Scene Five

(At Hotel d’Enghien. Window upstage right. Door downstage right. Credenza with pot of coffee and cups and congolais at the back wall. Secretary Julien Duboismartin is at easel centerstage, painting. Lieutenant Etienne Duboismartin is in his late twenties, plain faced, 5’7” and 150 pounds; comes in from bedroom offstage left. His hair is unkempt. He stretches. He yawns. Julien gives him a glance, then back to the easel. It is about noon. Game table stage left with peg solitaire [European round board with marbles; evidenced at the Court of Louis XIV in 1687]. Easel with map of France back wall stage right. Model of masted ship on credenza.)

***Julien:*** Well. Good afternoon. (Condescension.)

***Etienne:*** Don’t start. (Walks to credenza. Pours a cup of coffee. Tastes it.) Awful. (Takes a bite of congolais.) Dry. Awful coffee. Dry congolais. Nothing’s right.

***Julien:*** Did you know the congolais is the same thing as the French macaroon, with coconut? It’s true. From Italy to France in 1533; Catherine de Medici’s pastry chefs.

***Etienne:*** I’m in misery here and you give me a tutorial on macaroons.

***Julien:*** Stop it. You brought this on yourself.

***Etienne:*** Please. No big brother platitude.

***Julien:*** We all told you so. But no. You had to make a big show. Everybody in Le Havre knew. Now you’re paying the price.

***Etienne:*** Shutup. Just shutup. (Shuffles to the game table.) I’m sick of solitaire. I can’t sleep.

***Julien:*** Then why do you stay in bed till noon?

***Etienne:*** Nothing else to do. I can’t believe it. All lost. I was a major, an aide-de-camp, going to America to do battle. I was excited. Never in my whole life. It’s why I got in the army in the first place.

***Julien:*** Celebration. Youthful incontinence. You gave Stormont what he was looking for. Any reason to complain to the Prime Minister.

***Etienne:*** It was innocent. Maurepas could have looked the other way.

***Julien:*** No. No, he couldn’t. You and your pumped up buddies. Parading about Le Havre. Telling everybody how you were going to stuff redcoats. Where you were going to stuff them. No surprise.

***Etienne:*** Stormont threatens Maurepas. Maurepas stops us all. You know, when people knew I was a major, they looked me in the eye. Before, it was like I wasn’t there. (Sips coffee.) What are you doing? (Walks to easel.) What’s it supposed to be?

***Julien:*** What’s it look like?

***Etienne:*** I dunno. Trees. Is that a rock? Rabbit? Or did a cow just make a deposit? (Thoughtful.) Isn’t this a waste? (Indicates painting.) I mean, it’s a lot of time.

***Julien:*** If I didn’t paint, I think I’d lose whatever sanity I have.

***Etienne:*** Hmm. I’d never guessed.

***Julien:*** You sound surprised.

***Etienne:*** I just always thought…well…that you were…content.

***Julien:*** I am secretary to a man who believes he has no equal. I draft letters for him. He signs them without looking at them. He looks past me. Broglie never looks me in the eye. I know this is all I will ever be. Ever.

***Etienne:*** (After a moment.) I didn’t know.

***Julien:*** Now you do. Fresh canvas for me is a do over. I make order from chaos. I see horizons. I see promise. Each stroke primes the next.

***Etienne:*** How do you stand it? Doesn’t something inside you…I don’t know…I feel this rumble inside…it’s like a volcano…some grand something…

***Julien:*** Put away the solitaire. I’ll beat you at chess. (He goes to game table. Starts putting away peg solitaire, setting up chess.)

***Etienne:*** Wait. There must be an answer. Let me think. I still have my commission. Right? I’m still a major in the Continental Army. And a lieutenant in the French army, one foot in both camps.

***Julien:*** But no closer to America.

***Etienne:*** That’s the point. I just need to get there. I just need a ride. I can’t swim 3000 miles. (Paces, thinking.) Well, I could, but…

***Julien:*** Sit down. Let’s play…

***Etienne:*** I am. I’m playing chess, up here. (Points to his head.) I need a way to cross an ocean. There must be some way.

***Julien:*** You should be good at figuring it out. Ten years in the navy…

***Etienne:*** Exactly. Scrounge. If you can’t do it one way, do it another.

***Julien:*** What happened to all that self-pity?

***Etienne:*** (Stops. Looks at Julien.) Quit the big brother thing. I’m serious.

***Julien:*** No, no. I was admiring the about-face.

***Etienne***: Help me think. Think it through. You said Broglie signed orders without even reading them? What if he signed orders for French officers to board ship for America?

***Julien:*** You want me to forge orders? And have him sign?

***Etienne:*** Sure.

***Julien:*** What if he reads them?

***Etienne***: You said he never looks at what he signs.

***Julien:*** What if he does this time?

***Etienne:*** Well…as long as you shoot him before he shoots you…(Both look at each other…smile…laugh.) I get it. Bad plan. Too risky.

***Julien:*** You’re thinking like Ulysses.

***Etienne:*** That really irritates me. (Stops. Looks at Julien.)

***Julien:*** What did I say?

***Etienne:*** We have a laugh. Then you one-up me. With some Greek something.

***Julien:*** Ulysses was Roman, actually. (Pause.) Odysseus was Greek.

***Etienne:*** Wouldn’t be such a great loss if he shot you afterall…(Thinks some more.) What if you forge orders AND you forge Broglie’s signature?

***Julien:*** He’d shoot me for sure.

***Etienne:*** That’s the point. (Smiles. Julien smiles. Knock at the door. Lafayette enters.) Lafayette! Come in! My brother and I were just talking about how to arrange to get him shot.

***Lafayette:*** I’ve come at a bad time.

***Julien:*** No, no. His humor at my expense. Any news from DeKalb? Or Deane?

***Etienne:*** We’ve been thinking about how to get to America.

***Lafayette:*** DeKalb says Deane will work it out. Deane promises, but no boat.

***Etienne:*** Think options. Chessthink. Percolate. Freewheel.

***Julien:*** My head feels like concrete. (All thinking.) Did you know the largest unreinforced concrete dome in the world is the Parthenon? It’s a fact. 128 A.D.

***Etienne:*** What does that have to do with anything?

***Julien:*** You told me to freewheel. I freewheeled to the Parthenon. You said I could. Freewheel.

***Lafayette:*** Vis sat contra fatum.

***Etienne:*** (Deadpans Lafayette.)

***Lafayette:*** If he gets to freewheel, I freewheel.

***Julien:*** Vis sat contra fatum. Vigor suffices against fate.

***Etienne:*** You two deserve each other.

***Lafayette:*** My motto. On my coat of arms. See. (Points to left breast.) Vis sat contra fatum. Vigor suffices against fate. It means…

***Etienne:*** Don’t explain it to me.

***Julien:*** Too wordy. (Pointing to Lafayette’s motto, above his family crest, on his uniform.) Le Havre I think is out. How about Bordeaux? (Walks to easel of map, traces Le Havre to Bordeaux.)

***Lafayette:*** Stormont is all over Le Havre. Bordeaux is better.

***Etienne:*** Better? Better for what?

***Julien:*** Less likely to attract attention when you embark for America.

***Etienne:*** Fine. You two are shifting pawns. The question is: Where do we get a boat? (Lafayette walks to the chess table, fingering the chess set, distracted.)

***Julien:*** Let’s see. Military frigates won’t work. Too obvious. Stormont has his eye on them for sure.

***Etienne:*** We could bribe a captain.

***Julien:*** As soon as you turned over the money, you’d see neither money nor ship nor captain.

***Etienne:*** (Smiles. Then seriously, deliberately.) Julien. What about this: what if we bought a ship?

***Julien:*** It’d be 100,000 livres. Probably more. We don’t…

***Etienne:*** No, we don’t. (Looks at Lafayette, who is still distracted looking at the chess set.)

***Julien:*** If we owned the boat…

***Etienne:*** We sail it anywhere we want.

***Julien:*** (Looks at Lafayette and calmly attracts his attention.) Lafayette. (Lafayette looks up.)

***Etienne:*** What if we bought a boat?

***Lafayette:*** Bought a boat. Who?

***Etienne/Julien:*** (First look at each other, then at Lafayette.) You! (In unison.)

***Lafayette:*** Me!

***Etienne:*** Yes. You. You buy it. You own it. You sail it. With whomever you want on board.

***Julien:*** (Said with gusto.) Recules de Basmarein et Raimbaux. At Bordeaux. The largest shipbuilder in France.

***Etienne:*** 100,000 livres.

***Julien:*** Or more.

***Etienne:*** But think of it!

***Julien:*** Pierre de Basmarein. President of the company. I know him. He does business with the insurgents.

***Lafayette:*** My own ship. I’ve never owned a ship. (Walks to the model ship, gazes.)

***Julien:*** Basmarein is good to work with. The ship would pay for itself. You could send cargo back from America.

***Lafayette:*** One problem. The Duc d’Ayen controls my accounts.

***Julien:*** How old are you?

***Lafayette:*** Nineteen.

***Etienne:*** Six years. Six years till you’re twenty-five. It’ll be over by then.

***Lafayette:*** Less than six. Five and three quarters…Could I name it? (To Julien.)

***Julien:*** Your ship. You name it.

***Lafayette:*** “The Victory.” I’ll name it “The Victory.”

***Etienne:*** (Taken aback.) You mean, you’ll do it?

***Lafayette:*** (Deliberates. Slow smile.) Cur non?

***Etienne:*** Cur non? What’s cur non?

***Lafayette:*** My new motto. Less wordy. So you can remember it.

***Julien:*** Cur non, my brother, is Latin for “Why not?’ (Speaking to Etienne.)

***Etienne:*** You’re forgetting. Your accounts. The Duc d’Ayen.

***Lafayette:*** He’ll come around. Let me handle that. In the meantime, I can borrow against my accounts. It’ll work.

***Julien:*** Etienne, you go to Bordeaux. Leave tonight. Find Basmarein. Tell him I sent you. He’ll find us a ship. We’re really going to do this.

***Lafayette:*** Shouldn’t I be the one to go?

***Julien/Etienne:*** (Together.) No!

***Etienne:*** No one will notice me. I’m a lowly lieutenant in the French army.

***Julien:*** (Talking to Lafayette.) Stormont would have you followed. It’d be best if you took a holiday. Go somewhere. Throw them off the scent.

***Lafayette:*** (Deliberates.) Adrienne’s uncle, the Duc d’Ayen’s brother. I have declined invitations to visit. The Marquis de Noailles.

***Julien:*** Lafayette. Are you serious? You are made of stout stuff. You surprise me.

***Etienne:*** What? What do you mean? What did I miss?

***Julien:*** I mean, the Marquis de Noailles is the French ambassador to the Court of St. James. Lafayette is talking about visiting London.

***Etienne:*** London? England? What? You’ll visit King George, I suppose?

***Lafayette:*** Good plan, eh? They’ll never guess what we’re up to.

***Julien:*** Etienne. When you find it, when the ship is ready, contact DeKalb. He’ll get word to you (indicating Lafayette) in London.

***Lafayette:*** I get seasick.

***Julien:*** Well. (Shrugs shoulders.) Small price to pay. Face downwind. It’s a philosophy of life.

***Lafayette:*** No, no. My new philosophy of life: Cur non?

***Etienne:*** I like it. Cur non? (With gusto.)

(Lights dim.)