the decision he had made. Was it the right choice? Lafayette was indeed on the rise, but with his limited knowledge of history, Joseph knew that Lafayette was not the central character of this era. He was merely a supporting actor in the grand drama of this time. Joseph had accidentally crossed his path, and he wondered if this was the right move.

Many years later, when he looked back on this decision, Joseph would reflect on how this night's actions had been incredibly correct. By following Lazare Carnot, he embarked on a path to become an indispensable "technocratic bureaucrat." In the original history, even Lazare Carnot's reckless actions did not lead to his death. Joseph, essentially a coward, was not fond of risking his life like Carnot. Therefore, his position would prove to be much safer.