Scene Seventeen

(April 12, 1777, Saturday, in Lafayette’s room at Bordeaux. Vicomte de Mauroy has arrived, removed his boots and is washing his face. Window upstage right. Beneath the window is a stand with a bowl and a pitcher of water, for freshening up. Mauroy has dropped his traveling bag on the floor to the right of the stand. A door is downstage right. Writing desk is centerstage, chair on its upstage side. Lafayette is writing a letter, obviously very involved in in its content. His coat is on the back of his chair. Credenza is at the back wall with three drawers, two with clothing and the third with papers. Centerstage right is a small breakfast table with two chairs, both facing the audience and on the upstage side of the table. The table has butter and biscuits and coffee pot with cups. The biscuits are hard. Lafayette’s travel bag is on the desk, left side facing the audience, and on the right corner is Horace’s “Odes.” Next to the “Odes” is a statuette of Vercingetorix (a king from a chess set serves) and next to this a small chess set with pieces deployed.) Mauroy and Lafayette are both in military uniforms. Mauroy has taken his jacket off, put it on the back of one of the chairs at the breakfast table where he had removed his boots.)

***Mauroy:*** (Looks out the window. Pours water into the wash basin.) Bordeaux is pleasant in spring. (Wets his face with water, drys it with the towel lying left of the bowl.) I’m saddle sore. Three days in the saddle will do it. (Lafayette writes, thoughtfully. He gets up, goes to the credenza and empties the first drawer; puts its content of shirts and socks into his bag, then sits down to write again. Mauroy sits down at the breakfast table, puts his boots back on, all the while watching Lafayette. He takes a biscuit, bites on it only to discover it hard as a rock. He pounds it on the table, puts it back. Lafayette goes back to credenza, opens second drawyer. Mauroy mischievously lays Vercingetorix horizontally. Lafayette puts content of second drawyer in his bag, uprights the horizontal statuette, sits back down and adds to his letter. He gets up a third time and goes to the third drawer and empties it, while Mauroy horizontals Vercingetorix. Lafayette emties the papers from the third drawer into his bag, sits down, notices Vercingetorix and absently sets him upright, then returns to writing.)

***Mauroy:*** Who is that? (Points to Vercingetorix.)

***Lafayette:*** Vercingetorix.

***Mauroy:*** I thought maybe Caesar.

***Lafayette:*** (Looks straight at Mauroy.) No.

***Mauroy:*** (Picks up Horace’s “The Odes.”) What’s this?

***Lafayette:*** Horace. (Paying only passing attention to Mauroy.)

***Mauroy:*** What are you doing?

***Lafayette:*** (Gotten up from his chair, starts loading the chessmen into a wooden box.) Packing. I’m leaving today.

***Mauroy:*** I caught up with you just in time, then.

***Lafayette:*** I have orders. (Continues putting chessmen in box.)

***Mauroy:*** I know about…(Lafayette holds up his hand, asking in effect for Mauroy to hold his thought, records his own thought at that moment in his letter, then back to packing chessmen as Mauroy is watching.)

***Lafayette:*** You were saying…

***Mauroy:*** I know about your orders.

***Lafayette:*** Then you know I don’t have much time. I’ve been here for over a week. I hoped Maurepas would rescind the orders, but I have heard nothing. (Sits back in his chair thinking as Mauroy watches.)

***Mauroy:*** Have you ever disobeyed an order?

***Lafayette:*** (Lafayette stops and intentionally catches Mauroy’s eye.) I have never disobeyed an order, but…(Mauroy interrupts.)

***Mauroy:*** Broglie has a message for you, and so does Carmichael. Come and sit down. (Motions for Lafayette to come to the breakfast table.) Your bobbing up and down has worn me out. (Mauroy stands at breakfast table waiting for Lafayette who has stopped to add to his letter, then joins Mauroy. Both sit, Lafayette pours coffee.)

***Lafayette:*** Broglie knows?

***Mauroy:*** April 15th.

***Lafayette:*** Marseilles.

***Mauroy:*** The Duc d’Ayen and Italy.

***Lafayette:*** I need to leave today, soon. (Sips his coffee.)

***Mauroy:*** (Stands, walks to window.) Broglie says no.

***Lafayette:*** No?

***Mauroy:*** Broglie says that if you leave for Marseilles…

***Lafayette:*** (Interrupts.) But I’m not leaving for Marseilles.

***Mauroy:*** (Sits back down.) You said you’d never disobey an order.

***Lafayette:*** You interrupted. I said, “I have never disobeyed an order, but,” and you didn’t let me get the ‘but’ part out.

***Mauroy:*** Go ahead. Get the ‘But’ part out.

***Lafayette:*** “But” this is different.

***Mauroy:*** What does that mean?

***Lafayette:*** (Stands and walks to the chair behind his desk, puts on the coat draped over the chair, and uses the chair as a rostrum.) It means I’m leaving for my ship, and it is my ship, “The Victory,” at Los Pasajes. These last ten days everything became clear. Stories make a difference. Those stories grandmother Catherine told me, they were tilling the soil. Then came the books. Books make a difference. I thought it was about Latin, but it was about the ideas. The fertility of the soil comes from the ideas. Then comes the planting of the seed. America is the seed…independence, liberty, equality, justice.

***Mauroy:*** This isn’t new. You’ve known this all along. What makes now different?

***Lafayette:*** (Walks to the window; Mauroy gets up with coffee in hand, walks across the stage, then faces upstage to Lafayette; Lafayette turns to face him.) Let me tell you what I had to come to understand. The seed must be tended. Or it doesn’t grow. One must make a decision to tend it, despite the odds, despite rebukes…even in the face of orders telling you not to do it. You must take a stand, and sometimes you stand alone.

***Mauroy:*** (Picks up book on the edge of writing desk.) What does Horace have to do with it?

***Lafayette:*** Book I of the “Odes.” I’m a Latin scholar you know. (In mock seriousness.)

***Mauroy:*** I know, I know. (Waves it off.)

***Lafayette:*** My motto is “Cur Non? It occurred to me that I had to make the decision to embrace my destiny. No one else could do it. Horace validated my motto.

***Mauroy:*** So you never intended to go to Marseilles?

***Lafayette:*** I did. At first. But undistracted moments gave me clarity. I had to have time to unclutter my thinking. These ten days did that.

***Mauroy:*** This is an order you will disobey?

***Lafayette:*** (Lafayette picks up the letter he has been writing. Gives it to Mauroy, who reads silently.) I will. I must. I’ve written the Prime Minister to tell him so. I’m certain he will share it with the Duc d’Ayen.

***Maurepas:*** I like this. (Pointing to the letter and a specific paragraph.) I can tell you think chess. You say here that since you received no reply about your request to rescind your orders, silence grants consent to the request. Clever.

***Lafayette:*** The argument, I admit, is not tight, but sufficient to the purpose.

***Mauroy:*** Broglie would approve.

***Lafayette:*** You never told me. What was Broglie’s message?

***Mauroy:*** It really doesn’t matter now, but he said to follow your destiny. And what of the Duc d’Ayen?

***Lafayette:*** The hardest…Sailing to Spain, coming here to Bordeaux. It was all about my father-in-law. It’s true. DeKalb was right. I needed his approval. I wanted his respect. I wanted him to confirm what I had already decided. I now know that it will not happen. He will not give me his approval. His respect I must earn. If I remain under heel I’ll never have the chance to earn it.

***Mauroy:*** Horace? Does that lesson come from Horace?

***Lafayette:*** Vercingetorix. The greatest warrior of them all. Caesar massed his legions and invaded. Gallic tribes were fierce, but divided. Vercingetorix was told by the elders in his council that the tribes would never unite, that he shouldn’t even try. But he knew that only a united Gaul stood a chance against Caesar’s power. Vercingetorix united them. They met Caesar at the battle of Gergovia. The Gauls won. Vercingetorix followed his destiny. He is the first hero of France.

***Mauroy:*** So you are satisfied, without the Duc d’Ayen’s approval? (Returns the letter.)

***Lafayette:*** Reconciled. And what did Carmichael say? You said he sent a message.

***Mauroy:*** (Thinks about whether or not to go into detail, decides not.) Broglie said to follow your destiny. Carmichael said to tell you your destiny is in America.

***Lafayette:*** That seals it. Are you coming? (Puts Horace and Vercingetorix into his travel bag.)

***Mauroy:*** Of course. Let’s take precaution, just in case a warrant is out for you. Change into this courier’s dress. (From his bag he retrieves a drab brown shirt and pants.) You are at risk. I’ll ride in carriage, you on horseback. I’ll follow some distance behind so I can come to rescue if needed. We need to hurry. The west gate bolts at sundown.

***Lafayette:*** (Retrieves his passport, reads it.) The west gate is a problem. My passport. (Hands Mauroy his passport.)

***Mauroy:*** Fumel stamped it. Marseilles, east gate only.

***Lafayette:*** What now.

***Mauroy:*** It’ll just take longer. We’ll take carriage through the east gate, then double back around Bordeaux and on to Bayonne, St. Jean-de-Luz, San Sebastian, and Los Pasajes. Here, put this in your bag. (Gives Lafayette the courier’s outfit.) You can change after we pass through the gate. (Both complete packing.)

(Lights dim.)