Scene Two

(Window stage right and a door further downstage. A credenza on back wall upstage. A map of Atlantic world and Europe on easel beside the credenza stage right. A magnum of madeira and a tray of congolais on the credenza. Downstage, left of center, a chess table on which is a chessboard and pieces. Baron DeKalb stands stage left, playing Vicomte de Noailles, across the table from him. Vicomte de Mauroy is behind Vicomte de Noaille sitting on a barstool, drink in hand. Lafayette and Secretary Duboismartin are at the head of the table upstage, two barstools behind them which they use at discretion. DeKalb is surveying the table, preparing his next move. Tuesday, August 8, 1775, at Metz, northeast France. Baron Johann DeKalb (June 19, 1721 to August 19, 1780) is 48 years old, 5’9” with full face and portly but not fat; acquline nose, 200 poiunds, and serious. He is deliberate, a stoic, German accent, and in military garb. Louis-Marie, Vicomte de Noailles (April 17, 1756 to January 7, 1804) is a nineteen year old. He married his cousin Anne Jeanne Baptiste Georgette Adrienne Pauline Louise Catherine Dominique de Noailles (1758-1794), Adrienne’s older sister. He is 5’11” and weight 175 pounds, handsome, smiling, and confident. He is an epicurean. Vicomte de Mauroy is 45 years old, 5’9” at 185 pounds, a bit unkempt, less military in bearing than DeKalb, and a condescending attitude. A cynic. In military garb. Secretary Duboismartain is 35 years old, 5’7” and quiet spoken, an observer. He is to the point and grammatically correct. A realist. An intellectual, which serves well in his capacity as Comte de Broglie’s secretary. Lafayette is 5’9” and 155 pounds, timid, earnest, high forehead, a bird-beaked nose. An idealist. Military garb. Prince William Henry is spoken of but does not appear. He is Duke of Gloucester and Edinburgh (November 25, 1743-August 25, 1805) and the younger brother of King George III (June 4, 1738-January 29, 1820). He is 31 years old, 175 pounds, 6’ tall, calm, with baritone voice and English accent. In 1766 he secretly married Maria Walpole, the illegitimate granddaughter of Sir Robert Walpole considered the first prime minister of England from 1721-1741. The marriage was not sanctioned by King George III not only because of her illegitimate history, but because her family had no royal rank. He is in frock and breeches as befits a man of his station.)

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

***DeKalb:*** (Pays him no mind at first, then waves him off.) Planning.

***Mauroy:*** Planning? For what?

***DeKalb:*** My shot.

***Mauroy:*** It’s your move, not your shot, and planning won’t help. Noailles will win. Noailles always wins.

***DeKalb:*** Not today. (Makes his move.)

***Noailles:*** (Takes DeKalb’s knight. Sees DeKalb dejected.) Don’t look so down. The game is still on, my friend.

***Mauroy:*** (To Noailles, sarcastically.) Everybody’s your friend.

***Noailles:*** (Looks at Mauroy.) Is that your fourth drink?

***Mauroy:*** Play. (DeKalb moves. Noailles surveys, begins a move, and Mauroy suddenly intervenes and moves his bishop.)

***Noailles:*** Mauroy, what are you doing?

***Mauroy:*** I cheat. I cheat for you, DeKalb.

***DeKalb:*** I don’t need your help. I can cheat for myself.

***Noailles:*** (Takes his turn. Returns the bishop to its spot and moves the rook.) Check! Gilbert, fetch me a drink! And a macaroon!

***Duboismartin:*** (As DeKalb prepares his move. Watches Lafayette fetch drink and macaroon.) Lafayette, why do you take orders from him? (Indicating Noailles.)

***Noailles:*** Because I’m his best friend.

***Lafayette:*** And my brother-in-law.

***Mauroy:*** You married sisters? There’s something not right about that. Won’t you have stupid children?

***Lafayette:*** What?

***Duboismartin:*** Pay him no mind. He’s a cynic. He makes things up and he sees the worst in the best.

***Mauroy:*** Duboismartin. You are good with words. I see why Comte de Broglie employs you as secretary. You compliment me.

***Duboismartin:*** (To Noailles.) So, Noailles, your father-in-law is the Duc d’Ayen?

***Noailles:*** He is. And Lafayette’s.

***Duboismartin:*** A formidable man.

***DeKalb:*** Big words. You always use big words.

***Mauroy:*** (To Duboismartin.) Your vocabulary. Dumb it down. That way the dumbest among us can understand. (Looks at DeKalb.)

***DeKalb:*** (Interrupts his game and stares at Mauroy, then closes his eyes and purses his lips as though to control himself.)

***Mauroy:*** Hey, hey you. I’m talking to you. (Taunting DeKalb.)

***DeKalb:*** (Eyes closed.) I see a fist in your face. I feel better. (Opens eyes and goes back to the game.)

***Mauroy:*** You are the roughian. Go back to your rich mistress!

***DeKalb:*** She is not my mistress. She is my wife. (Angrily struts toward Mauroy; Duboismartin puts left hand on DeKalb’s chest, looks him in the eye.)

***Duboismartin:*** You are a stoic. Stoics do not waste themselves on cynics.

***DeKalb:*** (DeKalb returns to his position.) I don’t know what that means.

***Noailles:*** (To DeKalb.) Your play, my friend. (To Duboismartin.) I’m his favorite.

***Duboismartin:*** Whose favorite?

***Noailles:*** The Duc d’Ayen, our father-in-law (Points to Lafayette.). He likes me better than Gilbert over there.

***Lafayette:*** It’s true. (DeKalb makes his move.)

***Noailles:*** (Makes a move.) Checkmate! Let’s go again. (They reset the board.) (Back to Duboismartin.) Gilbert is quiet. Spends time in his head.

***Duboismartin:*** The Duc dislikes thinkers?

***Noailles:*** He likes talkative types.

***Lafayette:*** (Brings drink and macaroon to Noailles.) I don’t know what to say to him.

***Duboismartin:*** You must converse with him sometimes. What do you talk about?

***Lafayette:*** I don’t. I avoid him.

***Duboismartin:*** But you’re underage; doesn’t he have to give you permission for just about everything?

***Noailles:*** Everything. Whatever we do. So I do the asking, not Gilbert. (Eats macaroon, drinks madeira.)

***Mauroy:*** (To Duboismartin.) Duboismartin, why are we here. Why did your boss order us here?

***Duboismartin:*** Comte de Broglie is my employer. He is not my boss. I don’t know.

***Mauroy:*** Of course you know. You’re his secretary. (Gets up. Unsteady at first. Walks to credenza. Refills his tumbler.)

***Duboismartin:*** Prince William Henry. The Duke of Gloucester and Edinburgh, the younger brother of King George III, I suspect.

***DeKalb:*** Who?

***Duboismartin:*** Prince William Henry.

***DeKalb:*** An Englishman. Here? At Metz?

***Mauroy:*** He married a tramp. He knows France is partial to tramps.

***Duboismartin:*** Be careful. (Speaking to Mauroy, who pays him no mind.) Show some decency.

***Mauroy:*** He’s been run out of England.

***Lafayette:*** I don’t understand.

***Duboismartin:*** (To Lafayette.) Prince William Henry is the younger brother of King George III. Without permission, Prince William married Maria Walpole. The family has no royal rank and she is illegitimate. She is not welcome at the Court of St. James.

***Lafayette:*** But it’s done. She’s family.

***Mauroy:*** It’s not how the world works.

***Duboismartin:*** King George now requires any high-born marriage to have his consent first.

***DeKalb:*** (To Duboismartin.) This makes no sense. The brother of the King of England comes to France because his feelings are hurt? Fine. Fix his hurt. Shoot him. He’s English. Shoot him.

***Noailles:*** My friend, you are a violent man.

***DeKalb:*** And you. All you want to do is play.

***Duboismartin:*** He had smallpox, earlier this year. Poor health. That’s part of why he’s here.

***Lafayette:*** He should have been inoculated.

***DeKalb:*** (Everyone turns, looks at Lafayette.) What is this, ‘inoculated’?

***Mauroy:*** More than one syllable, more than you can handle. (To Lafayette.) What do you know of inoculation?

***Lafayette:*** (Understated.) A little.

***Duboismartin:*** Well. He did decide to inoculate his children. Princess Sophia and Princess Caroline. Princess Sophia was two years old. She did fine.

***Lafayette:*** And Princess Caroline?

***Duboismartin:*** Nine months old. A week after inoculation she died.

***DeKalb:*** It still doesn’t follow. His brother’s mad at him. So what? His child dies. This is life. Why leave your country?

***Duboismartin:*** You are a stoic. But there is more to it.

***Mauroy:*** (Interjects to DeKalb.) You left your country.

***DeKalb:*** Idiot. My reason counts. I came to fight. France is my country now.

***Lafayette:*** (To Duboismartin.) You say there is more, some other reason he is here? (Interested.)

***Duboismartin:*** (Pauses.) The insurgents. (Has casually ambled to the map.)

***Mauroy:*** America? What does America have to do with Prince William?

***Lafayette:*** I don’t understand.

***Duboismartin:*** The last war with us, now over ten years ago, drained the English treasury, just as it drained ours. To make up for lost revenue King George decided to tax his colonies in America. (Points to the colonies.)

***Noailles:*** But they won. France lost.

***Duboismartin:*** It was a pyrrhic victory. (Walks back to his station.)

***DeKalb:*** Talk plain.

***Duboismartin:*** England was bankrupt. It needed money. So, it taxed the colonies.

***Mauroy:*** So America revolts. Thirteen colonies up against…

***Lafayette:*** (Interrupts Mauroy in his enthusiasm.) What hope do they…I mean, England has an army and a navy. What’s the point? (Walks to the map, surveys it.)

***Duboismartin:*** America has been on its own. England was fine with that, until the war drained its accounts. Only then did England decide to pay attention. America became a place to raise money. King George didn’t count on their raising objections.

***Mauroy:*** Upstarts. Lafayette, you’re right; there is no point. There is no hope. They haven’t a chance. None. A fight over money. What a pity. It’s always about money.

***Duboismartin:*** You’re wrong.

***Lafayette:*** What do you mean? (Back to his station.)

***Duboismartin:*** Some say this is about ideas.

***Mauroy:*** Fight for money. Fight for women. Only a fool fights for ideas.

***Duboismartin:*** I think there is more to it.

***Lafayette:*** Ideas? What ideas? (To Duboismartin.)

***Noailles:*** What does it matter to you? It’s no business of ours.

***Mauroy:*** (To Lafayette.) Why this sudden interest? From someone who can’t even stand up to his father-in-law. (To Lafayette.)

***DeKalb:*** (To Mauroy.) Shut up. (To Duboismartin, in solidarity with Lafayette.) What ideas?

***Duboismartin:*** We…well, the Comte de Broglie…is connected. As commander of the Army of the East he gets news from our ambassador in London, the Marquis de Noailles, from Prime Minister Maurepas, Foreign Minister Vergennes, even the King himself. I see it. I’m his secretary. Sometimes these reports on America are like reading arguments from Cicero or Plato. America argues it has no standing in Parliament and that any power Parliament has comes from the people. They talk about the injustice of it.

***Lafayette:*** The insurgents, they accuse the King of injustice? They challenge the King?

***Duboismartin:*** Well, Parliament. It amounts to the same thing, I guess. The incredibly novel thought is that power is granted Parliament by the people. It’s bottom up, not top down.

***Lafayette:*** This is Greece and Rome. I haven’t heard talk like this since college.

***Duboismartin:*** Talk like this is usually left in college. France is ancient. It carries burdens of tradition and ritual. England the same. America not so much. It’s fresh ground.

***Lafayette:*** It’s about justice, then? The why of the fight is about justice?

***Duboismartin:*** And its flanks. Liberty and equality. Much as I can tell.

***Mauroy:*** Duboismartin, I’ll grant you this: you’re smart and you know history. But tell me: has anyone, anywhere, anytime fought for these things and won and made it stick?

***Duboismartin:*** (Gazes at the floor.) Never. Not like this, anyway.

***Mauroy:*** England will crush them.

***Lafayette:*** What do they fight for?

***Mauroy:*** He just told you. I see why your father-in-law dislikes you. You don’t listen. You don’t pay attention. You and DeKalb deserve each another.

***Lafayette:*** (To Mauroy, forcefully.) You compliment me.

***Noailles:*** Ho, Ho! Mauroy, he got you. Touche, my friend. Well done.

***Lafayette:*** (To Duboismartin.) You told us why they fight. But what are they fighting for?

***Duboismartin:*** Independence. (Thoughtfully.) Independence, I suppose. To make their own way.

***Mauroy:*** You give too much credit. Americans are no different from anybody else. They are greedy. Self-interested. Stupid. High-minded nothing. They are transplanted Englishmen and that will never change.

***Duboismartin:*** DeKalb. Do you agree?

***DeKalb:*** (Thoughtful.) No. No, I don’t.

***Mauroy:*** (Incredulous.) You ask DeKalb? His opinion counts for nothing. Why do you even ask?

***Lafayette:*** (Sees Duboismartin looking at DeKalb, knowingly. Looks at DeKalb, who looks away, thoughtfully.)

***Duboismartin:*** DeKalb? Tell them.

***Mauroy:*** (DeKalb is quiet.) See! He has no opinion. He’s an idiot.

***Noailles:*** (Turns to Mauroy.) Shut up.

***Lafayette:*** DeKalb?

***DeKalb:*** I’ve been to America.

***Lafayette:*** (Perks up, interested.) When? Why? What was it like?

***Duboismartin***: Lafayette. Give him time.

***Lafayette:*** (Goes to credenza. Gets a tumbler of madeira and a macaroon. Carries it to DeKalb. Returns to his spot. Sits on barstool.) Go on.

***DeKalb:*** Comte de Broglie. He’ll be coming soon. (Silence.) I speak French and English and German.

***Mauroy:*** You? A polymath?

***DeKalb:*** Seven years ago I was sent on a secret mission.

***Mauroy:*** You were a spy? You were sent to blend in?

***Noailles:*** Mauroy, please.

***DeKalb:*** Foreign Minister de Choisel. He heard talk. He heard a rumble out of America. Even then. There was talk of revolt. King Louis XV wanted to ally with America against England. But only if America could win. Only if they were ready. Choisel sent me to find out. (Hesitates.)

***Lafayette:*** What did you find?

***DeKalb:*** In America. People are plain spoken. They say what they think. They’re rude. They work. Hard. They work to make their own lot better. They have a spirit of independence. But , then at least, they were not ready for rebellion. They were mostly content. That’s what I reported to Choisel. That’s what he reported to the King.

***Lafayette:*** What do you think now? Will those thirteen colonies break with the empire?

***DeKalb:*** Yes. I think they will.

***Duboismartin:*** DeKalb, you are a fox.

***Lafayette:*** The fight. (To DeKalb.) Is Mauroy right? Is it all about money, about who gets what?

***DeKalb:*** No…not this war. Not from what I know. This is different. America sees the world differently. This will be about ideas. America, I think, will rally to ideas. Liberty, equality, justice.

***Lafayette:*** What’s the endgame? The object?

***DeKalb:*** Independence. They have been free for 200 years. How do you just let that go? You don’t. independence is the only way to make their ideas a reality. They’ll fight hard for their vines and fig trees. It’ll be about the ideas. That’s what I think.

***Lafayette:*** Can they win?

***Mauroy:*** (Laughs.) What a joke!

***DeKalb:*** Not without help.

***Lafayette:*** Help?

***Duboismartin:*** (To Lafayette.) Are you bored with maneuvers here at Metz? Why so interested?

***Noailles:*** Anything to do with our father-in-law?

***Lafayette:*** (All eyes on him. Calmly.) It was a simple question. Help from whom?

***Duboismartin***: Maybe that is one best left to Comte de Broglie and, perhaps, Prince William. He sides with the insurgents.

***Lafayette:*** With insurgents?

***Mauroy:*** (Looking at Lafayette.) You simpleton. France, only France has power enough to help. But it has neither the will nor the money. Good luck to you and the big ox over there---you two can rescue America. (Motioning toward DeKalb.)

***DeKalb:*** Enough. (Marches to Mauroy who has hidden behind Noailles, crouched down, eyes closed. Noailles steps out of the way to leave Mauroy exposed. Then, through the door stage right Comte de Broglie enters. Everyone snaps to attention, except Duboismartin the secretary, and Mauroy unsteadily.)

***Broglie:*** Gentlemen, at ease. Prince William Henry is travelling the continent. I invited him to visit the post here at Metz. He’s at my quarters freshening up. I want you to hear what he has to say.

***Mauroy:*** Sir?

***Broglie:*** Mauroy.

***Mauroy:*** Did Prince William’s break with his brother come because of his wife?

***Broglie:*** (Delay.) No. (Forcefully.) Prince William supports the insurgents in America. He thinks King George’s policies wrong headed. He openly criticizes his brother and as a result finds himself unwelcome at court. (Helps himself to a tumbler of madeira.)

***Lafayette:*** He favors the insurgents?

***Broglie:*** He does. He says they’re Englishmen and he wants them back in the fold. If this revolt is suppressed it will only foment more and more discontent. America has tasted freedom and Prince William does not see it giving up. England will be better with America than it will without it.

***Noailles:*** Does America even have an army?

***Broglie:*** Of sorts. Merchants and farmers. (Ambles to the chess table, observes. DeKalb motions that it is his turn; Broglie moves DeKalb’s bishop for DeKalb and nods affirmatively.)

***Noailles:*** What do they expect to do with shopkeepers and farmhands? They’ll be no match for English regulars.

***Broglie:*** Perhaps. But there is evidence otherwise. (Pause.) Outside Boston in Massachusetts there are two villages. On April 19 this year those shopkeepers and farmhands heard alarms and church bells and came running. Out of nowhere. They came near destroying the King’s own. Lexington and Concord. Later, June 17, at Breed’s Hill, when it was all over General Howe may have owned the field, but at terrible price. America fights. They know what they’re about.

***Lafayette:*** But they don’t have a navy.

***Broglie:*** True. But they have the Continental Army. Where they are most lacking is officers. They need officers, good commanders.

***Mauroy:*** Do you propose we enlist?

***Broglie:*** America needs competent officers. That’s what we do. We lead men into battle.

***DeKalb:*** Will the King of France permit French officers to commission in the American army?

***Broglie:*** No. King Louis must maintain a public perception of neutrality. France cannot afford to provoke war with England.

***Mauroy:*** If French officers were interested, how would they be paid?

***Broglie:*** I don’t know.

***Mauroy:*** How would they be commissioned as officers in the American army?

***Broglie:*** I don’t know.

***Mauroy:*** How would we get across the Atlantic?

***Broglie:*** I don’t know. Here’s what I suspect. The insurgents will ask France for help. Their Continental Congress has the authority. They’ll send a delegate to Paris to negotiate. That delegate will be the means to get commissions for those of you who are interested. You are soldiers. This is a chance to fight, to show what you’re made of. (Surveys the group.) Noailles and Lafayette. You two will need permission from the Duc d’Ayen. You’re not at your majority.

***Mauroy:*** Noailles, you best do the talking since the Old Man likes you best.

***Broglie:*** Noailles and Lafayette. Go to my quarters and escort Prince William back here. I told him you would come for him. (Noailles and Lafayette exit.)

***Duboismartin:*** (To Broglie.) You’ve been thinking about this for a long time. What’s your plan?

***Broglie:*** You three have my confidence. I want command of that Continental Army. Stuck in this backwater on maneuvers is a disgrace. I’m made for better than this. We are made for better than this.

***Mauroy:*** What more can be done?

***Broglie:*** Patience. If DeKalb is right, and I think he is, America will not let go. The Continental Congress will send an envoy to Paris. There is no other way. They must ask France for help.

***Duboismartin:*** Envoy comes. Then what?

***Broglie:*** I’ll meet with him. As soon as he arrives. DeKalb, you’ll be the go between, in case, as is likely, he speaks no French. We’ll make a pipeline. We’ll funnel French officers to him. He’ll commission the officers into the Continental Army.

***Duboismartin:*** How do you become commander-in-chief?

***Broglie:*** The Continental Congress. They’ll see French officers in action. They’ll see prestige. They’ll see results on the battlefield. Then they’ll call for a French commander-in-chief. I will be that man.

***Duboismartin:*** America may not take to having a French officer as Commander of the Continental army.

***Broglie:*** They want to win. Nothing else matters.

***DeKalb:*** Does the King know? Is he behind us?

***Broglie:***  He is. But…we must be discreet. He can make no public gestures.

***Mauroy:*** Is Lafayette aware?

***Broglie:*** He knows nothing and I want it that way. He’s an idealist and that works to my advantage.

***Duboismartin:*** I have never seen him like he was today, after hearing about insurgents. He’s taken by the idea of the fight for ideas.

***Broglie:*** You and DeKalb stay close to him. He can do us a lot of good. We’ll get him commissioned…(Casts a glance out the window.) Here they come. On your guard.

(Lights dim.)