Scene Six

(March 16, 1777, at Chaillot, just west of Paris. First floor, gardener’s quarters. Window upstage right. Door downstage right. Credenza left wall. Pierre de Basmarein staring out the window at the gardener. Basmarein is 45 years old, 5’7” and 200 pounds, stocky and blunt. He walks as though each leg is a tree planted. He is business-like but reflective. Dining table centerstage, DeKalb on right and William Carmichael on left, playing chess.)

***DeKalb:*** How can you do this? (Accusatory, speaking to Basmarein.)

***Basmarein:*** I’m a businessman.

***DeKalb:*** You lie. You cheat.

***Carmichael:*** DeKalb. Enough. (Firmly, not angrily.)

***DeKalb:*** Carmichael. This isn’t right.

***Basmarein:*** My investors. They want money. In hand.

***DeKalb:*** You’re president of the company!

***Basmarein:*** Everybody answers to somebody.

***Carmichael:*** Thirteen officers are ready to load. Surely your investors…

***Basmarein:*** My investors want returns now. They say…

***DeKalb:*** They say, they say…What do you say? It’s not them. It’s you!

***Basmarein:*** This is a risky deal. Chances are that ship will never make it to America.

***Carmichael:*** Why? Why do you say that?

***Basmarein:*** It’s a merchant ship. It carries flour, potatoes. It’s 220 tons of floating target. It can’t outrun a barge, much less an English man-o-war. Heaven help you. Two canons. What good are they?

***Carmichael:*** You said Captain Boursier had experience.

***Basmarein:*** Sure. He has experience lumbering across the Atlantic. He knows nothing of how to parry cannonballs. The thirty men in the crew are no better. They’re like all the rest, out for themselves.

***DeKalb:*** I’ll take care of the English. You live up to your end of the deal.

***Basmarein:*** Two feet on land. You talk big. Put your ugly face in mid-ocean, no land in sight…then we see.

***Carmichael:*** (Thoughtful.) You command the largest shipyard in all France. This ship…”The Victory”…

***Basmarein:*** “Le Bon Mere.” The vessel is “Le Bon Mere.”

***Carmichael:*** Lafayette renamed it. He calls it “The Victory.” This is trifling to your company. Why, now, are you demanding 100,000 livres? Why full payment? You know it’s impossible.

***DeKalb:*** Because you are a money-grubbing…

***Basmarein:*** It’s 112,000 livres.

***DeKalb:*** See! What did I say? You can’t be trusted.

***Carmichael:*** DeKalb. (Waving him down. Then turning back to Basmarein.) There is more. You are holding back. You didn’t hesitate at first. (Thoughtful.) Lafayette proposed 40,000 livres now. The rest of the 112,000 livres by June, three months. You knew what Lafayette was about. You knew…Lafayette could not collect 112,000 livres at once…that payment would be piecemeal…Lieutenant Duboismartin made it clear. What’s changed?

***Basmarein:*** (Staring out the window.) I admire your gardener.

***DeKalb:*** What has the gardener to do with anything?

***Basmarein:*** He tends the leaves. The stalk. The soil. He creates something magnificent.

***DeKalb:*** (Steps to the window.) He’s planting flowers. That’s all.

***Basmarein:*** (Turns back to Carmichael.) The Duc d’Ayen.

***Carmichael:*** What about him?

***Basmarein:*** Word has it…he opposes this mission…he hates Lafayette…he will destroy…(Hesitant.) anyone giving sympathy to Lafayette…will be destroyed…will wake to find themselves in the Bastille.

***Lafayette:*** (Walks in. Stands, surveying.)

***DeKalb:*** (Turns, stands facing Lafayette.) We’ve been waiting for you. Where have you been?

***Lafayette:*** (Steps inside. Broad smile. Upbeat.) My friend, DeKalb. Today is the most glorious day of my life. (Kisses DeKalb on both cheeks.) I can’t believe my good fortune. Let’s dance. (Takes DeKalb as though to dance. DeKalb is implacable. Stands fast.)

***DeKalb:*** You can’t dance.

***Carmichael:*** Lafayette. We have business. You’re late.

***Lafayette:*** (Playful formality.) William Carmichael, I’ll tell you. I was so happy…today DeKalb and I leave for Bordeaux to board my ship…”The Victory”…good sound to it…for America. I was about to burst. I had to tell somebody.

***Carmichael:*** You didn’t go to Adrienne, did you?

***Lafayette:*** No, no, no, no. Seeing Adrienne, little Henriette…I would have lost all resolve.

***Carmichael:*** Who then?

***Lafayette:*** My good friend Noailles. Still dark, this morning, I went to his apartment. I opened the door. I closed it quietly. He was still in bed. Asleep. I got this close to his face. His eyes closed. (He walks to DeKalb and stands nose-to-nose to show how close.) He looked so…peaceful. Then I poked him. (Pokes DeKalb.) He opened his eyes to look straight into mine. Scared us both. I told him the story. Lieutenant Duboismartin. Bordeaux. “The Victory.” America. Do you know what he said? At first he couldn’t speak. I said, “Come with me.” He said he couldn’t. Then he said. “I wish I were more like you.” (Silence. Quietly.) Then I left. I always thought I wanted to be him. Now he wants to be me.

***Carmichael:*** Lafayette…this is Pierre Basmarein. President of Recules de Basmarein et Raimbaux of Bordeaux.

***Lafayette:*** (Strides purposefully to Basmarein. Kisses him on both cheeks. Shakes his hand enthusiastically.) I know you. DeKalb’s letters. If not for you…I am grateful. I have been away, in London. I met King George III, himself.

***Carmichael:*** He has news. Bad news. (Silence.)

***Lafayette:*** My friend. What news? (Addressing Basmarein.)

***Basmarein:*** My investors. They worry.

***Lafayette:*** They’ll be paid. I promise. Today I have 40,000 livres. The rest…you will have by June. Lieutenant Duboismartin told DeKlab. DeKalb sent word to me in London. He said we had a deal. I hurried back. Was this not our arrangement?

***Basmarein:*** My investors want full payment now.

***DeKalb:*** You gave your word. (To Basmarein.)

***Basmarein:*** This is business.

***DeKalb:*** Stop it. You do what you want to do and you call it business. This makes it right? You are evil.

***Carmichael:*** DeKalb. Enough.

***DeKalb:*** You have no honor. (To Basmarein.) I can’t take this. I’ll be outside. (Storms out.)

***Lafayette:*** Basmarein. Did I misunderstand our agreement?

***Basmarein:*** No. No, you didn’t. Circumstances have changed.

***Lafayette:*** I don’t understand.

***Basmarein:*** You are nineteen. My investors…

***Lafayette:*** I may be young, but I keep wise company.

***Basmarein:*** Experience…

***Lafayette:*** Too much, or too little? (Silence.) There is more. What is it? (Basmarein looks to Carmichael.)

***Carmichael:*** I’ll tell you. The Duc d’Ayen. He’s worried that your father-in-law will put us all in chains. That “The Victory” will be confiscated.

***Basmarein:*** He can do it. You know he can. Even Prime Minister Maurepas fears him. Some say he has more power than the King.

***Lafayette:*** I see.

***Basmarein:*** So. My investors…(Hesitates.)

***Lafayette:*** You are honorable. You have a good reputation. All I know of you speaks highly…May we talk honestly? May you and I agree to dispense with the conceit of “investors”?

***Basmarein:*** But I…(Hesitates. Looks at Carmichael, then back to Lafayette.) Yes. Let us talk honestly.

***Lafayette:*** You know I am good for payment. I just cannot pay the whole now.

***Basmarein:*** That is part of the problem. You don’t have control of your own accounts. The Duc d’Ayen does. Until your majority, until you’re twenty-five.

***Lafayette:*** True. My access to cash accounts are limited. But, I have land. Friends will loan against the land. You will be paid. Carmichael here will see to it.

***Basmarein:*** (Hesitant.) I don’t know…

***Lafayette:*** Come. Sit. (Basmarein sits at table, across from Lafayette.) The last time I saw the Duc d’Ayen…Do you know what he said to me?

***Basmarein:*** (Shrugs his shoulders.)

***Lafayette:*** He said, “You will never amount to anything.” (Thoughtfully.) He wasn’t being malicious. He was honest. It is what he feels in his heart to be true…I have thought a lot about it. Do you know what I have decided?

***Basmarein:*** (Shrugs his shoulders again.)

***Lafayette:*** (Looks to Carmichael.) Carmichael, do you?

***Carmichael:*** Yes. I do know what you have decided.

***Lafayette:*** (Talking to Basmarein.) This is my great friend. (Indicating Carmichael.) We think alike.

***Basmarein:*** What have you decided?

***Lafayette:*** Do you know. Stars are there for everyone to see. It takes but an undistracted moment. You can lasso a star with an undistracted moment. Dreams are in those stars. But people don’t give them the undistracted moment they deserve, or if they do they give up…unwilling to commit what it takes to make the dream real…unwilling to walk to the edge. This, what we are about today…is not about power…it’s not money…it’s about doing something grand and worthy. Something beyond self. Here we are. The chance to be on the side of something bigger than me and you…to be on the side of liberty, equality, and justice. Somebody told me not long ago those were empty words and I thought about that…empty if we don’t make them real. This is a chance to fight for people and their independence. That’s what’s at stake. This is more than a business deal. You are the in the breech…I need you. This grand adventure evaporates without “The Victory.” You are president of a big company. This is of little moment to your company. I am asking you to take risk. To step to the edge with me.

***Basmarein:*** Your dreams are abstractions. Do you understand what you are putting at risk?

***Lafayette:*** What? My wealth? My rank?

***Basmarein:*** You could lose it all.

***Lafayette:*** If you take my ship from me, I will have my wealth and my rank, but I will have lost it all.

***Basmarein:*** (Gets up. Walks to the window.) The gardener is still there.

***Lafayette:*** (Stands beside Basmarein.) He tills. He plants the seed. He nurtures the soil. He watches over it as it grows. He takes risk every day in hope that his dream grows. It is a wonderful abstraction.

***Basmarein:*** (Turns to Lafayette.) 40,000 today?

***Lafayette:*** Carmichael will deliver it.

***Basmarein:*** The rest in June?

***Lafayette:*** Carmichael will deliver it.

***Basmarein:*** (Walks to Lafayette.) You leave for Bordeaux today?

***Lafayette:*** Immediately.

***Basmarein:*** Your ship will be ready when you arrive.

***Lafayette:*** Perfect. We’ll board as soon as we arrive. The sooner we’re on the water, the less chance we’re delayed.

***Basmarein:*** Good luck to you. (Shakes Lafayette’s hand.)

***Lafayette:*** Please make amends with DeKalb as you leave. He is impossible to deal with when he is surly.

***Basmarein:*** I suspect he’s impossible to deal with even when he’s not. (Exits.)

***Carmichael:*** (Pours two tumblers of madeira. Gives one to Lafayette.) Masterful. You are learning.

***Lafayette:*** I meant every word.

***Carmichael:*** Of that I had no doubt.

***Lafayette:*** DeKalb and I will leave by carriage. Here is a letter to the Duc d’Ayen. It explains everything. And this to Adrienne. (Gives Carmichael each letter in turn.) Will you arrange to have them delivered?

***Carmichael:*** They’ll have them in hand tomorrow at latest.

***Lafayette:*** DeKalb and I will be on high seas before anyone is the wiser. I truly think my father-in-law will come around. I am convinced Papa will bless this undertaking. I know I will not be forced to leave France without his consent.

***Carmichael:*** Take no chances. Sail as soon as you reach Bordeaux.

***Lafayette:*** I cannot believe my good fortune. (Exits.)

***Carmichael:*** (Looking after him.) My friend. You’ll need all the good fortune you can muster.

(Lights dim.)