**Lafayette & Lafayette Act Three Plan**

(March 25, 1781, Marquis de Lafayette’s headquarters at Williamsburg. It is mid-afternoon. Lafayette is pouring two tumblers of Madeira. Centerstage is a round table with a chair on either side facing downstage. Chessboard with pieces set, on the table on the upstage portion. James stands downstage left, eyes to ground, hands clasped in front. Map of Southeast on easel upstage center. Credenza is against the wall right, and Lafayette there on which is the Madeira.)

***Lafayette:*** (Brings the tumblers to the table. Places one on James’s side, motions for James to take it. James is hesitant.) Please. (Indicating for him to take it. Raises his glass.) To General Washington, and to Liberty. (Drinks.)

***James:*** (Focused. Takes a drink. Holds it, closes his eyes to savor it, swallows.) Thank you.

***Lafayette:*** Madeira makes life better. Your way says you think so too.

***James:*** It has been awhile. It is very good.

***Lafayette:*** Sit. Please. (Motions James to sit. James is hesitant.) Please. (Both Lafayette and James sit.) You have been with William Armistead long?

***James:*** All my life.

***Lafayette:*** You told him of my proposition?

***James:*** I did. At least what I understood of it.

***Lafayette:*** And what did he say?

***James:*** It was up to me. He said it was my choice.

***Lafayette:*** It is not, I think, how most might have replied in his position.

***James:*** We differ from most.

***Lafayette:*** What did you decide?

***James:*** It depends. What do you want me to do?

***Lafayette:***  Lord Cornwallis.

***James:*** He’s not a personal friend.

***Lafayette:*** He is the best they have. Ten days ago he overpowered General Greene at Guilford Courthouse, at Greensboro, in North Carolina. He won, but it was costly. (Stands and steps to the map.)

***James:*** He won at Camden. General Gates was no match.

***Lafayette:*** General Gates. The hero of Saratoga. He didn’t rest his horse until he was a hundred miles away. You are a student?

***James:*** I read.

***Lafayette:*** After Camden, Cornwallis lost at King’s Mountain and Cowpens.

***James:*** Is he still in South Carolina?

***Lafayette:*** Two days after Guilford, he turned south, floated the Cape Fear River. He’s camped at Wilmington, North Carolina.

***James:*** What now?

***Lafayette:*** I don’t know. General Arnold set up headquarters at Portsmouth, here. (Indicates Portsmouth on the map.)

***James:*** Why Portsmouth? The Elizabeth River is not deep enough for a man-o-war. What’s the plan?

***Lafayette:*** William was right about you. You are perceptive. I don’t know. Perhaps, the only thing that makes sense, Arnold is preparing for relief from British ships out of New York.

***James:*** They can’t make it into the harbor at Portsmouth.

***Lafayette:*** You and I are of same mind.

***James:*** Cornwallis.

***Lafayette:*** He needs supplies. The Carolinas and Georgia won’t do.

***James:*** You think he’ll come to Virginia.

***Lafayette:*** Arnold burns Richmond, but instead of marching north, he floats back down the James to Portsmouth. It doesn’t make sense unless he plans to meet up with Cornwallis.

***James:*** The Madeira. It is good.

***Lafayette:*** (Walks to the credenza, brings the flask to the table, pours for both.) I have 2000 men, not enough muskets, ball, or powder for pitch battle. My men need shirts and shoes. I must deploy them with finesse.

***James:*** What do you want me to do?

***Lafayette:*** Cross the lines at Portsmouth. Find out what Arnold plans.

***James:*** What will you do if you capture him?

***Lafayette:*** Hang him.

***James:*** You want me to spy?

***Lafayette:*** Yes.

***James:*** So. If I choose to do this, I can have no identifying papers. No trace of origin.

***Lafayette:*** You will report to me. You will be in voluntary service. No uniform. No arms.

***James:*** No papers.

***Lafayette:*** No enlistment papers.

***James:*** If I get caught on suspicion on the American side, what happens?

***Lafayette:*** Chances are good you’ll be shot. Get caught on the British side and if they suspect, you stand good chance of being hanged.

***James:*** Sylvia will love this.

***Lafayette:*** Sylvia?

***James:*** My wife.

***Lafayette:*** Will you tell her?

***James:*** Are you married?

***Lafayette:*** Yes. Adrienne.

***James:*** What did Adrienne say when you told her you were going to America to get shot at?

***Lafayette:*** I didn’t tell her.

***James:*** (Gives Lafayette a quizzical look.)

***Lafayette:*** There was no time. And I wanted her to answer truthfully that she knew nothing.

***James:*** Answer truthfully to whom? (Proceeds to drink.)

***Lafayette:*** The King of France. King Louis.

***James:*** I’d be more worried about my wife. If Adrienne is like Sylvia, you are in trouble and it may take the King to save you. It’s good you have three thousand miles of ocean between you.

***Lafayette:*** I have since been home, once. I am back in good grace.

***James:*** William told me about you. You are rich. You know the King of France. Why give that up for this?

***Lafayette:*** There was nothing in it. Life at Court, small talk, dissipation. My father-in-law arranged for me a position with the Comte de Provence. The King’s older brother. I could not abide the idea of life without purpose.

***James:*** What did you do, I mean, when your father-in-law arranged your position at Court? How did you get out of that?

***Lafayette:*** At a masquerade ball, where everyone knew everyone despite the mask, the Comte kept boring us all with his feats of memory. I said, “Memory is no substitute for a keen mind.”

***James:*** But you wore a mask. It’s not as though he knew who you were.

***Lafayette:*** He knew. The very next day he asked me if I knew who I had insulted. I said, “The man who stands before me now.” My job offer was withdrawn. My father-in-law was furious.

***James:*** But why here? Why America?

***Lafayette:*** I suspect for the same reason you are here now. Everyone has three things that fire their sense of purpose. Land, legacy, books.

***James:*** Virginia is the only land I know. William and his father John Armistead made life as good as it could be for me. I sensed liberty, compared to my fellows.

***Lafayette:*** My land was the Auvergne, southern France. Mountains and open space and the freedom to explore them.

***James:*** Agnes Armistead, John Armistead’s first wife, told William and me stories about Achilles and honor. I grew up wanting to be like that. It was the only legacy I knew.

***Lafayette:*** My grandmother, she was the one who told me stories. My family fought with Joan of Arc at Orleans. My father died when I was two at the Battle of Minden. I wanted to live up to that. Tell me about the books.

***James:*** Other than Sylvia, I live for books. Cicero and Plutarch are my favorites.

***Lafayette:*** I was a Latin scholar. We had to translate the Roman classics. I grew into those books and the high purpose they called for.

***James:*** The soil is tilled, the seed planted. Maybe without knowing it, I have searched for the object of my purpose. I saw it when we talked at the public store yesterday.

***Lafayette:*** Tuesday, August 8, 1775. At Metz. I heard about the rabble in America, farmers and merchants, fighting for freedom. This was what the land, the legacy, and the books were all about. (Takes a draught of Madeira.) What do you win from this war?

***James:*** It seems to me this fight is on principle. The idea is not new, but it has never been given force. I mean, once you say, for the world to see, “All men are created equal,” how can you take it back, how can you back away?

***Lafayette:*** I can’t promise you anything. Your station may not change, even if you do this. Even when America wins.

***James:*** There is hope. My risk is less than yours. If America fails, you hang.

***Lafayette:*** You have a discerning eye. My disposition is, like yours, hopeful. The principle for which we fight is right. If we lock onto the principle and the power of the principle, it makes any sacrifice worthwhile.

***James:*** What’s it like?

***Lafayette:*** How do you mean?

***James:*** You are a Marquis. You know the King of France.

***Lafayette:*** My father was the Marquis before me. He died. The title came to me. It is not like I earned it. I know the King only because of the title.

***James:*** Whenever you walk into a room you must know that people admire you. I mean, what is that like?

***Lafayette:*** I don’t carry it well. I disappoint spectators. I lack grace and standing. Once the Queen laughed at me. We were dancing and I was so awkward, she just stopped and laughed.

***James***: How bad can that be? You were dancing with the Queen; so what if she laughed.

***Lafayette:*** When she laughed, the ballroom stopped. Everybody took notice. Everybody laughed. They laughed at me. I was humiliated. I walked away. I knew right then I could never live that life.

***James:*** America is a long way to go to escape humiliation.

***Lafayette:*** I tried to be somebody I wasn’t. My brother-in-law, now he has the touch. He dances. He plays cards. Everybody likes him and I did my best to be like him. It didn’t work. I didn’t fit.

***James:*** I know that feeling. Where is he now, your brother-in-law?

***Lafayette:*** The Count de Noaille, he is here, under my command. He things I am somebody. What is it like? For you?

***James:*** What? To be me? In my station, you mean?

***Lafayette:*** Your choices are never your own.

***James:*** William makes things tolerable. Still, you are right. I have friends who rage. They see only the indecency. They see hypocrisy in the rhetoric. Then there are those who are reconciled. This is the hand we are dealt, they say, it’s the way it was meant to be, make the best of it.

***Lafayette:*** And you. What do you say?

***James:*** Every moment of every day presents a question. From the point of the question to the point of the reply there is freedom. There is choice.

***Lafayette:*** It’s a special temperament that can see that space.

***James:*** It is a matter of will.

***Lafayette:*** Do you think the rhetoric is hypocrisy?

***James:*** The gap from rhetoric to execution is huge, but the Declaration says: “All men are created equal.” How can there not be hope in that?

***Lafayette:*** The law is one thing. The spirit may not follow. I want for France the democracy I see here. But she has had a King so long I don’t see the people following otherwise. The three estates define how we think.

***James:*** No one ascends? No mobility?

***Lafayette:*** Within their class, but not into another class. It is the way it has always been. People accept it.

***James:*** I choose to believe I will not be forced to live this class all my days. It isn’t a class. It’s less than that. People do not look at me. They look through me. I am invisible to them.

***Lafayette:*** It’s not malicious, not always.

***James:*** True. It’s habit. It’s the way it’s always been. That’s what I tell Sylvia.

***Lafayette:*** It can change. Ignorance can be overcome.

***James:*** The spirit must change and that will be a matter of will. Sometimes it’s not that they don’t know. They know but it doesn’t matter.

***Lafayette:*** People here attend their own vine and their own fig tree. They are absorbed in their own pursuits. They need to think it through.

***James:*** Undistracted moments. Sylvia says I am too generous. I dismiss slights. Those little…(thinking of the right word.)

***Lafayette:*** Indignities.

***James:*** A thousand little indignities. Condescensions. It wears. I understand rage. I understand giving up. I choose middle ground.

***Lafayette:*** You read. You are a reader.

***James:*** it makes a difference. I see the possibilities. It broadens my scope. It gives me hope.

***Lafayette:*** Arnold has a base at Portsmouth. Cornwallis will join him there, I’m sure. I need you to find out what his plans are. What do you say?

***James:*** I have never had Madeira with a Marquis before.

***Lafayette:*** Underwhelmed?

***James:*** You are a peculiar sort.

***Lafayette:*** I’m a peculiar sort? I could say the same of you. Cornwallis. What do you say?

***James:*** You’ll talk with William?

***Lafayette:*** I’ll take care of that.

***James:*** I’ll take care of Sylvia.

***Lafayette:*** You have the more difficult task.

***James:*** How do I authenticate my messages to you?

***Lafayette:*** Sign them, “Cur non!” My motto on my coat of arms. “Why not!”

***James:*** When do we start?

***Lafayette:*** I’ll be in touch.

***James:*** (Pulls the chessboard to the center of the table.) I have never played a marquis before. (White pieces to James.) I was just thinking…

***Lafayette:*** (Raises his hand to interrupt.) Your move.

(Lights dim.)