Scene Fourteen

(April 3, 1777, at Bordeaux, office of Commandant M. de Fumel. Lafayette and Fumel are present, the one pacing, the other calmly at his desk, fingering papers. Congolais on the credenza. Mid-afternoon.)

***Fumel:*** Why are you here?

***Lafayette:*** I have orders. (Waves the orders.)

***Fumel:*** Those. I’ve seen those. I don’t know what they are. Give them here. Let me look at them again. (Takes the orders. Looks them over.)

***Lafayette:*** Grant me two weeks’ leave.

***Fumel:*** I was not mistaken. What I remember is what I read. Confined to the company of your in-laws. Your offense must be beyond imagination.

***Lafayette:*** You think it’s funny.

***Fumel:*** No. On the contrary. I think it’s hilarious. Whatever your transgression, Naples is a great place to serve punishment. You’ve been ordered to the beach.

***Lafayette:*** I’m embarrassed.

***Fumel:*** You should be. Meet your aunt, her husband, and your father-in-law April 15, at Marseilles, for a holiday to Italy. Is this punishment? What is this?

***Lafayette:*** I know, I know. Give me two weeks’ leave.

***Fumel:*** Humor me. Satisfy my curiosity. Is it true your plan all along has been to go to America to fight the English?

***Lafayette:*** (Hesitates to incriminate himself, then gives way.) It’s true. With insurgents to fight for their independence.

***Fumel:*** The platitude may elevate the purpose but at bottom it’s America, to fight. How can France find fault with that? The King himself must smile.

***Lafayette:*** Unless I attract too much attention.

***Fumel:*** What of it? That’s what heroes do, attract a lot of attention.

***Lafayette:*** But then Lord Stormont objects. Prime Minister Maurepas replies. I get caught in the middle.

***Fumel:*** I see. That accounts for your embarkation registry and “Gilbert du Motier.”

***Lafayette:*** To avoid attention.

***Fumel:*** But blonde? Tall?

***Lafayette:*** (Shrugs his shoulders.) It’s how I look to myself in the dark…please give me two weeks’ leave.

***Fumel:*** What for? This (waving the orders toward him) amounts to the same thing. Some officers I know boast about how they survived time in jail; you’ll be able to boast about you survived spending time with your in-laws.

***Lafayette:*** I know the Duc d’Ayen is behind this. From the first he’s been against my plans.

***Fumel:*** (Looks and points to the orders.) He can’t very well be too fired up against them. This is his battle cry.

***Lafayette:*** Well, he is. That’s Prime Minister Maurepas. (Pointing to the orders.)

***Fumel:*** So this is Maurepas, deflecting public opinion, but answering to your father-in-law’s demand to put a harness on you.

***Lafayette:*** I can persuade him to change his mind. Give me two weeks to go to Paris.

***Fumel:*** You go to Paris and you won’t be back. The Duc d’Ayen…

***Lafayette:*** I can convince him.

***Fumel:*** Of what? Tell me, convince him of what?

***Lafayette:*** Well…

***Fumel:*** (Arches eyebrows.) That won’t go far.

***Lafayette:*** America and independence…

***Fumel:*** He doesn’t care about America…He has no reason to care.

***Lafayette:*** Well…

***Fumel:*** We’ve been there before.

***Lafayette:*** It’s my chance to show courage.

***Fumel:*** It’s your chance to show foolishness. England is invincible and America will do nothing. The only question is how big a thud it will make.

***Lafayette:*** (Tries again.) The Duc d’Ayen will understand the value of…

***Fumel:*** No, he won’t.

***Lafayette:*** (Silence.) I suspected as much, that you wouldn’t permit my leave. May I send this letter to Prime Minister Maurepas? (Hands letter to Fumel)

***Fumel:*** (Takes the letter. Reads it.) Contrite. Apologetic. Sorry for the misdirection. (Reads on.) There it is; I was looking for it. “Please rescind my orders to Marseilles.” (Reads on. Walks about as he reads.) I don’t see where you agree to forsake the whole thing.

***Lafayette:*** (Silence.)

***Fumel:*** Fine. Send it. (Gives the letter back.)

***Lafayette:*** You don’t approve.

***Fumel:*** (Moment’s hesitation.) Why should it matter whether or not I approve?

***Lafayette:*** I just thought…I don’t know.

***Fumel:*** (Ruminating.) Why did you go to Spain?

***Lafayette:*** I thought we were likely to get caught if we stayed in France.

***Fumel:*** Why not just sail on to America?

***Lafayette:*** I couldn’t.

***Fumel:*** Why?

***Lafayette:*** The Duc d’Ayen.

***Fumel:*** (Stares. Nods as though he understands.) You want his approval. No. No. I am amended. You must have his approval. This is personal for you. More than some grandiose sense of filial piety. It has nothing to do with money or maturity or anything else.

***Lafayette:*** If I can see him, I can convince him. Spain was time to think, maybe for both of us.

***Fumel:*** I am not getting in the middle. You have your orders. I expect you to do your duty.

***Lafayette:*** I’ll wait here in Bordeaux until I get a reply. (Waves the letter he intends to send.)

***Fumel:*** Suit yourself. But if you fail to show at Marseilles by April 15, I will sign the warrant for your arrest myself. Here is your passport. Exit the East gate to get to Marseilles. Try to go through any other gate and you’ll be brought back to me. (Gives the passport to Lafayette.)

***Lafayette:*** (Turns to exit, gets to the door.)

***Fumel:*** Go home. Do what you’re told. You don’t have it in you to do anything else.

(Lights dim.)