Scene Four

(At Hotel d’Hambourg, Rue Jacob, Paris, December 7, 1776, American headquarters. Easel with map of France at back wall. Door downstage right. Working desk middle of stage. High backed chair behind desk. Silas Deane signing papers at desk. His secretary William Carmichael at window, upstage right, gazing out. Silas Deane [January 4, 1738-September 23, 1789] is 38 years old. He was born in Groton, Connecticut, and graduated from Yale. He is a lawyer and a merchant. In April, 1759, he was hired as a tutor for Edward Bancroft, in Hartford, Connecticut, later to be exposed as a spy. On March 2, 1776, the Continental Congress appointed him secret envoy to Paris to negotiate for men, money, and arms. Deane recruited Lafayette, Baron Johann DeKalb, Thomas Conway, Casimir Pulaski, and Baron von Steuben, among others. He was recalled December 8, 1777. He is 5’9” and weighs 160 pounds, with a perceptible paunch, high cheekbones and receding hairline. His manner is clipped. Deane’s secretary is William Carmichael [1739-February 9, 1795], a 37 year old from Maryland. In 1776 Congress named Carmichael as a secret agent, and assistant to Silas Deane. He is 5’7”, weighs 165 pounds, sad eyes, a moon-like face. He is friendly without being forward, very well informed, and articulate. He is very patriotic and dedicated to the American cause. He was trained in the classics.)

***Deane:*** (Holding letter up for Carmichael to see.) Carmichael. What’s this?

***Carmichael:*** (Distracted. Gazing out the window, does not answer.)

***Deane:*** Carmichael!

***Carmichael:*** Sir?

***Deane:*** You’re preoccupied. What’s the matter?

***Carmichael:*** Paris in winter reminds me of home.

***Deane:*** Everything reminds you of home.

***Carmichael:*** It’s the snow. Maryland’s eastern shore is beautiful this time of year.

***Deane:*** Only a true romantic could look onto the streets of Paris and see the shores of Maryland.

***Carmichael:*** You can’t tell me that the Seine winding through Paris doesn’t stir memories of the Connecticut River winding through Hartford.

***Deane:*** Take Notre Dame and the Louvre, put them on the banks of the Connecticut and then the Seine would remind me of home. Put it aside. We have work. What is this? (Waves the letter.)

***Carmichael:*** It’s the letter to the Continental Congress I drafted yesterday. (Disapprovingly.) It’s your recommendation to Congress to replace General Washington with the Comte de Broglie.

***Deane:*** Do I detect a note of rebuke? You disapprove.

***Carmichael:*** Congress will not replace Washington and certainly not with Broglie.

***Deane:*** Broglie has been a great help to me. I’m impressed.

***Carmichael:*** We hardly settled in before he was at the door. We nearly tripped over him. He’s in it for himself, whatever he can get out of it.

***Deane:*** You’re too skeptical. Besides, how do you place so much confidence in Washington?

***Carmichael:*** I know Tench Tilghman, Washington’s aide-de-camp. He’s from Maryland and a good judge of men. Tilghman says no one can lead like Washington.

***Deane:*** Congress wants a commander-in-chief who wins. Broglie can win and I tell them so. (Walks to the window.) Connecticut has white snow, not soot stained snow… How can you justify his leadership three months ago at Long Island? (Back to his desk.)

***Carmichael:*** It was a well ordered retreat and executed without a loss.

***Deane:*** Only after redcoats took 3000 Americans on the battlefield. He managed to get back across the East River in the dead of night only because he had John Glover and his Marblehead cod fishermen manning the boats.

***Carmichael:*** You underestimate Washington.

***Deane:*** (Returns to his desk, signs the letter.) Send it. You are the perfect secretary. I value your opinion. We can argue and then be done with it.

***Carmichael:*** (Puts the letter into his pocket.) I’ll place this with a reliable courier; he’ll take special precautions.

***Deane:*** There’s no point in sending it by routine post; we might as well address it to King George himself. London has spies every where.

***Carmichael:*** Lord Stormont deserves credit on that account. He pays well for information and he marches straight to Prime Minister Maurepas when he senses impropriety. He is clever.

***Deane:*** How you can be so charitable to someone who makes our work so difficult is beyond me. I think Maurepas fears Stormont and that concerns me. If Stormont discovers I give French officers commissions in the Continental Army…

***Carmichael:*** He’ll go straight to Maurepas with strident, very public demands to put a stop to it. Maurepas will feel obligated, if only to maintain the appearance of neutrality.

***Deane:*** How do you manage meeting Lafayette so often without raising Stormont’s objection? Lafayette’s profile in Paris is so high.

***Carmichael:*** DeKalb and Lafayette are good friends. DeKalb arranged our first meeting. Since then, Lafayette comes by carriage at midnight and we give the horse its rein while we talk. In Paris, we fit in with all the other carriages meandering at midnight. It’s like a fraternity.

***Deane:*** What do you two talk about?

***Carmichael:*** It is as though he was primed to hear the story. I told him what I believe to be true. This is a fight for independence. At bottom it’s about ideas. We’ll be able to do something no other people, ever, have done.

***Deane:*** Don’t you think you make too much of a halo out of it?

***Carmichael:*** It’s what I believe…He says Marie-Catherine, his grandmother, stoked the fire for him with heroic stories…then Latin studies of Plato and Aristotle, without his really being aware of it, gave definition to what he wanted…

***Deane:*** That’s lofty talk for anybody.

***Carmichael:*** Lofty perhaps, but for him it comes naturally. He says he has been fallow long enough…that’s how he talks…and he is ready to make something of himself. America is for him destiny, the object of stories and study. He is different. (Standing at credenza, marking papers and doing paperwork.)

***Deane:*** A twenty year old dreamer. DeKalb is bringing him shortly. What will he ask for?

***Carmichael:*** He’s nineteen, not twenty. He wants an officer’s commission in the Continental Army.

***Deane:*** Can we afford him? How much money does he want? I had to give Mauroy 12,000 livres up front.

***Carmichael:*** I don’t know. Words like “courage” and “honor” are a seamless part of his vocabulary. He says “Why not!” a lot, as though he’s up for it. I don’t think he’s about the money.

***Deane:*** What war has he been in?

***Carmichael:*** None.

***Deane:*** How many men has he killed?

***Carmichael:*** None.

***Deane:*** (Picks up a roster.) Sixteen French officers so far.

***Carmichael:*** Is that the total number commissioned?

***Deane:*** (Nods affirmatively.) DeKalb fought in Flanders and the Seven Years’ War. I made him a Major General. Lieutenant Duboismartin was in the navy ten years before getting into the army; besides his older brother is Broglie’s secretary. I made him a major; he’ll be aide-de-camp to DeKalb. Vicomte de Mauroy I made a major general because Broglie asked. He’s a disagreeable fellow.

***Carmichael:*** Lafayette stands apart.

***Deane:*** He does stand apart. He’s never shot anyone.

***Carmichael:*** There are things more important.

***Deane:*** It’s a war. What’s more important?

***Carmichael:*** He has connections at the French Court.

***Deane:*** I hear his father-in-law is not keen on his venture. (Walks to the map.) Anyway, DeKalb will be pleased to hear sixteen officers will follow him to Le Havre tomorrow. Once they register, off for America, with or without Lafayette.

***Carmichael:*** DeKalb will bring Lafayette shortly. Be kind.

***Deane:*** I’m always kind.

***Carmichael:*** Let me forewarn you: Lafayette can be awkward.

***Deane:*** Awkward.

***Carmichael:*** Socially awkward.

***Deane:*** Socially awkward. Never shot anyone. I need a drink. (Pours tumbler, sets it on his desk.)

***Carmichael:*** Stormont will be on high alert. DeKalb better keep his bunch on a short leash. If they boast about fighting England in America, if Stormont gets wind…

***Deane:*** He’ll rattle to Maurepas…

***Carmichael:*** Then Maurepas will refuse registry and no officer will board ship to America.

***Deane:*** What does Lafayette know about Broglie, about his becoming commander-in-chief?

***Carmichael:*** Nothing.

***Deane:*** Good. There is no need for him to know. (Knock at the door.)

***DeKalb:*** (Enters with Lafayette.) Mr. Silas Deane, may I present the Marquis de Lafayette. (Lafayette strides purposefully to Deane, shakes his hand energetically, kisses him on both cheeks.)

***Lafayette:*** Mr. Deane, it is my pleasure.

***DeKalb:*** And you know Mr. Deane’s secretary, William Carmichael.

***Lafayette:*** (Strides to Carmichael. Shakes his hand energetically.) My friend. (They all stand awkwardly, silenced.) Mr. Deane, it’s an honor to be in your presence. (Awkward silence. Deane coughs nervously.. Lafayette searches for small talk.)

***Deane:*** (Glances at Carmichael, then at Lafayette. Points to Lafayette’s coat of arms.) What is the insignia, here above your coat of arms?

***Lafayette:*** Vis sat contra fatum. My motto. Vigor suffices against fate. Vis sat contra fatum.

***Deane:*** I see.

***Carmichael:*** Lafayette was a Latin scholar.

***Deane:*** I understand you want to serve in the Continental army.

***Lafayette:*** More than anything.

***Deane:*** Why?

***Carmichael:*** (Lafayette and Carmichael look at one another.) I’ve told him about our conversations.

***Lafayette:*** What I know of America I’ve learned from my friend DeKalb, but especially from this man (indicating Carmichael, fondly, almost reverently). I understand about independence, but she reaches for more, more than Greece, more even than Rome.

***Deane***: (Unsure, quizzical look at Carmichael.) I’m not sure I understand. What do you mean?

***Lafayette:*** The Declaration of Independence became only lately available to me.

***Deane:*** Don’t feel left out. I was informed not much more than a month ago, but I shared the Declaration with Foreign Minister Vergennes as soon as it arrived.

***Lafayette:*** “We hold these truths to be self-evident, all men are created equal.” It defines the fight. History has never before seen such bold plan. Liberty, equality, and justice wrapped in it. I want to be a part of it.

***Carmichael:*** (Deane looks at Crmichael, impressed.) He has thought it through. It’s no platitude to him.

***Deane:*** You’re nineteen.

***Lafayette:*** Too young or too old?

***Deane:*** You’ll need the Duc d’Ayen’s permission and I understand he’s none too keen on America***.***

***Lafayette***: If I have an officer’s commission, it will win him over.

***Deane:*** And what rank do you think would persuade him?

***Lafayette:*** Major General.

***Deane:*** (Looks at DeKalb, then at Carmichael, then back at Lafayette.) You’ve never been in battle.

***Lafayette:*** No.

***Deane:*** You’ve never been shot at?

***Lafayette:*** No. My wife offered one time.

***Deane:*** You have never shot at anyone?

***Lafayette:*** No.

***Deane:*** You understand that a major general is only a notch below the commander-in-chief, only General Washington carries a rank higher.

***Lafayette:*** Yes. (Deane walks to the credenza and refills his drink. Takes a draught.) But I will bring attention to the cause, and you will find no one with more enthusiasm for the cause.

***Deane:*** (Looks at DeKalb and Carmichael, hesitant. Returns to his desk.) How much money?

***Lafayette:*** Sir? (At first not understanding.)

***Deane:*** Your pay. How much money are you asking for?

***Lafayette:*** Pay?

***Deane:*** Yes, yes. Your salary.

***Lafayette:*** None.

***Deane:*** (Stunned.) None?

***Lafayette:*** None. I’ll serve at my own expense.

***Deane:*** (Looks at Carmichael, eye arched, smiles.) DeKalb leaves for LeHavre tomorrow to register, board, and sail. Can you join him?

***Lafayette:*** First, I’ll report my good fortune to my father-in-law the Duc d’Ayen. I’ll catch up.

***Deane***: DeKalb. I remind you control your men. If they are indiscreet, if they boast too much, Lord Stormont will complain.

***DeKalb:*** I know. And Maurepas will be obliged to refuse registry.

***Deane:*** Not just registry. He could order an embargo on all officers going to America.

***DeKalb:*** Understood.

***Deane:*** As for you, my young friend, for your commission. DeKalb, come. Sit. Transcribe the contract. The Marquis de Lafayette is commissioned a Major General in the Continental Army. December 7, 1776. And right here, add (Points to place on contract) “without pay.” (Deane and Lafayette shake hands.)

(Lights dim.)