

The Fox 61

Chapter 61: Preparing for Military Reforms

In the following days, Joseph was tirelessly busy, working alongside Carnot to manage all aspects of the military: recruitment, organization, equipment, and logistics.

Prior to this, most European nations relied on voluntary enlistment for their armies, which was expensive and limited in scale. Even during the early years of the Thirty Years' War, European armies remained relatively small. It was only when King Frederick II of Prussia introduced conscription that the small Prussian state turned into a military powerhouse.

However, to build a formidable army, the king needed to ensure that his soldiers were content. Frederick II heavily invested in national education and patriotism to transform his subjects into citizens. This allowed Prussian soldiers to fight bravely in the Seven Years' War, despite receiving minimal pay, against the major European powers.

But this approach had its trade-offs. Subjects had few rights and responsibilities, while citizens demanded more. To turn citizens into a powerful force, one must feed them well.

During Frederick II's rule, Prussia reaped significant profits from successful wars, expanding the cake, so to speak. This led to a peaceful coexistence among different classes. However, after Frederick II's death, the situation changed. Prussia lacked leaders who could continue expanding the cake, and conflicts arose. The rulers soon realized that subjects were far easier to manage than citizens. By the time of the Napoleonic Wars, the once-feared Prussian army had become a shadow of its former self.

Yet, France didn't face these worries of converting subjects into citizens. Through the revolution, the concept of "subjects" had vanished. So, why not transition from voluntary enlistment to universal conscription? This would significantly boost the size of the army. Given France's population, the possibility of fielding a million-strong army was not far-fetched. If France could mobilize such a force, the rest of Europe would tremble under the radiance of the French flag, and no king would dare to meddle in French affairs.

Nonetheless, merely conscripting soldiers wouldn't suffice. There were many other factors to consider. Conscripted soldiers served for a limited period, which meant their combat skills might be less advanced compared to other nations' armies.

Moreover, conscripts received lower pay, which could affect their morale. To maintain high spirits among underpaid soldiers, patriotic education, improved social status, and other incentives were essential. For example, in later years, the armies of the Qing Dynasty in China received modest pay, but many had to use connections to secure a position. All these factors played a role.

"There must be no glass ceiling for commoners within the military," Joseph stated. "Even a private who excels should have the opportunity for promotion. Soldiers who demonstrate exceptional skills during training and missions should have a chance to attend military academies."

"Glass ceiling?" Carnot chuckled. "That's a vivid way to put it. We're in a new era, and such a glass ceiling has no place here. But if everyone has the opportunity to attend military academies, we'll need more institutions."

"We can establish military academies at different levels," Joseph proposed. "The lowest level can be integrated into the first company of each regiment. Company commanders will be responsible for basic education of their subordinates. At the very least, they should be able to understand military orders. With the implementation of conscription, we'll see soldiers joining who might not even recognize letters or numbers. Just like the strength of the Roman legions heavily relied on competent decurions, if our sergeants are illiterate, their understanding and execution of orders will suffer, impacting the overall combat effectiveness of the army. So, I believe the first companies need to provide basic literacy training."

"Good plan," Carnot agreed. "But there might be complaints from these company commanders."

"No, they'll be complaining about you," Joseph said, "You're the boss; I'm just your deputy."

"Let them complain," Carnot shrugged.

"Then, we can have military schools for squad leaders who excel in their duties at the company level, and we'll call them the Basic Officers' Training School. They will receive training in fundamental military knowledge. Once they complete their training, they can take on company-level positions. For higher-ranking officers, we'll need dedicated academies with instructors. Well, some senior officers could serve as teachers," Joseph added, emphasizing the word "senior."

Carnot immediately understood the implication. He smiled and said, "Senior officers? You mean sending those politically unreliable officers there. That's one way to do it. Besides this, do you have any other ideas?"

"I have one more idea," Joseph said. "Perhaps we can reduce the length of military service..."

"How is that even possible?" Carnot widened his eyes. "Mr. Bonaparte, I understand you want to save money, but conscripts already serve for a short duration. If we further reduce it, the time spent on military training would be insufficient, potentially lowering their combat skills. If we keep shortening the service period, we'll have to continuously train new soldiers, which can become more costly."

"Mr. Carnot, retirement isn't the end," Joseph explained. "All retired soldiers will be registered as part of the National Guard, becoming members of the National Revolutionary Army. This way, we won't need to spend excess funds to maintain a large standing army. These trained soldiers can serve in the National Guard without government expenses but still maintain a certain level of training and skill. In times of war, we can recall them to the regular army from the National Guard."

Carnot listened, took a moment to think with his head lowered, and then said, "Your idea is quite innovative. It involves many complex aspects that need thorough consideration. However, I believe this method is worth exploring..."

Joseph, while teaching at the military academy, was not a military expert by trade. Still, he found opportunities to showcase his brilliance to true specialists, thanks to his knowledge from future experiences. His suggestion, commonplace in later times, was an extraordinary concept for this era.

Creative ideas and practical solutions often had a wide gap in between, and building a bridge required detailed work. Joseph lacked expertise in these areas, but Carnot excelled in them. He had a sharp and delicate mind, rich experience, and a knack for handling various tasks effortlessly. Many challenges that seemed impossible to others, Carnot managed skillfully. Additionally, his physical strength and boundless energy allowed him to work nearly twenty hours a day.

"This man's work capacity is naturally strong, and with such effort, he alone can replace at least ten people! They should be ten experts! This guy is not human!" Joseph described his superior in a letter to Napoleon.

"Joseph Bonaparte is the most talented person I've ever met, and his mind is a treasure trove! I dare say that even Alexander the Great's famed treasury doesn't compare to the wealth within his mind. Whenever and whatever the problem, he can pull a solution from that treasury. But Joseph Bonaparte is also the laziest person I've ever met. If there's a chance to be lazy, he'll seize it.

But I wouldn't consider this laziness negatively. He always finds simpler ways to avoid tedious work. For instance, he uses mathematical models to manage various tasks efficiently, freeing up time for other activities. To be honest, seeing him work this way makes me both envious and admiring. I work over ten hours a day, and there are always tasks left undone. However, this guy, working a maximum of eight hours, still has time for mathematics, and occasionally even publishes a paper or two!

Joseph Bonaparte has another rare quality: integrity. You know how much mischief one can make when dealing with logistics. If someone else held Joseph's current position, who knows how wealthy they might become? But Mr. Bonaparte is incredibly disciplined, and even the benefits he should rightfully receive according to the grey rules, he accepts them reluctantly. I dare say that if he wasn't worried about arousing others' discontent and causing trouble for his work, he might not even accept those..."

This was Carnot's evaluation of Joseph in a letter to their teacher, Monge. (Of course, the part about integrity was a misunderstanding. Joseph's "integrity" was primarily driven by fear and the fact that, through his position, he legally earned enough money. Similar to a county governor in New York State in the future, who reportedly didn't take a salary throughout his term, yet saw his personal wealth multiply legally. Nevertheless, Joseph did his best to avoid taking these things. He thought, earning more money legally would risk revealing too much inside information. Just as a county governor in New York State in the future refused to take a salary, yet multiplied his personal assets legally during his term.) In conclusion, both Joseph and Carnot were highly satisfied with their collaboration. Their efforts were paying off. By May of the following year, their comprehensive plan, including conscription, military academies, and the reserves, was in trial operation in Paris. Marshal Lafayette was very pleased with their work and intended to expand this model to other regions nationwide.

Chapter 62: A Pleasant Surprise

Ever since Bishop Talleyrand sold the Church's land, the financial crisis of the new government seemed to have temporarily abated. However, selling billions of livres worth of land all at once wasn't an easy task. If it was too expensive, no one could afford it, and if it was too cheap, it would be a significant loss. So, a new idea emerged: issuing a form of paper currency backed by these lands.

According to the initial plan, the issuance of this paper currency was supposed to correspond to the value of the Church's land. Theoretically, the government could gradually recover these notes by selling the Church's lands. So, in theory, the value of these notes was still guaranteed.

These notes were called "assignats," and Joseph's wages were mainly paid in this form of currency nowadays.

Carnot believed that Joseph must spend his time after work studying mathematical problems, or else, it couldn't explain how he could make discoveries amidst such a heavy workload.

But in reality, Joseph's main focus after coming home every day wasn't academic research. Instead, it was figuring out how to quickly convert the assignats in his hand into silver coins or other, more reliable assets in his eyes, such as land and food.

If this were a few years later, during Robespierre's reign, doing such things would practically be like placing your head on the guillotine. However, at this moment, it was something everyone was involved in. It was said that Robespierre proposed to limit the maximum price of grain in parliament, but this proposal was unsurprisingly rejected and didn't even make it to the formal discussion stage. That's because, at this time, almost everyone in the parliament, except Robespierre, was taking advantage of the situation to make money.

Joseph wasn't working alone. In fact, he had enlisted a few partners. One was his long-time partner, Lavache, and the other was a man he had met through Armand, named Danton.

Both of these partners would face the guillotine a few years later. However, Joseph believed that as long as he acted cautiously, didn't become too ambitious, and withdrew at the right time, plus the fact that he was "useful," he should be fine.

With their connections and information, the deals made them a tidy sum.

In the midst of this eventful life, Joseph suddenly received a letter from Corsica sent by Napoleon. The letter mentioned that Paoli had returned to Corsica.

Paoli was the hero of Corsica's independence movement. Joseph's father had served as his deputy and fought alongside him and the French against the Italians. After the resistance failed, Paoli went into exile in England, while Joseph's father pledged allegiance to France. Joseph knew that for a long time, Paoli had been an idol in Napoleon's heart. Napoleon had always yearned to lead Corsica to independence and freedom alongside him.

However, from the letter sent by Napoleon, Joseph could sense that Napoleon's mood wasn't great. Although the letter didn't contain many words, the sense of disillusionment could be easily felt between the lines.

"What's wrong with this guy?" Joseph wondered. "Maybe I should go see him."

But with his busy affairs, Joseph couldn't find the time. Instead, he sent another letter to Napoleon, comforting him on one hand and inviting him to come to Paris. In Joseph's view, Corsica was too small, and there was no future on that tiny island.

A week after sending the letter, Joseph returned home from work. As he walked in, he saw a short man sitting at the table, playing chess with Lucien. Louis stood beside them, offering advice, "Napoleon, Napoleon, move your bishop here, attack his knight..."

Hearing the door open, Napoleon put down the chess piece in his hand and looked up. "Joseph, you're later than what Lucien said," Napoleon said with a smile. His face was full of smiles, and there was no sign of the disappointment from his previous letter.

"Why did you come so quickly? You didn't receive my response to your letter, did you?" Joseph asked, as he took off his coat and handed it to Sophie, who had come to greet him.

"How could I have received it?" Napoleon shook his head. "I heard about your letter a week ago. By that time, I was already on my way to Paris. If I had stayed in Corsica, maybe I would have received it by now."

"Napoleon, are you playing or not? You promised to help me get revenge!" Louis chimed in.

"Napoleon, don't play anymore. Louis is just making excuses; he's already losing this game," Lucien added.

Napoleon didn't seem to mind. "Joseph, do you remember the investigation I conducted?" he asked.

"Of course, I remember."

"Do you know what the investigation revealed?" Napoleon shook his head.

Joseph didn't need to ask because he knew Napoleon would tell him.

"Most of Corsica's nobles are like Paoli, stuck in the past. It's understandable, as their good times were a few decades ago when the Italians left, and the French hadn't arrived yet. But now, their desire for independence is stronger, not for any other reason but because they're afraid of what's happening in France. They fear that such changes might affect them. If Corsica could sail away like a boat, they'd want to hide the island somewhere secluded to protect it from the waves of time.

As for Corsican peasants, they're mostly foolish. Corsica's nobles at least understand their interests, while they don't. They're like ignorant animals, still living in the haze of the Middle Ages. Perhaps a great storm is needed to wake them up.

In short, if I join forces with Paoli, considering the current situation in France, there might be a war. Achieving independence might be possible, but the independent Corsica would be a mere puppet like Paoli himself. I don't want that kind of Corsica.

If Corsica is to keep up with the times, the revolutionary storm from France has to reach Corsica. So, now I believe that seeking independence for Corsica might not be a good thing."

"So, have you and Paoli fallen out?" Joseph asked.

"No," Napoleon replied. "How could I argue with a corpse? Besides, it's in Corsica. Our mother and sister are still in Corsica. It's a stagnant place, but compared to Paris, it's quieter and better suited for women. As for me, I won't follow an illusion anymore. In this matter, I should thank you, Joseph. Without your methods, I might not have seen the truth or made up my mind so easily."

"Let's put that aside for now," Joseph said. "Napoleon, what are your plans now?"

"I still have some leave left. I plan to stay here in Paris for a while, get to know the city, and then return to the army," Napoleon said.

"So, you want to stay here, freeload off me, eat my food, and become a parasite?" Joseph taunted.

"Are you planning to enslave me, just like when Sophie was away, you handed the household chores to Lucien, and Lucien passed them to Louis?" Napoleon laughed.

"Isn't that only fair?" Joseph laughed as well. "I'm currently working with Captain Carnot, advising Lafayette, to reform the military structure of France. Based on your performance in Corsica, I think you've made significant progress and are no longer exceptionally foolish. So, I believe there are some things you can manage with difficulty."

Joseph was openly planning to exploit his younger brother as cheap labor, but Napoleon found it amusing. To think, as a lieutenant, he would intervene in the military structure of one of the most powerful countries in Europe. It was a delightful prospect.

"How could someone allow a fool like you to get involved in something as significant as this? There's bound to be mistakes. And when they trace the responsibility, fools like you will surely be taken out and shot. Joseph, you might be a fool, but at least you're a Bonaparte's fool. I have to watch over you, so you don't mess things up and lose your head," Napoleon said.

Chapter 63: General Joseph of the Red Army

While there were plans to exert some pressure on Napoleon, Joseph also knew that Napoleon wasn't cut out to be a staff officer. In this regard, he fell several notches short of Carnot, let alone Joseph. He could handle the meticulous planning of various military details if needed, but it wasn't where Napoleon's true talents lay. Joseph had a different plan in mind for him.

On the second day of Napoleon's arrival in Paris, Joseph called Carnot to his office on the second floor of the city hall, presenting a new idea.

"Lazare," Joseph handed him a folder, "I've been thinking about a new approach to military training. I came up with a rough concept last night, and I'd like to hear your thoughts." After a period of collaboration, they had become close friends, addressing each other by their first names and using "tu" instead of "vous."

"Ah, Joseph, you always have the most innovative ideas," Carnot remarked as he took the folder and began examining the contents. "I can't help but wonder, considering the size of our heads, mine is practically a whole circumference larger than yours, but..."

As Carnot reviewed the document, Joseph skillfully poured himself a cup of tea and sat at his desk to work. After some time, when Joseph was refilling his cup with water, Carnot finally finished reading.

"Joseph," Carnot began, "this idea, overall, is excellent. There are, of course, many details to be ironed out, but investing in this is definitely worthwhile."

He then rang a bell on his desk, and a duty officer entered the room.

"Major, what can I do for you?" the duty officer asked. Carnot had been promoted to the rank of major due to his outstanding performance a few days ago.

"Ah, Yubel, could you find out when Mr. Lafayette is available?" Carnot requested.

"Yes, Major," Yubel replied with a salute and left the room.

"Joseph, this idea is brilliant," Carnot continued. "Creating a small, elite force to simulate the enemy in military exercises is an excellent approach. Each unit can engage in exercises against them, and then the adjudication department, let's call it the 'directorate,' can evaluate their performance. These evaluations can also be a basis for rewards and punishments for the units. Moreover, this kind of training will allow our soldiers to gain valuable experience facing a formidable opponent during peacetime. It's a fantastic idea!"

"We can't send all our soldiers to Africa to gain experience by fighting barbarians," Joseph replied. "This way, even though it may not be as valuable as real combat experience in Africa, it's better than having none."

"Joseph, you misspoke earlier," Carnot shook his head. "Even if we had the funds, we shouldn't send all our troops to Africa to fight barbarians. The experience gained from fighting barbarians doesn't have much relevance to building a professional army and may even be detrimental. The experience gained through high-level military exercises is far more valuable and effective. Fighting barbarians is like playing chess with beginners who don't even know the rules for capturing en passant. The more you play, the worse your skills become. During the Seven Years' War, the troops sent back from Africa didn't perform well for this reason."

In fact, similar occurrences were common in later times, but Joseph was unaware of them. For instance, some units that had gained "combat experience" by fighting insurgents abroad, returned to their home country and faced a simulated Red Army. They were defeated swiftly, hanging by a thread. In another country, a military advisor with "real combat experience" hesitated for over an hour while commanding a unit to cross a bridge, thoroughly checking it for potential roadside bombs. As a result, the unit was exposed to a massive enemy artillery barrage before even seeing the enemy, rendering it combat ineffective.

As Carnot spoke, there was a sudden knock at the door.

"Come in," Carnot said.

The duty officer entered and said, "Major, Count Lafayette is available now. You can find him in his office."

"Thank you, Yubel," Carnot acknowledged. He stood up, collected the documents Joseph had given him, and turned to Joseph. "Joseph, let's go and meet with Count Lafayette to discuss your idea. I believe we should move forward with this as soon as possible."

"Very well, Lazare," Joseph agreed.

"Oh, by the way, Lazare, do you have someone in mind for the commander of this unit?" Just as they were about to leave, Joseph inquired.

"Not yet," Carnot paused, "This unit won't be large at first, perhaps only around two hundred soldiers. So, it should be commanded by a captain. Joseph, do you have any good candidates in mind?"

"Well, Lazare, the thing is, I wasn't the one who came up with this plan," Joseph hesitated, "It was my younger brother, Napoleon, who proposed it. He's a young artillery lieutenant in our army, and I believe he has tremendous potential in military matters. However, he's quite ambitious and aspires to lead this experimental unit. What are your thoughts?"

Carnot chuckled, "Joseph, this is the first time I've seen you use your influence. Your brother, considering your circumstances, must have considerable talent. But you know, your brother... what's his name again?"

"Napoleon," Joseph reminded.

"Ah, Joseph, you know, Napoleon is just a lieutenant," Carnot remarked. "Persuading Count Lafayette to let a lieutenant command such a unit could be challenging. However, his noble

background may work in his favor. But Joseph, you're already a lieutenant yourself... Shall we go and discuss this with Count Lafayette and see what he thinks?"

Joseph understood the significance of having a noble background. To most Frenchmen, Corsican nobility was hardly distinguishable from the common people, if not inferior to respectable citizens. Therefore, the parliament didn't consider them true nobility. In the military, though, nobility had influence that couldn't be ignored. While a complete commoner like Carnot might be acceptable to the parliament, the military might have reservations. On the other hand, a Corsican noble like Napoleon, despite his lack of prominence, could be more readily accepted.

Joseph and Carnot then proceeded to Count Lafayette's office. Upon entering, after exchanging greetings, Carnot handed him the folder.

"General, we have a new proposal, and we hope to have your support," Carnot explained.

"Another brilliant idea, Lazare?" Lafayette inquired, a smile on his face, as he put on his glasses. "Let me take a look."

Lafayette examined the proposal for a while before looking up and saying, "A very valuable suggestion! Extremely valuable! Furthermore, it is highly feasible. Lazare, we left together yesterday evening, and you didn't drop a hint about this. Today, you spring it on me all of a sudden. You are quite the character."

"General, Joseph submitted this proposal to me this morning. I've only just seen it myself," Carnot clarified.

"Is that so?" Lafayette seemed a bit surprised. "Joseph, you've always claimed to be a novice in military matters. But this plan shows a remarkable understanding. Not just the idea, but the intricate details are something that only someone with in-depth military knowledge would think of. I believe that, now, you could command a French army battalion or even a brigade with ease. If you were in North America, you might even command a division. You're too modest."

"General, it's not modesty," Joseph replied. "I've been trying to learn as much as I can during this time, and I've made some progress. However, the details of this plan were not entirely my work. It was developed with the assistance of my younger brother, Napoleon. He's a lieutenant in our artillery."

"From what I see in the proposal, Lieutenant Napoleon seems to be quite talented and has a promising future," Carnot added.

"I believe that," Lafayette said. "If your brother is anything like you, then he must have quite a bright mind. About the commander for this unit, do you have anyone in mind?"

"This unit doesn't need to be very large at the beginning, perhaps only two hundred soldiers. Since this idea is originally Joseph's, and the refinement was achieved with Napoleon's help," Carnot explained, "let's have Joseph lead this experimental unit and have his brother assist him. How does that sound?"

Lafayette looked up and glanced at Carnot, then Joseph. He said, "Very well. We will promote Mr. Joseph Bonaparte to the rank of captain, and he can oversee the formation of this unit. Now, what should we name this unit?"

"This unit will specialize in simulating the enemy during exercises, and our most dangerous adversaries are the British in their red coats," Carnot remarked. "So, let's call this unit the 'Red Army.'"

Chapter 64: Division

To be honest, when Lafayette heard the introduction of Joseph, Napoleon's brother, by Carnot, his first reaction was, "Joseph wants to scheme for personal gain." However, Lafayette wasn't angry about it at all. In fact, he was somewhat pleased.

Firstly, because, in this era, this was quite a common thing to do. On the contrary, if someone didn't do so, it would be considered abnormal. And if Joseph was willing to tread his own path, then in Lafayette's eyes, he was, in a way, aligning with him. Of course, Joseph's approach was slow and hesitant, but he had finally come around now that the situation had become clear (at least in Lafayette's view). Lafayette still felt he should accept his allegiance with enthusiasm because Joseph was undeniably talented. Generally, people tended to be more generous towards talented individuals.

As for whether Joseph and his brother would mess things up, Lafayette wasn't particularly concerned. Firstly, he believed in Joseph's abilities. Even if Joseph wasn't particularly skilled in military matters, he wouldn't be worse than the many gilded noble officers in the French army. Furthermore, it was just a small force, and even if it were to be given a little golden shine by the Bonaparte brothers, it wasn't such a big deal. So, the matter was settled.

After approving this matter, Lafayette put it out of his mind because there were more pressing matters at hand.

For Lafayette, the most important thing was the reorganization of the French army. While Lafayette had considerable prestige in the French army, having prestige didn't mean the army would follow you. Look at Feng Yuxiang in the Northwestern Army in the future, no matter how much prestige he had, when General Chang shot his silver bullet, his men followed General Chang without hesitation. That Northwestern Army was essentially built from the ground up by Feng Yuxiang.

The current state of the French army was quite peculiar. The royalists didn't trust the army, the parliament didn't trust the army, and what was even more disastrous was that the army itself didn't trust the army. The mid-to-high-ranking officers in the French army were all nobles, but the lower-ranking officers and soldiers were primarily from the third estate. Even among them, there was mutual distrust.

Lafayette knew that if this situation continued, the army would split. A divided army would undermine his power base, leading to civil war and chaos.

"This will utterly ruin France," Lafayette thought.

However, some were willing to ruin France to fuel this division. In their view, the France of today was not their France.

Some of the former nobles were dissatisfied with today's France, including some nobles who had joined the third estate during the Estates-General. When the parliament, under the guidance of Bishop Talleyrand, confiscated the wealth that belonged to the Church, some clergy who had joined the revolutionary cause during the Estates-General, and who were now staunch supporters of the third estate, also stood against the current France.

Bishop Morry, Senator Cassans, and a group of clergy and noble senators organized a club known as the "Black Party" (because it had many clergy dressed in black robes). They vehemently opposed the revolution, started various newspapers like "Friends of the King," "Acts of the Apostles Gazette," and "Petit Gaule Gazette," freely insulted those in power, including Lafayette, and blamed all of France's difficulties on the "rebellious and ambitious adventurers" in parliament. They even appealed to the common people, pretending not to care about their interests but instead acting as if they were deeply sympathetic to the poorest citizens.

These tactics were not particularly effective, but they were not entirely fruitless either. Because the new government indeed did not care much for the common people. Whether in the cities or in the countryside, the living conditions were not better than before the revolution. Many people were asking the question, "We were hungry before the revolution, and we're still hungry after. Was the revolution in vain?"

They provided an answer to this question, that the revolution was worse than no revolution at all, and that returning to the monarchic era would bring peace to the country. This kind of rhetoric was less popular in Paris but found resonance in some rural areas.

In addition to this, some mid-to-high-ranking officers in the military were frequently in contact with these people, and they might be plotting something, which worried Lafayette.

On the other hand, some of Lafayette's former comrades who used to stand by his side had changed. Perhaps they felt that their glory had been overshadowed by Lafayette, so some of them distanced themselves from him. Perhaps, to attract attention, these people had become more radical than before. Some of his old friends, like Duport, Lamourette, and others, had become more radical. And some new friends were even more radical than the old ones. Here, we are mainly talking about Bishop Talleyrand.

Bishop Talleyrand and some of his religious friends proposed the "Clergy Civil Organization Act" in parliament. According to this law, France would establish eighty-three bishoprics (one for each province), which would belong to ten major archbishoprics. Like civil officials, the clergy, bishops, and archbishops would be elected by citizens. Elected officials should be confirmed by higher-level religious authorities, and archbishops would be appointed by the chief archbishop. New religious authorities no longer needed to report to the Pope, but only had to declare their faith in the same religion. They no longer needed to buy their canonicals from the Pope, and the Pope's approval was no longer required. Furthermore, this law abolished the "first year ecclesiastical tithe" (where new clergy members had to send their first-year income to Rome) and stipulated that clergy salaries would be paid by the state. It replaced the privileged ecclesiastical meetings with archbishopric meetings and had them participate in the religious administrative affairs of the archbishopric.

This essentially severed most of France's connections with the Catholic Church, a significant rupture. The Pope immediately condemned this law and excommunicated Talleyrand. However, Talleyrand dismissed it and continued to dress in archbishop's robes, engaging in various religious activities. As a response to the Pope's action, the parliament prepared another new law, requiring all clergy in France to swear allegiance to the French nation. Any clergy members refusing to swear allegiance would be removed from their positions.

This requirement completely contradicted the tradition of the Catholic Church. It essentially turned clergy into ordinary civil servants. According to religious doctrine, clergy's only allegiance should be to God. This law further exacerbated the tensions between the Church and the parliament.

Lafayette attempted to moderate the parliament, to not be too aggressive in such matters. But the parliamentarians needed such laws to show their "firm stance," and the clergy members leaning towards the parliament also needed this opportunity to control the pulpit (after all, unless they removed those guys, when would Lafayette become a bishop?).

So, Lafayette's efforts were in vain, and the law passed. Subsequently, things spiraled out of control. Most of the bishops and archbishops nationwide refused to swear allegiance to the government and the constitution, resulting in their forced removal. Meanwhile, many of the lower-ranking priests chose to swear allegiance to the government and the constitution and were promoted to become bishops and archbishops.

However, the appointments and dismissals issued by the parliament were largely ignored in many districts outside of Paris. On the contrary, in many districts outside of Paris, the bishops openly accused the parliament of blasphemy and encouraged their followers to fight against these "anti-Christ" forces.

The involvement of these religious forces bolstered the power of the Black Party. In places like Lyon, they effectively controlled the region, organized their own militias, and even turned the local garrisons to their side. Civil war was imminent.

Lafayette believed that the key now rested with the king. If the king was willing to firmly stand by his side and support the constitution, then the activities of the royalists wouldn't amount to much. On the other hand, if the king wavered and leaned towards the royalists, it would be a serious problem.

For this reason, Lafayette constantly visited the king, trying to persuade him to wholeheartedly support constitutional monarchy. He attempted to make the king and queen understand that times had changed, and the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV's era, the "L'tat, c'est moi" kind of rule, was no longer possible. The British-style constitutional monarchy was the best choice for the nation and the royal family. The royalists weren't truly loyal to the king; they were acting in their self-interest, using the king as a banner to rally followers. In a way, both the royalists and the radical republicans were hoping for the king's downfall.

Honestly, Lafayette's viewpoint was indeed quite reasonable. He also believed he had successfully convinced the king.

"In reality, our king is a very rational and educated person," Lafayette said to his adjutant Pierre as he left the Palace of Saint Cloud.

This assessment wasn't far from the truth. Louis XVI had been reluctant to resort to harsh measures before because he understood that the times had changed from his grandfather's era. However, can rationality always triumph over emotions and desires? Moreover, the queen wasn't as knowledgeable.

But Lafayette failed to notice that shortly after he left Saint Cloud, a messenger left the royal palace with a secret letter from the queen, addressed to the seemingly radical parliamentary member, Mirabeau.

Chapter 65: Unsettled Matters

"My respected Queen, you must exercise extreme caution when dealing with the Marquis de Lafayette. What the Marquis says may indeed have a certain truth to it, and one could argue that, overall, what he says can be considered an unassailable truth.

However, Your Majesty, you should be aware that, when it comes to deception, the truth can be more potent than lies. Often, individuals as naturally perceptive as yourself, dear Queen, can easily discern falsehoods. But the truth is different; it can be more misleading when emphasized and insinuated properly. Lafayette is a master of using the truth to deceive, a false Caesar, if you will.

'Times are changing,' 'constitutional monarchy is the future' these words hold some merit. But what Lafayette may not have mentioned, my dear Queen, is who precisely presides over this constitutional monarchy!

Under the current constitutional monarchy, forgive my bluntness, the King is a mere hostage, lacking genuine and universal respect. I'm sure Your Majesty has noticed the various newspapers in Paris, some of them radical, like 'Friend of the People,' proclaiming the establishment of a republic, seeking to completely end Bourbon rule in France and transform it into a republic. Such theories have supporters even within the parliament. Some moderate individuals are also inclined to lean towards them. This is a perilous situation.

Why do these people make such choices? The reason is simple: the mob has displayed its power, people know they possess it and are willing to use it. But, my Queen, our King, because of his leniency, has never been willing to exert his power or even show it.

If a King, while wearing the crown, refuses to display his power, what awe does the crown inspire? Your Majesty, often, refusing to demonstrate power is nearly as ineffective as having no power.

Furthermore, Lafayette is partially correct on one point: the royalists are not entirely reliable. Forgive me, Your Majesty, but, as in 'Macbeth,' the more blood-related people are, the more they thirst for our blood. You must be cautious of them, even if they are your kin.

But, my Queen, on this matter, Lafayette still employs his usual tactics. He tells you the truth, but he never reveals the entire truth. The truth and the whole truth are entirely different. The royalists and the republicans differ fundamentally on one point: the royalists depend on the King. The King, for them, holds natural authority. They might plot against the King through conspiracies or even assassinations, but they cannot confront the King directly. The King is their natural leader, whether some of them like it or not.

As for Lafayette, my wise Queen, I call him a 'false Caesar' because he presents himself as if he has control over the army, dressed as someone who can, like Caesar, command thousands with a single word. In reality, Lafayette has no control over the army, unlike the real Caesar.

The true Caesar had a legion that had served under him for a long time, and every aspect of that legion, including logistics and officer promotions, was entirely at Caesar's discretion. Therefore, Caesar could easily command them to do anything, even march on Rome. However, Lafayette does not possess such an army. He only has so-called 'prestige.' But how can this 'prestige' compare to the legitimate authority of Your Majesty? Today, he can control the situation only because of Your Majesty's legitimate position as the King. Only when Your Majesty is under his control can he control France's army.

Currently, this 'false Caesar' is enacting 'reforms' within the army. Your Majesty, this is Lafayette's attempt to remedy his own weaknesses. If he can control Your Majesty for a long time, he might genuinely control the army one day. Then, the false Caesar can become a true Caesar. Perhaps Lafayette genuinely hopes for a constitutional monarchy, but the constitutional monarchy established in these circumstances is highly detrimental to Your Majesty. The sustainability of any agreement depends on mutual respect. The parliament has already demonstrated its power, while the King has never displayed any power. In this agreement, the parliament takes the superior position, and the King almost becomes a beggar. Such a constitutional monarchy cannot endure. In the parliament, there will always be those who seek to attract attention through more extreme means, and humiliating the King will become their most effective way to gain popularity. Eventually, they will ask, 'Why do we need a King?'

But the constitutional monarchy in England is different. The British monarchy has displayed its power in many ways, and the parliament and the King respect each other's power and interests, ensuring a stable and reliable constitutional monarchy.

My Queen, in response to your inquiry about how the royal family should navigate the current situation, I, your humble servant, offer the following suggestions.

First, both you and His Majesty should feign utmost trust in Lafayette and display submission to the parliament to lull them into complacency. However, you must also make His Majesty understand the current perilous situation. He must take action.

In my opinion, staying in Paris offers no benefit to the King or the entire royal family. So, whenever the opportunity arises, the King should leave Paris immediately for a safer location. I believe such a place should have the following characteristics:

First, it should be broadly supportive of the monarchy and the legitimate order.

Second, it should be distant from the borders, for several reasons. First, it would send a message to the entire nation that the King is not colluding with foreign powers, as claimed by the ruffians in newspapers like 'Friend of the People.' Second, it would prevent opportunistic individuals who are not genuinely loyal to the King from using foreign forces to further their interests by infiltrating the royalist faction.

Taking all these considerations into account, I personally believe that Lyon would be the most suitable location.

Your loyal servant,

Honore Gabriel Riqueti"

Honore Gabriel Riqueti is the President of the National Assembly, a staunch revolutionary leader, and one of the prominent figures of the French Revolution. He is renowned for his unwavering commitment to revolutionary ideals. If this letter to Queen Marie Antoinette were to be discovered by others, it would undoubtedly stir up a significant controversy. In actual history, after his death, Riqueti was initially honored with burial in the Pantheon for his contributions to the Revolution. However, not long after, with the arrest of the King and the discovery of his correspondence with the Queen in the palace, it was revealed that Riqueti had sided with the royal family. This led to an angry mob exhuming his remains from the Pantheon and throwing them in a trash heap.

Riqueti was known for his extravagant lifestyle and a plethora of mistresses, which strained his finances. His legitimate income was insufficient to sustain such a lifestyle. After his close friend (and benefactor), the Duke of Orleans, was exiled from France by Lafayette, Riqueti's financial situation deteriorated further. It is said that he had to resort to borrowing from Jewish moneylenders once again.

As the royal family was effectively held hostage in Paris by the National Guard, they desperately needed someone with influence in the Assembly to advocate for their interests. At this juncture, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, a scholar and biologist with connections to the court, recommended his friend Riqueti to the Queen.

Lamarck is known for his contributions to the theory of evolution, notably publishing his "Philosophie Zoologique" in 1809. This work presented Lamarckian evolution, which posited that acquired characteristics could be inherited. Although this theory has largely been discredited, Lamarck's contributions to the field of biology remain significant.

With Lamarck's intervention, Riqueti, teetering on the brink of bankruptcy, clandestinely contacted the Queen last July after the storming of the Bastille. However, at that time, the Queen held him in contempt and dismissed his proposition as if he were an annoying fly.

But now, to win his assistance, the cost had increased substantially. It is said that the Queen prepared four checks for him, each with a face value of 250,000 livres, to secure his support. It was under Riqueti's subtle guidance that the royal family moved from the less defensible Tuileries Palace closer to the city center to the more easily escapable Saint-Cloud Palace.

"My dear, do you think what Riqueti is saying is true?" Queen Marie Antoinette inquired. However, the person she addressed as "dear" was not King Louis XVI but another man named Axelde Fersen, a Swedish nobleman. He was a member of the Swedish Riksdag and Marie Antoinette's secret lover and confidant.

"Riqueti is an extraordinarily talented and cunning man," Fersen sighed, "but precisely because of that, I wonder whether we can trust him."

"You're right," the Queen nodded. "Lafayette may lack loyalty to the King, but at least he has ideals and some boundaries. But Riqueti, he is a wretched scoundrel! I find it very hard to trust him. Moreover, if it weren't for them..."

Fersen let out a sigh; he knew that both he and the Queen were no match for Riqueti's cunning. The Queen was still haunted by the anger she felt when Riqueti had led the rebellion against the monarchy. While everyone understood that now was not the time to hold such grudges, the lingering resentment was hard to shake.

Chapter 66: Escape (1)

Due to their suspicion and fear of Mirabeau, the King and Queen did not follow his advice. In hindsight, this may have been their best opportunity.

Whether it was Mirabeau or Lafayette, they both reminded the King and Queen of one thing: their relatives couldn't be trusted. When choosing a location for their escape, Mirabeau emphasized that the King must not run too close to the border. One reason for this was to avoid harm from those who shared the King's blood.

Some believed that besides their distrust of Mirabeau, another reason the King and Queen didn't heed his advice was their reluctance to accept a constitutional monarchy. Fleeing to Lyon, relying solely on the power of Lyon, wouldn't be enough to counter Paris, let alone subdue it. Perhaps they could eventually reach a compromise, but it would still be a compromise in favor of Paris.

However, the Queen gradually convinced the King to escape from Paris. Still, various circumstances kept delaying their escape.

Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were both typical products of a sheltered palace life, and they had no experience in planning an escape. If they could have trusted Mirabeau, a man who frequently fled due to extramarital affairs and debts, he could have been quite helpful.

However, the King and Queen both distrusted Mirabeau. Besides, it seemed that God had turned away from the French royal family, who had always been pious - Mirabeau suddenly died.

Of course, Mirabeau wasn't poisoned by Pierre Blck's belladonna-laced wine. However, his death was connected to alcohol. In his final days, after receiving a new source of wealth, his bad habits became even worse, including heavy drinking, gluttony, and other indescribable activities.

It was said that Mr. Mirabeau would spend entire nights with prostitutes, feasting and binging. To keep enjoying fine food and wine without the constraints of a limited stomach, he followed in the footsteps of ancient Romans - after they had eaten their fill, they would induce vomiting to continue feasting.

In later times, people with a bit of health knowledge knew how harmful this practice was, but those in that era were ignorant of such matters. So, after another night of revelry, Mirabeau suddenly fell ill. His condition rapidly deteriorated, and not long after, illness claimed him.

Despite his libertine lifestyle, Mirabeau was knowledgeable, insightful, and skilled in managing relationships. His death left a void in the various factions within the Assembly.

However, Mirabeau's death didn't have a significant impact on Joseph and the others for the time being. During this period, Joseph and Napoleon devoted nearly all their time to building their small army.

The size of this "Red Army" exceeded their initial estimates. Initially, Joseph and the others had planned to form a small force of around a hundred men, but they quickly realized that due to the unique nature of this force, they needed more support personnel than expected. When the numbers were tallied, including support personnel, the force would exceed six hundred.

The increase in personnel naturally led to increased expenses, as was often the case in such projects, with budgets at the beginning and actual costs differing significantly.

Fortunately, after carefully reviewing the project, Lafayette believed that the money was well spent, and the project continued. However, he made a playful remark, "Joseph, you have over six hundred men in your team, but you only have a little over sixty soldiers who can line up on the battlefield properly. Add artillery and cavalry, and you have fewer than two hundred men. Yet, you have almost four hundred support personnel. If I send a two-hundred-strong force, and you fight them, people will say, 'You used over six hundred against our two hundred.' If I send a two-hundred-strong force, and you have this few soldiers..."

At that moment, Napoleon interjected, "Our unit can handle at least a thousand."

Lafayette heard Napoleon but only gave him a passing glance, clearly regarding his words as the usual arrogance of a young man. However, Lafayette was a lenient person and didn't want to quarrel with the young Napoleon, so he smiled and didn't say much.

With Lafayette's support, the formation of this army went smoothly. Two months later, most of the personnel and equipment were in place, and Joseph and Napoleon began to focus on their intense work.

This army consisted of multiple branches: infantry, and a relatively large artillery force with eight cannons. Joseph and Napoleon believed that modern warfare relied heavily on artillery. In most cases, battle plans should revolve around effectively utilizing artillery firepower.

The soldiers and junior officers in this unit were mostly selected by Lafayette from the French forces near Paris. After over a month of training, the unit was ready. However, what Joseph and Napoleon didn't anticipate was that their first mission wasn't to reinforce other units but to retrieve the King.

Joseph received orders one morning, signed by General Lafayette. The order stated that enemies of the revolution had "kidnapped" the King and his family and had left Paris with them. The general ordered Joseph's unit to be on high alert, ready for battle.

"The King has been kidnapped?" Upon receiving this order, Napoleon couldn't help but respond with a sarcastic question, "By whom? I bet he did it himself."

"Napoleon, this isn't what we should be thinking about right now," Joseph said while exchanging a knowing look with Napoleon.

Napoleon understood that Joseph had something to say but couldn't discuss it openly in front of others. So he remained silent.

"Do we know which direction the King and his family went?" Joseph asked the messenger.

"Some say they might be heading to Lyon, while others suggest Montmdy. The Assembly has sent representatives in both directions. General Lafayette requests your readiness to act at a moment's notice," the messenger replied. "You should be prepared to move as soon as he gives the order."

"Very well. Please inform the General that we can be ready in ten minutes to follow his command," Joseph replied.

The messenger saluted and left. Once he was gone, Napoleon exclaimed, "Joseph, we're on the brink of war!"

"Keep your composure. The King hasn't escaped yet. There's a chance they might bring him back," Joseph replied. Although his knowledge of history wasn't extensive, he knew that Louis XVI had ultimately been executed. If the King had escaped so easily, why would he have ended up on the guillotine?

However, Napoleon didn't share Joseph's view. He said, "Joseph, you're too naive! Why would you even entertain such fantasies? Have you thought that a lightweight carriage drawn by two horses can travel a considerable distance in a single night? I believe the King was well-prepared beforehand. Along the way, there must have been people ready to assist him. These people wouldn't have to do anything other than have another lightweight carriage prepared. As soon as the King arrived, they'd switch carriages and speed away. If they left in the middle of the night, by now, they

should be near the border, in alliance with royalists and Austrians. Even if the National Assembly's representatives sprinted, they couldn't catch up. This is simple math, so basic even a fool like you should understand. I can't fathom how you still entertain such fantasies..."

"I don't know," Joseph shrugged.

However, by the afternoon of the third day, new orders arrived, confirming Joseph's suspicions: the King had indeed been intercepted!

"Representatives of the Assembly intercepted the King's family in Varennes. Some mercenaries are active in the area, and there are only a few local National Guards responsible for protecting the King. General Lafayette orders your immediate departure to protect the King's family and bring them back to Paris."

The messenger delivered the signed order from Lafayette to Joseph and then departed. Joseph immediately ordered the cavalry under Captain Robert to depart first, with infantry following behind. Napoleon wanted to accompany the cavalry, but Joseph prevented him, explaining that they needed to keep a low profile at this time.

"The situation is still chaotic. At this moment, we should try to hide our political stance as much as possible. We're different from others. While they have to play the game of alliances and corruption to climb the ladder, we can rely on our talents and cunning. We should avoid dangerous alliances as much as possible," Joseph explained to Napoleon.

"My brother, you're too cautious," Napoleon commented, a hint of sarcasm in his slightly upturned lips. Joseph could tell that Napoleon probably wanted to say something like, "Joseph, you're a coward."

"Joseph, you're indeed overly cautious," Napoleon remarked.

However, Joseph's caution was justified. They needed to be careful not to reveal their political leanings during these tumultuous times. They were different from the others; they could climb the ranks using their talents and cunning, rather than through corrupt alliances. So, they had to avoid risky alliances.

Now, their mission was clear: to protect the King's family and bring them back to Paris.

Chapter 67: Escape (2)

As the cowardly group slowly made their way towards Varennes with Napoleon and the infantrymen, they received continuous updates along the journey.

It was said that the King's carriage had been exposed in the town of Saint-Menehould on the evening of the second day of their escape. They rested there at a post station and were discovered by the local municipal council and the National Guard when they reached Varennes.

"What on earth is happening? How could they have taken until the evening of the second day to reach Saint-Menehould?" Napoleon was still baffled by the situation. "If it were me, I could have made a round trip between Paris and Montmdy in this time!"

However, this question was soon answered. On the morning of the fourth day, Joseph and Napoleon finally caught up with the King. By then, there were already thousands of people surrounding the King's carriage. Most of them were members of the National Guard and ordinary citizens from

towns along the way, armed with various weapons, "protecting" the King's carriage, while the cavalry under Bouill's command followed behind.

"They really went all out with this carriage! Are they fleeing or on a pleasure trip?" Napoleon was dumbfounded, gazing at the King's luxurious carriage.

Indeed, the King's carriage was utterly unsuitable for an escape.

It was an enormous, opulent four-wheeled carriage requiring twelve horses to pull it. The carriage was not only large but also exquisitely adorned with ornate carvings on the panels and golden-adorned lanterns, exuding luxury. The King, along with his family, their tutor, and the governess, made a total of nine people inside this grand vehicle.

"Who planned this for the King? They even used this kind of carriage? It's like they might as well have embedded golden fleur-de-lis on the carriage doors! Are they afraid people won't notice them? God, what kind of fools are around the King!" Napoleon couldn't help but exclaim to Joseph.

"Napoleon, don't get agitated. You must understand, human intelligence knows no bounds," Joseph shook his head. "Some people can astound you with their foolishness."

Indeed, Louis XVI's escape was organized quite clumsily. After the decision was made to leave Paris, the King's family had been preparing for the escape. Marie Antoinette was in charge of the operation, and it was orchestrated by her lover, Fersen. According to Fersen's original plan, they were supposed to escape using several lightweight two-wheeled carriages, taking different routes.

If they had followed this plan, it would have been nearly impossible for the National Assembly to capture the escaping King. However, Queen Marie Antoinette strongly opposed this method as it meant they would have to separate from their children during the escape. What if the children fell ill? What if they got lost? What if... So, the Queen firmly insisted, "We must stay together as a family, not be separated."

Clearly, it was impossible to fit the entire royal family into lightweight carriages. The Queen remained stubborn in her decision, and nobody could convince her. In theory, the King had more say in this matter, and he understood that the original plan had a higher chance of success. But the King remained silent and did not express his opinion. Thus, the plan with lightweight carriages was scrapped, and the only choice left was a large four-wheeled carriage.

Even with the four-wheeled carriage, it could have worked without major issues. Many four-wheeled mail carriages ran on the roads near Paris. Choosing a discreet mail carriage and arranging proper support, the chances of a successful escape remained high.

However, Queen Marie Antoinette still wasn't satisfied with this plan. The conditions in the mail carriage were miserable: hard seats, cramped space, and a rough ride. What if the children fell ill during the journey? What if they needed the care of their governess, Madame de Tourzel? Plus, the King's sister, Madame Elisabeth, and the guards added up, they needed a carriage that could accommodate at least nine people.

In reality, a four-wheeled mail carriage could indeed accommodate this many people. In fact, with some creativity, you could fit even more into a limited space. However, fitting the royal family and their attendants into such a space was impossible. So the only option was to commission a massive carriage. Fersen had a colossal carriage custom-made to comfortably accommodate nine people.

This carriage was exceptionally large, and to ensure its reliability and prevent any breakdowns on the road, its components had to be reinforced. However, this had a consequence - the carriage became so heavy that a regular number of horses couldn't pull it. Therefore, they had to prepare twelve horses to pull this massive carriage.

Even so, with proper organization, the escape could still have had a high chance of success. However, there were some issues on the Austrian side responsible for the rendezvous, leading to continuous delays. In the process, de Bouill's cavalry, responsible for receiving the King, was moved several times, raising suspicions among the locals. This would later contribute to the failure of the escape.

Nevertheless, even with these setbacks, the escape still had a high chance of success.

However, on the planned night of the escape, Lafayette suddenly visited with Bailly. The unexpected visit startled King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette, thinking that their operation had been exposed. However, Lafayette and Bailly were unaware of the King's intentions; they were there to mediate the ongoing disputes between the King and the National Assembly, a result of recent conflicts with the Church. The King was eager for them to leave but dared not show any difference in his behavior. So, they stayed until 11:30 pm.

Once Lafayette left, the King immediately returned to his room, pretended to go to bed, and extinguished the lights to deceive any spies within the palace. He quickly jumped out of bed and proceeded to his son's room, where his disguise set of clothes, a wig, and a servant's hat was already prepared. His son had already quietly left. The King changed into his disguise and sneaked downstairs. Fersen's equerry guided him, and the King, dressed in a green jacket and a servant's hat, easily passed through the scrutiny of the guards stationed within the palace. One guard even commented, "This fat one is definitely the cook who's been secretly eating the King's good food."

The King boarded the carriage, and everyone was ready. Fersen released the brake, and their escape began.

However, the escape faced problems from the very start. Because the carriage was enormous and the roads around Paris were relatively narrow, every turn required the carriage to slow down to a near stop, which was far beyond what Fersen had expected. After all, no one had driven such a massive carriage before. It took an additional two hours to leave Paris than planned.

Finally, the carriage left Paris. Here, the horses were changed, and the King, needing to catch a breath, got off the carriage. No matter how luxurious the carriage, sitting in it for a prolonged period was still exhausting.

However, the King seemed to forget his situation. After he got off the carriage, he unexpectedly began chatting with some local peasants by the roadside. He didn't consider that his actions might reveal his whereabouts. Remember, the carriage was already conspicuous, and the King's likeness was featured on portraits in various town halls and on Louis d'or coins. In fact, the representatives from the National Assembly who later tracked him down used information provided by these witnesses.

The carriage stopped multiple times along the way to allow the esteemed passengers to rest properly. This further slowed down their journey beyond the planned schedule.

Around 4 o'clock that afternoon, the carriage reached Chlons. According to the plan, the Duke of Choiseul was supposed to meet the King there with German mercenaries (as the French cavalry was unreliable due to their leanings toward the National Assembly). However, at this location, the King did not encounter these troops. Instead, their conspicuously grand carriage raised suspicions among the locals.

At the prearranged rendezvous point, the King only met one horseman. He informed them that the Duke of Choiseul, along with the German mercenaries (as the French cavalry was suspected of disloyalty and couldn't be trusted), had been waiting there for hours. The presence of so many mercenaries had naturally drawn attention from the locals. To avoid further suspicions, the Duke had left with his men. However, he told the King to keep moving and that another group of cavalry was waiting for them in Saint-Menehould, about two hours ahead.

By this time, it was already dark, and the horses were tired. They continued for two more hours and reached the next meeting point. However, there was no cavalry awaiting them at this location, as they had moved to a different road due to a miscommunication in orders.

Without meeting the cavalry, the King and his family had no choice but to continue in the carriage. However, this time, the conspicuous nature of the carriage had drawn suspicion from the local people. When the King stopped to rest in Varennes, the postmaster, Drouet, noticed his resemblance to the man on the Louis d'or coin and quickly informed the municipal council. The carriage had left Varennes by the time they responded.

The municipal council sent Drouet to pursue the King. He rode a horse, took a shortcut, and arrived in Varennes, a town on the only road leading to Montmdy, before the King. The citizens of Varennes, upon hearing this news, rang the alarm bells and blocked the King's party. This was the end of the road for the King's escape. He was still two hours away from his destination.

At this point, having received the message, the Duke of Choiseul arrived with his cavalry. However, they were confronted by the outnumbered National Guard of Varennes. While they could see the King's luxurious carriage in the distance, at this moment, the gap between them was unbridgeable. The Duke's cavalry did not engage the National Guard and retreated. Perhaps they feared fighting could endanger the King, or perhaps returning the King to captivity would have been preferable to some. Who could say for sure?

Chapter 68: The Vote (1)

The king's escape, though initially seen as a farcical drama, completely altered the nation's course. Before this incident, even though there were some, like Marat, vehemently attacking the king in the press, the moderate faction still held sway in the Assembly. This was especially true after the king's swearing of the constitution. In fact, even the radicals like Robespierre and Danton were shouting "Long Live Louis XVI" at that time. The difference between the radicals and moderates back then was merely technical, like whether the clergy should pledge allegiance to the state or whether they should use democratic elections to appoint bishops. But everything changed after Louis XVI's flight.

Upon discovering the king's escape, Lafayette immediately declared that the king had been "kidnapped by enemies of the state." This claim managed to deceive many, albeit briefly. However, soon after, a letter left by the king was found in the palace. In the letter, the king claimed that he had

been abducted to Paris and that everything he had signed after July 1789 was done under duress and was therefore null and void.

When this letter was discovered, Lafayette was busy planning the "rescue" of the king and other post-escape arrangements. He hadn't anticipated that they would manage to bring the king back at all. Thus, there was no time to keep the letter a secret, and word of it quickly spread. Although Lafayette later vehemently claimed the letter was a forgery and that the king had been coerced into writing it, this explanation lost all credibility as soon as the king returned to Paris because, apart from the king himself, there was only one adult male in the group who had accompanied the king his valet, which meant the king had not been coerced at all!

However, the intricacies of politics often hinge on willful blindness. Even though they knew that the king was fundamentally opposed to the revolution and constitutional monarchy, many members of the Assembly found it in their interest to maintain the constitutional order. So, they pretended not to know about the king's opposition to the revolution and continued to support constitutional monarchy, ostensibly protecting the king.

But the king's prestige among the common people was completely shattered by this event. The angry mob vandalized everything related to the monarchy and the fleur-de-lis (the Bourbon dynasty's symbol) in the streets, either smashing them or covering them up. As most members of the Assembly still supported constitutional monarchy, the frustration of the lower classes was redirected toward them. In their eyes, these people and the king were in cahoots, oppressing the people. It was because of these individuals that, after the revolution, the people's lives hadn't improved in the slightest.

This anger had always been simmering beneath the surface, but for two reasons, it had remained dormant like molten lava. The first of these reasons was their expectations from the National Assembly. At that time, they still believed that the National Assembly could represent their interests and speak for them, and that good days would come if they waited patiently. However, during this time, that patience was wearing thin.

In the "Constitution of 1791" passed by the Assembly, citizens were categorized as "active" or "passive" based on their property status. Only those who paid a certain amount of taxes were granted the right to vote and be elected, thus being deemed "active" citizens. In a way, this was a limitation on citizens' rights based on their wealth. Just a few days before the king's escape, the Assembly had enacted the infamous "Le Chapelier Law." According to this law, workers were strictly prohibited from forming unions and going on strike, with violators facing a fine of 500 livres and a one-year loss of citizenship rights, and ringleaders being fined 1000 livres and sentenced to three months in prison.

These laws not only failed to protect the interests of the lowest classes but also increased their constraints. This quickly eroded the trust the lower classes had in the Assembly.

The second reason was the absence of leaders among these people.

However, the king's escape resolved both of these issues. The National Assembly's prior actions, combined with the impact of the king's escape, significantly diminished the Assembly's standing among the lower class. The National Assembly, at that time, had lost the trust of the common people.

Following the king's escape, the demonstrations of the lower classes also presented a new opportunity for some radical deputies. They astutely noticed that by standing with the lower class, they could gain significant political capital. Brissot, Bonaire, and Condorcet openly suggested that France should consider adopting a republic.

And so, things started to get more complicated.

Nevertheless, this chaotic situation didn't seem to affect Joseph and Napoleon. On the contrary, with the likelihood of war increasing, their responsibilities grew even more pressing. The newly formed army was undergoing drills and exercises against them. In these drills, Napoleon repeatedly employed tactics like ambushes and artillery ambushes, rendering their forces ineffective. In no time, even as a mere lieutenant, Napoleon had gained recognition in the Paris National Guard.

But soon, an unexpected event disrupted Joseph's work yet again.

On the 16th day, the Assembly officially declared the king and queen innocent, claiming that they had been abducted. Of course, they also hypocritically vowed to severely punish the "kidnappers."

This decision enraged the sans-culottes. On the 17th, led by some republicans, a group of sans-culottes marched to the Place de la Rvolution near the City Hall for a demonstration. There, they were brutally suppressed by the National Guard under Lafayette's command, resulting in numerous casualties.

Lafayette explained that it was the mob that had first attacked the National Guard. He maintained that the National Guard had only opened fire after raising the red flag on City Hall and issuing three warnings to the mob. According to prior Assembly laws, City Hall had to display the red flag and issue three warnings before using deadly force to quell a riot. However, the republicans and sans-culottes accused Lafayette of lying. According to them, Lafayette's National Guard had only raised the red flag and opened fire without issuing a single warning.

Since they had already resorted to violence, they decided to keep going.

Lafayette announced in the Assembly that the sans-culottes were thugs, and behind them were conspirators the members of the Cordeliers Club. Consequently, the Assembly issued arrest warrants for several prominent members of the Cordeliers Club, including Danton and Desmoulins. Danton, upon hearing the news, promptly fled Paris. When it came to fleeing, he was far better at it than Louis XVI, and he successfully made it to England. As for Desmoulins, he found a hiding place.

In reality, since the police system hadn't fully recovered yet, their ability to apprehend anyone was quite limited.

On the surface, it appeared that Lafayette had the upper hand. However, this series of actions tarnished his reputation significantly. Especially within the National Guard, there were many sympathizers of the Cordeliers Club. Soon, even within the National Guard, voices opposing Lafayette emerged. These voices greatly undermined Lafayette's position. While his allies, Dumouriez, Barnave, and the Lameth brothers, didn't differ much from Lafayette in terms of their political views, they were content to see Lafayette's standing damaged. A series of Assembly actions afterward was essentially orchestrated by them, but people believed that Lafayette was manipulating everything. So, not long after, Lafayette's reputation shifted from that of a hero to an executioner and conspirator.

Reputation is a fickle thing, often more fragile than pristine paper. Mark Twain's experience in running for governor is a prime example of this.

One afternoon following the Place de la Rvolution incident, Joseph was about to leave work when he coincidentally ran into Lafayette returning from outside. Lafayette wore an exhausted expression, and upon seeing Joseph, he called him over, saying, "Tomorrow night, the club will have an important meeting. I hope you can attend."

Joseph knew that when Lafayette mentioned "the club," he was referring to the Jacobin Club. Since the "Breton Club" had moved to Paris and set up its meetings in the Jacobin Monastery, it had officially changed its name to "Society of Friends of the Constitution."

Joseph had always done his best to keep his distance from the Jacobin Club's activities. Especially in such tumultuous times. So, he quickly made up an excuse, saying he was very busy and had some vital matters to attend to, preventing him from participating in the meeting.

"Is it a matter concerning the army?" Lafayette asked with a furrowed brow, as this was Joseph's usual excuse for missing club activities.

Joseph immediately replied, "No, it's a personal matter." He knew that if he claimed it was due to official business, Lafayette, his superior's superior, would likely order him to temporarily set aside his duties.

He then inquired, "General, may I ask what important matters are at hand for the club that necessitate the presence of members like me, who seldom attend?"

"The club is holding new elections to select a new club president. Can't you spare some time for that?" Lafayette replied.

At that time, the Jacobin Club was not yet a radical organization, but it had been growing more radical recently. Today, many of the club's voices no longer aligned with Lafayette. However, for Lafayette, the club was an essential tool for gaining political influence that he couldn't easily give up. Perhaps Lafayette hoped to use these elections to cleanse the Jacobin Club.

Chapter 69: The Vote (2)

As soon as Joseph heard what this was about, he felt even more reluctant to participate. Although he wasn't very active in the club's activities, he was not entirely unaware of the current situation within the club. Ever since the King's flight, the club had been divided. Previously, most members of the Friends of the Constitution Club were staunch supporters of constitutional monarchy. However, after the King's escape, some had shifted their allegiance to supporting a republic. And with the events at the Place de la Bastille, this division was becoming even more pronounced.

As for the election of a new club president, the current president was Lafayette. Although he had been less active in club activities lately due to official duties, he was undoubtedly one of the candidates. Joseph could easily guess that the other contender at this club meeting would be Robespierre. He was also quite certain that Robespierre had won this election, as Lafayette seemed to have lost confidence; otherwise, he wouldn't insist on dragging Joseph into this.

"Participating in this is really not an option. If it goes wrong, it might cost me my head," Joseph thought. He quickly said, "General, I'm not trying to avoid my duty, but I..."

For a moment, Joseph couldn't come up with a particularly convincing reason and began to sweat.

"What's the matter?" Lafayette furrowed his brow, forgetting Joseph for a moment. "Do you have a date with a lady? But this matter is important, and I hope you can find a way to attend."

At this point, Joseph finally came up with a plan: he would feign illness. He decided to agree now and then pretend to be very ill as soon as he got home in the evening. He had to be so sick that he couldn't move, and Lafayette couldn't possibly carry him to the meeting on a stretcher.

With this strategy in mind, Joseph replied, "Very well, General, I will make time."

"Good, I'll be waiting for you," Lafayette smiled at Joseph. As for whom Joseph would vote for, who he would choose between himself and Robespierre, Lafayette thought that was a foregone conclusion and didn't need to ask.

After Lafayette left, Joseph quickly found Napoleon on his way home and told him about the situation, and they coordinated their approach.

However, as they approached the front door of their home, Joseph was taken aback. He saw two people waiting at his doorstep.

The two people waiting at Joseph's doorstep were Armand and Robespierre!

If he could, Joseph would have turned and run immediately. But Armand and Robespierre had already spotted him. Armand waved at him, and Robespierre nodded in acknowledgment.

"No escaping now!" Joseph looked at Armand's sincere smile and felt a shiver down his spine. He felt exposed, as if he had been stripped naked and thrown into the snowy fields of Siberia. In that moment, he could almost see the imposing figure of the guillotine.

Joseph could guess why Armand and Robespierre were here: it was about the vote.

"I'm such a fool!" Joseph thought. "I knew I'd be called upon to vote, but I didn't expect Robespierre to come as well. If I were a little smarter, I'd find a place to hide and spend the night away..."

But now, it was too late to think about it. The guillotine no, Robespierre had already approached.

"Mr. Bonaparte, I'm sorry to disturb you at this time," Robespierre said with a smile.

"Joseph, why did it take you so long to return? Your brother refused to open the door for us, as if he thought we were the Big Bad Wolf!" Armand said, wearing an innocent smile, as if she didn't realize they had brought the Big Bad Wolf into their home.

"Lucien has gone to a classmate's house, and only Louis is at home. He's a bit rigid, so I told him not to open the door for anyone," Joseph replied with a forced smile.

Once inside, Joseph brought Napoleon and the troublesome Little Red Riding Hood (Armand) and the fearsome Big Bad Wolf (Robespierre) into the house. After everyone was seated, Robespierre asked, "Mr. Bonaparte, is this your brother, Napoleon? I've heard he's quite talented in military matters."

Napoleon didn't speak, but Joseph could tell he was rather pleased.

"Napoleon has been doing well lately," Joseph replied. Robespierre had veered off the main topic, and Joseph hoped he would continue to do so, giving him more time to think.

In theory, the same methods that could be used against Lafayette could also be applied to Robespierre. But Joseph was a bit hesitant. He knew that deceiving Robespierre was a different matter. If he ever grew suspicious, it would be troublesome.

"Maybe there's a way to have the best of both worlds," Joseph thought while continuing to engage in the conversation.

Robespierre finally got to the point, asking, "Joseph, what do you think about the King's escape and the events at the Champ de Mars?"

"The King's escape?" Joseph replied. "I think he came very close to succeeding, but he was captured and brought back, which shows that even God supports the revolution."

At this point, mentioning God in front of Robespierre wasn't a problem, as not long ago, Robespierre had considered piety as one of the most important virtues in his writings.

Robespierre smiled but wasn't swayed by Joseph's answer. He continued, "Ah, Mr. Bonaparte, what I meant to ask is, do you believe the King was 'kidnapped'?"

"I'm not a fool to believe such nonsense," Joseph said with a wry smile. He didn't want to appear foolish in front of Robespierre. If he had to choose between offending Lafayette or Robespierre, Joseph would certainly choose to offend Lafayette, as it seemed unlikely that Lafayette would send him to the guillotine. This illustrated Machiavelli's point that it's better to be a feared ruler than a loved one.

"But our King does seem quite foolish," Napoleon interjected. "Look at how he tried to escape in style. He even had a carriage, as if he feared no one would recognize him."

Now that Joseph had made his stance on the King's escape clear, Napoleon felt that he didn't need to hold back.

"But Lafayette still insists that the King was 'abducted,' Joseph, what do you think of this?" Robespierre asked.

Joseph thought for a moment. He knew that many people believed he had benefited greatly from Lafayette and were beginning to see him as a supporter of Lafayette. With this question, Robespierre was likely trying to assess friend from foe. On this matter, if he continued to support Lafayette, it was clear that Robespierre would consider him a Lafayette ally and political enemy.

However, immediately opposing Lafayette might seem unscrupulous. Joseph knew that anyone who acquired a reputation similar to Machiavelli's would encounter numerous problems later on. So he intentionally hesitated for a moment before saying, "Lafayette probably has his reasons for saying this. He might be trying to prevent a war."

Seeing that Robespierre appeared deep in thought, Joseph continued, "Lafayette may be worried that if we were to investigate the King's escape, it could lead to internal unrest and foreign interference. Mr. Robespierre, you are aware of the precarious state of the French army, as the senior officers are not reliable. However, we can't simply replace them all at once. Therefore, Lafayette might be concerned that a war would put France in a very unfavorable position."

Robespierre finally got to the point, "So, Mr. Bonaparte, do you share Lafayette's views? Do you agree with him?"

Joseph shook his head. "I understand Lafayette's concerns, but I don't agree with his approach. I believe that Lafayette has made two mistakes in this matter."

"Please elaborate."

"First, Lafayette's perspective is too focused on the military," Joseph explained. "He fails to see that the greatest strength of France is not its army but its people. Allowing someone who has lost the people's trust, who has betrayed them, to continue sitting on the throne would severely damage the morale of the people."

"Second, he underestimates our enemies. He thinks that if we make concessions, we will receive the same goodwill from our enemies. But our enemies will not relax their attacks because of our weakness. On the contrary, our vulnerability will encourage them to take risks."

"Furthermore, the King has already expressed his opposition to the revolution. After that, the royal family has no way out. They understand that the people will never trust them again. In the future, whether it's our actions or theirs, it will all be seen as expedient by the other side. They will never believe that we still want to preserve his rights. Instead, they will see this as our fear of domestic and foreign counterrevolutionary forces."

"Lafayette may hope to buy time by keeping the King in power to rebuild the military. But the royal family won't be oblivious to this. From their perspective, giving Lafayette this time is equivalent to signing the death warrant for the monarchy. So, they won't grant Lafayette this time."

"I see," Armand chimed in. "Joseph, there's an important club meeting the day after tomorrow, where we'll be electing a new club president. This will determine the direction of the club. I believe our club can't continue down Lafayette's mistaken path."

Chapter 70: The Vote (3)

Joseph raised his head and glanced at Armand, then at Robespierre, and said, "Armand, Mr. Robespierre, you both know that I am friends with Lafayette..."

"Joseph, we are all friends with Lafayette. But Joseph, *Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas*," Armand said, quoting a Latin phrase: "I love my friend, but I love truth more."

Robespierre smiled as he observed the exchange.

"Alright, Armand," Joseph said, his brow furrowed. "While I cherish my friendship with General Lafayette, I cannot betray my principles. However, I suggest a different method for the club's elections."

"What do you mean by a different method?" Robespierre asked.

"Currently, the club votes by a show of hands, right?" Joseph continued. "What if we change it to a secret ballot? Think about it, Lafayette has been the president for a long time, and he wields a lot of influence. With an open show of hands, some may succumb to pressure and vote against their will. We can list the candidates on a ballot, and voters can simply check the name they prefer. Then, they place their ballots in an empty box, and when the voting is done, we can open the box in public to count the votes. This way, we avoid the complications of open voting while ensuring fairness."

Joseph's words hadn't even finished when Armand expressed his dissatisfaction. "Joseph, isn't it honorable to openly support or oppose something? Why be so secretive?"

Joseph furrowed his brow, about to retort, but to his surprise, Robespierre spoke first.

"Armand, I find Joseph's proposal quite reasonable. It's a good idea," Robespierre said slowly.

"But as representatives of the people, shouldn't we be transparent in our choices? Why be so clandestine?" Armand seemed unconvinced.

"Armand," Robespierre frowned, "the club is not a parliament, and its members are not representatives of the people. Furthermore, do those who don't quite meet the standards of sainthood not have inherent rights? Morality is something we use to hold ourselves accountable, not to impose on others. For instance, I don't believe that carousing with a bunch of women every night is a proper way to live, but I still consider you and the late Mr. Mirabeau as my good friends."

"You're right, Maximilien," Armand lowered his head.

Robespierre's words surprised Joseph. Such a reasonable statement from "The Incorruptible" Robespierre was unexpected. Amidst his astonishment, Joseph couldn't help but think that Robespierre was a dangerous individual who could artfully find justifications for his political interests.

With this visit from Robespierre, Joseph couldn't afford to miss the club meeting two days later. That evening, he finished his dinner and boarded a lightweight carriage, heading to the Jacobin Club.

Joseph entered the club, exchanging greetings with people he knew, both familiar and unfamiliar faces. Suddenly, a familiar figure caught his eye.

"Hey, Bonaparte, long time no see!" the person greeted him with a smile.

"Duke of Orleans? You're back?" Joseph was surprised, as the person he was talking to was the Duke of Orleans, who had been sent as the ambassador to England recently.

"Yes, I'm back," the Duke of Orleans replied, his attitude reminiscent of a sly fox.

Although the Duke of Orleans had been in England, his sources of information remained strong. As soon as he noticed the damage to his political rival Lafayette's reputation, he promptly returned.

"With Lafayette's current reputation, even if he publicly reveals the conspiracies he had against you, I doubt anyone would believe him anymore. However, being away from the country for so long, I wonder how much influence the Duke still wields," Joseph silently pondered.

The meeting was about to begin when the room was nearly full. Lafayette announced the start of the meeting.

As the chairman, Lafayette began by defending himself, stating that he had always acted in the interest of France. He went on to accuse "extremist ideas" of aiming to destroy the country and its traditions. After a lengthy speech, he acknowledged the prevalence of these ideas within the club and implored the members to support him and resist these dangerous thoughts.

After Lafayette's speech, Robespierre stood up and asked if he could share his thoughts.

"Yes!" came the response from the crowd.

Robespierre then made his way to the podium, passing by Lafayette, who wore a scowling expression filled with disdain. In contrast, Robespierre had a polite smile on his face.

Robespierre began his speech by expressing his respect for French tradition. He asserted that some radicals were trying to turn France into a republic, a notion that he found unpalatable and destined to fail. He even said, "Republic? What is that?"

But then he stated that King Louis XVI's hostility towards the revolution and his opposition to the constitution were evident. Even if he now declared his support for the constitution, it could not be trusted. Allowing such a person to continue as king would only harm France. Everyone had to acknowledge this fact and refrain from self-deception.

"The truth never harms us; it is our attitude toward the truth that does. If we ignore everything and bury our heads in the sand like ostriches, telling ourselves, 'None of this exists,' that is when we truly harm ourselves. Clearly, the current king is no longer trustworthy! I oppose a republic, but I also oppose Louis XVI continuing as king."

With these words, Robespierre raised his eyes, casting a glance at the Duke of Orleans, who immediately began to applaud.

If Louis XVI were to abdicate, his son, Louis XVII, would be the first in line for the throne. Louis XVII was still a minor, and according to French tradition, a regent from the royal family needed to take over as the king's proxy. Currently, the only eligible candidates for regent were Louis XVI's brother, the Count of Provence (historically known as Louis XVIII), Louis XVI's other brother, the Count of Artois, and the Duke of Orleans.

The first two were staunch royalists who openly opposed the revolution, so the only viable choice for regent was the Duke of Orleans. When Robespierre expressed his stance, the Duke of Orleans naturally found it agreeable.

Robespierre then went on to argue that while he opposed extremist republican ideas, he believed that thoughts should be free. He stated, "Opposing one idea can only be done with another idea, not with swords."

Joseph found Robespierre's words rather pointed and laden with dark humor, a quality he had not expected from him.

Finally, Robespierre proposed a secret ballot to ensure that club members' votes in the upcoming elections would not be influenced by those in power.

This proposal exceeded Lafayette's expectations. He knew this voting method would be detrimental to him, but if he openly opposed it, he would practically confirm the accusations of "interfering with voting through power." So, he remained silent, wearing a stern expression.

The vote followed. Although it was a secret ballot, Joseph still voted for Robespierre. There was no other choice for a prudent man like him.

Then came the vote count, with one person announcing the votes while several others supervised. The two candidates were neck and neck, with Lafayette taking the lead at times and then Robespierre surging ahead. In the end, the results were announced: Robespierre won by a two-vote margin, becoming the Jacobin Club's chairman.

Lafayette's face was grim, likely pondering who had betrayed him. But Robespierre's expression wasn't particularly jubilant either, as he had expected one more vote according to his calculations.

"We have a traitor among us," Robespierre couldn't help but think.

Lafayette took the stage again. Everyone assumed he would deliver some remarks as the outgoing chairman. However, he declared, "Regrettably, I've noticed that extreme ideas have taken hold in the Jacobin Club. The club's principles have diverged greatly from what they were when we established it."

He scanned the room and continued, "Now that our political beliefs have changed so drastically, I announce my departure from the Jacobin Club. Those who, like me, oppose these political beliefs, please join me in leaving."

Joseph was completely stunned by Lafayette's unexpected move. Lafayette had turned his secret vote into a farce, and now the question was which side he should stand with.

At that moment, one person took the lead and walked over to join Lafayette. Seeing this person, Robespierre's smiling face suddenly stiffened.

"Fouch, I didn't expect it to be you!" Robespierre gritted his teeth.