Scene Nine

(Prime Minister Maurepas sits at desk stage left. He is reading a letter. Jean-Frederic Phelypeaux, Count of Maurepas [July 9, 1701-November 21, 1781] is 75 years old, 170 pounds, 5’8” with dimpled chin, straight nose, full lips unflustered, dressed in official regalia, long locks of a white wig, blue sash of office across his chest. Duc d’Ayen paces deliberately as Maurepas reads the letter.)

***Maurepas:*** (Smiling.) He bought a ship. (Pause.) “The Victory.” It’s incredible. Isn’t this something! My word! (He’s impressed. Continues to read.)

***Duc:*** It’s a disgrace, that’s what it is. There’s more. It gets worse.

***Maurepas:*** Major general. In the Continental Army. (Impressed. Still reading.)

***Duc:*** I can’t believe…(Pacing. Fuming.)

***Maurepas:*** (Still reading.) To fight in America. With Americans. For their independence.

***Duc:*** He must be stopped. (Firmly. Adamantly.)

***Maurepas:*** (Lays down the letter.) Why?

***Duc:*** Why? That’s a stupid question and if you’re serious someone else can easily occupy that chair.

***Maurepas:*** (Shrugs his shoulders.) He goes to America. He irritates the English. I’m pleased. Anytime anyone irritates the English.

***Duc:*** You are serious! You idiot! He’s a French officer! He leads other French officers in this…Whatever it is you call it!

***Maurepas:*** A thrilling adventure. (Said plainly, deliberately.) That’s what I’d call it.

***Duc:*** He leaves a wife. A child. A child on the way…He leaves against my orders…and you call it a thrilling adventure? You are an imbecile!

***Maurepas:*** Is that why you’re here? Is that what this is about? Your son-in-law defied you?

***Duc:*** Don’t turn this on me! He’s a Marquis. He’s not some unknown street urchin. He embarrasses France. If you can’t help, the King can.

***Maurepas:*** (Picks letter back up.) Hold on, hold on. He says here he does it…so you will be proud of him. (Said quietly. Admiringly.)

***Duc:*** Foolishness. It means nothing. We need to act quickly. (Pause.) I don’t have much time.

***Maurepas:*** (Looks at him quizzically.) You don’t have much time? Are you ill?

***Duc:*** No, no. I’m to go to Italy. On holiday. I haven’t much time to get ready.

***Maurepas:*** (Arching his eye.) I see.

***Duc:*** Don’t be so condescending. I needn’t take this from you. It’s been in the works. My sister and her husband…we’ve had plans for a long time.

***Maurepas:*** Duc d’Ayen, with all due respect, what would you have me do?

***Duc:*** You’re the Prime Minister. Arrest him.

***Maurepas:*** Arrest him? On what charge?

***Duc:*** Since when do you need a charge? You don’t need a charge. A few days in the Bastille. Just do it!

***Maurepas:*** The Bastille?

***Duc:*** You’re right. Even that’s too good for him, but it’s the best we have at the moment.

***Maurepas:*** (Ponders.) You know, of course, your son-in-law is famous.

***Duc:*** I don’t care. It doesn’t matter.

***Maurepas:*** All Paris knows about him. People applaud him. Fighting with insurgents. They love it.

***Duc:*** What of it? So what?

***Maurepas:*** (Shakes his head.) We are in a new day. There was a time…not that long past…but it’s changing as we speak…there was a time the prime minister could arrest anybody for anything, or as you say, for no reason at all. It’s not so simple now. People question. People will have their say.

***Duc:*** This has nothing to do with Lafayette.

***Maurepas:*** It has everything to do with Lafayette. Lafayette is an original. Paris is in love with him. It gossips about him. Salons can’t get enough of him. If I arrest him, Paris comes down on my head. The people are part of the equation. We can’t just arrest him.

***Duc:*** (Points an accusatory finger.) Maurepas! You stop him. I don’t care how.

***Maurepas:*** Yes, sir, I’ll stop him. But not because he’s a disgrace or because he’s an embarrassment. Lord Stormont. He watches. France is neutral, at least officially, over this dogfight in America. Stormont will cause trouble if he thinks I am behind Lafayette’s adventure. So, yes, I’ll stop him.

***Duc:*** What then? You want to stop him for Stormont. But there again, you can’t stop him, because of the people.

***Maurepas:*** Let me think…When do you go to Italy?

***Duc:*** April 15th. What’s that got to do with it?

***Maurepas:*** And with whom are you going?

***Duc:*** I don’t see…that has nothing…

***Maurepas:*** Humor me.

***Duc:*** My sister and her husband, the Comte de Tesse. We meet at Marseilles, April 15th, then to Italy.

***Maurepas:*** Italy is quite the playground. Here’s what we do. His letter says he’s in Bordeaux. I’ll dispatch orders. I’ll order him to quit his scheme and I’ll order him to join you and your party on April 15th at Marseilles. And he is to accompany you on your trip to Italy.

***Duc:*** How will the courier find him at Bordeaux? He could be anywhere.

***Maurepas:*** The courier can find his ship. “The Victory.” It’ll be on the Garonne River at anchor.

***Duc:*** And if he has already sailed, what then?

***Maurepas:*** The commandant. M. de Fumel. He knows everything. Whatever moves at the Port of Bordeaux he knows about. If the courier can’t deliver the orders into Lafayette’s hand, he’ll take them to Fumel. Fumel can take it from there.

***Duc:*** Can you trust Fumel?

***Maurepas:*** Fumel is ambitious. He’ll do what he’s told.

***Duc:*** This better work!

***Maurepas:*** It will work. Lafayette won’t disobey a direct order. (Said wistfully.)

***Duc:*** Your heart isn’t in it, I can tell, and I don’t care.

***Maurepas:*** My heart doesn’t matter. But you’re right. I’ll write the orders, but they do not represent my wishes. Lafayette has imagination. He writes his own verse. It’s a pity. He wants your blessing to play the tune.

***Duc:*** Spare me your literary allusions. He’s misguided. He needs my permission to do this wild thing and he doesn’t have it. You send that courier with those orders today, do you hear me?

***Maurepas:*** Yes, sir. Today. I’ll send the orders today.

***Duc:*** It won’t be soon enough for me. (Exits in a huff.)

***Maurepas:*** It is a pity.

(Lights dim.)