Scene Three

(Hotel de Noailles, Paris, Duc d’Ayen’s study, mid-morning. Door downstage right. Credenza at wall upstage with madeira and tumblers. Above is a map of the Atlantic. Work desk centerstage, two high backed chairs in front of it downstage. Bust of Caesar and statuette of Genitor on the desk. Alluded to is Joan of Arc [1412-May 30, 1431] who was at the Siege of Orleans 1428 and subsequently burned at the stake. Lafayette’s education was a classical one and would have included studies of Plato [428-348 B.C.E.], Aristotle [384-322 B.C.E.], Plutarch [46-119], Aeschylus [525-456 B.C.E.], Sophocles [497-406 B.C.E.], Euripides [480-406 B.C.E.], Thucydides [460-400 B.C.E.], Herodotus [484-425 B.C.E.], Epictetus [55-135], Tacitus [56-120], Marcus Aurelius [121-180], and Horace [December 8, 65 B.C.E.-November 8, 27 B.C.E.].)

***Noailles:*** (Knocks, opens door. Looks about. Strides in.) Not here.

***Lafayette:*** Maybe we…(Hesitates at the doorway, timid.)

***Noailles:*** C’mon. (Taunting.) Afraid?

***Lafayette:*** It’s just that…

***Noailles:*** Nice. (Surveys the room. Strides to madeira. Pours himself a tumbler.)

***Lafayette:*** (Looks at Noailles.) Bad idea.

***Noailles:*** The ole man won’t mind. (Pause.) Remember, I’ll do the talking. He likes me.

***Lafayette:*** Can’t I…

***Noailles***: (Offhand.) He doesn’t like you.

***Lafayette:*** How are you so sure?

***Noailles:*** Same as you.

***Lafayette:*** He doesn’t know me.

***Noailles:*** I know you and I don’t like you. (Lafayette sneers. Noailles looks at Lafayette and smiles.)

***Lafayette:*** Why does he…

***Noailles:*** Look. It doesn’t matter. Whether he likes you or not does not matter.

***Lafayette:*** (Pause. Thoughtful. Quietly.) Matters to me.

***Noailles:*** What?

***Lafayette:*** (More forcefully.) Matters to me.

***Noailles:*** Well. Your problem. It’s not like he’s going to exchange you.

***Lafayette:*** He would if he could.

***Noailles:*** True. But the market is meager for a used marquis. (Said with drama.)

***Lafayette:*** Thanks.

***Noailles:*** Besides, Adrienne might object.

***Lafayette:*** I mean…you…(Fumbling.)

***Noailles:*** The ole man’ll keep you around. You have a baby coming. Well. You don’t. Adrienne does. (Pauses.) Besides, you’re rich.

***Lafayette:*** I’m good for something.

***Noailles:*** You know what your problem is?

***Lafayette:*** Can’t wait.

***Noailles:*** Self-confidence.

***Lafayette:*** But I…

***Noailles:*** It’s understandable. You can’t dance. You can’t hold liquor. Come to think of it, you’re justified in your absence of self-confidence.

***Lafayette:*** You’re great help.

***Noailles:*** I try. I drink. I gamble. It’s all for you. To show how it’s done.

***Lafayette:*** He wants me to be you.

***Noailles:*** (Looks at Lafayette.) Can you blame him?

***Lafayette:*** (To himself.) It won’t happen.

***Noailles:*** What? Speak up!

***Lafayette:*** Nothing.

***Noailles:*** (Looking at the map.) Are you sure?

***Lafayette:*** What?

***Noailles:*** This…(Points to America on the map.)

***Lafayette:*** What about it?

***Noailles:*** Long way from home.

***Lafayette:*** I know.

***Noailles:*** Lots of water from here to there.

***Lafayette:*** You backing out?

***Noailles:*** Me? No. Course not. (Looks at statuette.)

***Lafayette:*** Do you think…maybe we should come later.

***Noailles:*** (Paying no mind. Pointing to the bust of Caesar and the statuette of Genitor.) Nice work.

***Lafayette:*** Caesar and Genitor.

***Noailles:*** Sure. But do you know which is which?

***Lafayette:*** (Waves him off.) Papa thinks Caesar warrior of all warriors.

***Noailles:*** Me, too.

***Lafayette:*** Really?

***Noailles:*** Sure. I mean, don’t you?

***Lafayette:*** No. No, I don’t.

***Noailles:*** See? See what I mean? (Incredulous.)

***Lafayette:*** What? What’d I say?

***Noailles:*** Listen. It doesn’t matter.

***Lafayette:*** What? I don’t know what you’re talking about.

***Noailles:*** Who the best is. Caesar, Alexander. I don’t care. If Papa thinks it’s Caesar, it’s Caesar. Get it?

***Lafayette:*** No.

***Noailles:*** I’ll do the talking.

***Lafayette:*** Caesar was a pompous, power hungry…

***Noailles:*** Exactly. That’s exactly why I’ll do all the talking. (Pause.) Are you sure you want to go through with this?

***Lafayette:*** (Firmly.) Yes. Do you think…(Hesitant.)

***Noailles:*** He’ll give us permission. He likes me.

***Lafayette:*** What if he doesn’t?

***Noailles:*** What if he doesn’t like me?

***Lafayette:*** No.

***Noailles:*** (Distractedly.) What do you mean?

***Lafayette:*** We need his blessing to go to America.

***Noailles:*** We’ll need commissions, too. Broglie says he’ll handle that.

***Lafayette:*** Papa. What if he refuses?

***Noailles:*** (Stops. Thinks. Seriously.) That’s the end of it. It’s over.

***Lafayette:*** Just like that?

***Noailles:*** Just like that.

***Lafayette:*** Why?

***Noailles:*** Why? How dumb…He’s the Duc d’Ayen. He gets what he wants.

***Lafayette:*** I just thought…

***Noailles:*** No. No, you didn’t think. Papa knows everyone. The Prime Minister. The Foreign Minister. The King.

***Lafayette:*** But…

***Noailles:*** It’s how it is. Until you and I are twenty-five, Papa makes the calls.

***Lafayette:*** What happens…Say we…object.

***Noailles:*** We? It won’t be we. If you object…you get to enjoy the stone décor of the Bastille, I suspect…I’ll visit.

***Lafayette:*** He wouldn’t.

***Noailles:*** Try him. (Duc d’Ayen steps inside, through the door, unnoticed. Noailles pours himself another tumbler of madeira.) The ole man won’t mind.

***Duc:*** The ole man does mind.

***Noailles:*** (Surprised.) Sir. (Noailles and Lafayette snap to attention. Noailles fumbles with his tumbler, unsure what to do with it, not wanting to set it down.)

***Duc:*** Drink it.

***Noailles:*** What…I…

***Duc:*** You heard me. Drink it.

***Noailles:*** Yes, sir. (Quaffs it. Sets tumbler down. Blows his cheeks, as though exhausted.)

***Duc:*** My space. (Fingers motion toward the space from the back of the desk to the back wall.) Out. (Noailles and Lafayette move to front of work desk. Duc calmly walks behind work desk. Silence. He fills Noailles’ tumbler, sets it in front of him.) Drink it.

***Noailles:*** Sir, I…

***Duc:*** All of it.

***Noailles:*** Yes, sir. (Drinks it down, straight. Lafayette looks on.)

***Duc:*** Gilbert. Is Adrienne well?

***Lafayette:*** (Nervously.) Yes, sir. She is. Thank you, sir.

***Duc:*** And my grandchild?

***Lafayette:*** Not long now, sir.

***Duc:*** (Turns to Noailles.) Is Anne well?

***Noailles:*** Yes, sir.

***Duc:*** Good. Good. (Taps fingers fingers on desk, impatiently.)

***Noailles:*** Sir, I…We…

***Duc:*** Did I ask? (Cuts Noailles off.)

***Noailles:*** (Silence.)

***Duc:*** I’m a laughing stock. Because of you (indicates with a wave of his hand both of them. Drums his fingers). Gambling. Racing. God knows what else.

***Noailles:*** But, sir…

***Duc:*** Did I ask?

***Noailles:*** (Quiet.)

***Duc:*** You are entertainment. All of Paris laughs…at me. It will stop. (Stares at Noailles. Speaks directly to him.) Do you understand?

***Noailles:*** Yes, sir. (Pause.) May I speak candidly?

***Duc:*** No. You may not! (Stares at Lafayette.) What waste. Is this who you are?

***Lafayette:*** I…(Stops. Does not finish.)

***Duc:*** Officers. In the Army of France. (Drums his fingers. ) No greater honor. Just what did you learn at Metz?

***Noailles:*** (Swaying just a little.) Prince William Henry married a tramp.

***Duc:*** (Hard look.) Why am I not surprised? In my day we studied the Gallic Wars. Grand strategy. And Caesar. The greatest of them all. Caesar was everybody’s hero.

***Lafayette:*** (Coughs. Nervously.)

***Duc:*** (Fixes on Lafayette.) Isn’t that right? Caesar, the greatest of them all. (Stares at Lafayette, daring him to disagree.)

***Noailles:*** Comte de Broglie.

***Duc:*** (Distracted from Lafayette, cranes his neck to look at Noailles.) What about him?

***Noailles:*** He’s commandant at Metz.

***Duc:*** (Rolls his eyes.) I know. What of it.?

***Noailles:*** The colonies, in America. The insurgents. He thinks they might…

***Duc:*** Bluster. What’s in it for Broglie? Doesn’t matter. It’s only a skirmish for England. What does it have to do with you, anyway?

***Noailles:*** (Glancing nervously at Lafayette.) Well…I mean…some say…they need French officers.

***Duc:*** Chinese officers, too, no doubt. It’s not for any self-respecting officer of France. A disgrace. Insurgent army. The ambassador at the Court of St. James is my brother, your wife’s uncle (Looking at Lafayette.). He knows. He says King George will put a stop to it all.

***Noailles:*** (A little wobbly.) Do you think maybe…

***Duc:*** I think discipline is a good thing. Self-control. That’s what I think. Both of you are lacking. What else?

***Noailles:*** (Looks at Lafayette.) No. Nothing.

***Duc:*** Be about your business. (Waves them off.)

***Noailles:*** (Turns to leave. Stops. Looks at Lafayette.) Coming?

***Lafayette:*** (Nods his head no. Noailles leaves. Addresses the Duc. Clears his throat.) I want to talk to you.

***Duc:*** (Drums his fingers. Motions for Lafayette to sit. The Duc sits.)

***Lafayette:*** I’d rather stand. (Hesitates.) I want to go to America.

***Duc:*** Long way for a holiday. Try Italy. My sister, her husband, and I are planning a trip. We’ll meet at Marseilles, then to Florence, Rome, Naples. (Drums his fingers.) Come with us. Maybe it’ll help.

***Lafayette:*** It’s not for holiday. I want to be an officer in the American army.

***Duc:*** (Thoughtful. Looks at the ceiling.) You don’t know what you want.

***Lafayette:*** There was a time…(Takes a deep breath.) There was a time what you say was true.

***Duc:*** You confound me. You have what every man wants. Family. Money. Rank. God knows, a mother-in-law who thinks you can do no wrong. A wife who adores you. Certainly not a French custom. (Pours himself a tumbler of madeira.)

***Lafayette:*** It’s not enough.

***Duc:*** You’re a captain in the Army of France. It is enough to serve France and France’s king!

***Lafayette:*** (As if to get in the last word, almost assertive.) And God?

***Duc:*** God can take care of himself, and where did that come from? At least Adrienne sounds authentic. With you it comes off as underhanded ploy to gain advantage. I resent it. France, Louis XVIth, and God if it suits you, in that order…but this is a distraction. Why America? What’s the impulse?

***Lafayette:*** I…(Now hesitating.)

***Duc:*** Speak up.

***Lafayette:*** I was a Lieutenant…because of you. Now a captain…because of you. You made me. I’ve done nothing on my own. I’m an ornament.

***Duc:*** Spare me your self-pity.

***Lafayette:*** (Takes a deep breath.) My grandmother Catherine told me I would be somebody, that I’d make a difference.

***Duc:*** Is this some novel notion? Some fresh philosophy? Do your duty. Saddle-up, ride, command, dismount. Every day. That’s the whole of it. Till you die. There is no other purpose.

***Lafayette:*** I’m eighteen. My family was with Joan of Arc at the Siege of Orlean. She was sixteen. Burned at the stake at 19. My father died at the battle of Minden. I have a legacy I cherish and I will not tarnish it.

***Duc:*** What makes you think America will answer?

***Lafayette:*** (Gaining moment.) For four years I studied Latin. I translated into it and out of it and back. It was wonderful and I was good at it.

***Duc:*** Is there a point?

***Lafayette:*** (Feeling confidant.) One time the professor accused one of my classmates of some transgression, I forget now, but his liberties were restricted. His punishment I knew excessive. He was not fairly treated. I tried to rally my fellow classmates to his defense, but I was disappointed.

***Duc:*** You learned a valuable lesson. People disappoint. (Looks at Lafayette intently.)

***Lafayette:*** What I learned was that the content of those Latin readings meant something to me. Plato’s Republic and the idea of justice. Aristotle’s Politics and the idea of liberty. Thucydides and the idea of equality. Epictetus, Tacitus, and Marcus Aurelius on doing the right thing. Plutarch on courage. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides on the nature of things.

***Duc:*** Books. You read too much and you think too much. You cannot hold an idea in your hand.

***Lafayette:*** You can fight for it.

***Duc:*** You can die fighting for it.

***Lafayette:*** Liberty, equality, and justice are worth dying for.

***Duc:*** I need no reason to fight. Give me orders and I fight. I don’t need a cause.

***Lafayette:*** I do. It matters. Why I fight matters.

***Duc:*** (Sits back in his chair. Reflective.) Things change. Soldiers now…I order them to the privy…why can’t they just go…instead, they ask why. I see it. I don’t like it. If the enemy were a brothel they’d attack with blind rage.

***Lafayette:*** The mind is not always in charge.

***Duc:*** Words. Liberty. Equality. Justice. The insurgents are heavy on high minded rhetoric and no army or navy to back it up.

***Lafayette:*** Papa, I’ll make you proud. I want your blessing.

***Duc:*** The Masons. They filled your head.

***Lafayette:***  I am a Mason, since Metz, but that has nothing to do with this. I know my destiny was set a long time ago, hearing stories from my grandmother and reading Latin in college. I didn’t realize it at the time, but those things took.

***Duc:*** Broglie. It was his influence.

***Lafayette:*** Boglie sponsored me, but I am a Mason by choice. Will you grant permission? Will you intercede with Prime Minister Maurepas?

***Duc:*** So that’s what this is about.

***Lafayette:*** Sir?

***Duc:*** You want to go to America. You want a commission as an American officer. You don’t come to ask my advice. You don’t come out of respect. You come because I am a legal impediment. You are underage and my permission is required.

***Lafayette:*** It’s not true.

***Duc:*** I want a son who does his duty. Honor, courage. I’ll not have my son-in-law in some swamp defending empty ideas.

***Lafayette:*** Papa, please…

***Duc:*** (Quietly, firmly.) No. the answer is no. (Walks to the door, turns, faces Lafayette. Quietly, but resolutely.) You’ll never amount to anything. (Exits.)

***Lafayette:*** (Looks on, silently.)

(Lights dim.)