1

PIERRE DUPONT cared deeply for his mother.

"I so loved this admirable woman," he recalled in his memoirs, "that every time I felt myself in love I sought out the points of resemblance between her and the beauty who, at the time, had become dear to me . . . it pleased me to imagine that it was my mother I was loving. Alas!"

Pierre was the second child conceived by Samuel Dupont, a Parisian watchmaker, and Anne Alexandrine de Montchanin, his wife. The first had died within days of its birth. Anne feared that the life swelling inside her womb might perish quickly too. She begged Samuel to let her nurse the child at her own breasts, rather than send it off to a country woman to be weaned. Samuel refused: no respectable wife of a master tradesman suckled her own young. Anne must deliver the baby and return to painting delicate scenes on the faces of the timepieces her husband crafted.

On December 14, 1739, after three days in labor, Anne gave birth to a son, named Pierre Samuel after her oldest brother and her husband, kissed it tenderly, and offered its hungry lips to the waiting farmer's wife. Samuel had not completely ignored his wife's pleading; the infant's nurse lived only an hour's carriage ride from Paris. If she wished, Anne might visit her newborn son on Sunday afternoons.

Anne Alexandrine de Montchanin came to the cluster of watchmakers' shops in Paris's Rue de Richelieu after a pleasant childhood spent as companion to the daughter of a wealthy uncle and aunt. Her own parents, of noble lineage but impoverished, had sent their youngest child to relatives gladly; only with their help might she hope to receive an education commensurate with her titled birth.

But when Anne reached her seventeenth birthday the aunt and uncle decided that their daughter no longer needed a playmate. Anne was offered a choice: assume the position of housekeeper on their country

estate or leave. She chose to take up life in a back room above the Paris watchmaking shop of her brothers, Pierre and Alexandre.

Anne began painting watchfaces by the fading evening light that filtered through the shop's front window. From her workbench she looked across the narrow Rue de Richelieu directly into the *horlogerie* of Samuel Dupont. Each day at dusk Samuel locked the door to his shop, placed lighted candles in its windows, and practiced his one passion, fencing. Anne's first glimpse of her future husband was a darting shadow thrusting and parrying against a white wall.

Soon Samuel's fencing sword began to rust. Late customers and friends learned to seek him out in the drawing room above the workshop of his competitors across the Rue de Richelieu. Anne did not lack for suitors; her birth into the nobility, her obvious refinement, and, not least, her lithe figure and fair skin caused many hearts along the street of watchmakers to stir. But Anne spurned them all except the man whose shop faced that of her brothers. Samuel, she believed, possessed a degree of dignity unusual among Frenchmen not born into the upper class. He was tall, slender, and handsome, with thick dark hair and a long, bulbous nose reminiscent of King Louis XIV's own famed protuberance. He stood remarkably erect for one who bent each day over a workbench. He was quiet, fastidious, and sober. He fenced well, a skill usually reserved for the nobility. Above all, he was, like Anne, a Protestant.

Within a few months Samuel and Anne married. She moved her possessions across the Rue de Richelieu, placed herself at a workbench near the window of her new husband's shop, and learned that the dignity she had admired in Samuel was little more than the stubbornness of ignorance.

Samuel Dupont could neither read nor write. He had learned, with difficulty, to do the simple sums his business required. As a young man he had come to Paris from the provincial city of Rouen, where for five generations the Duponts had been farmers and tradesmen. Rouen had for centuries been a center of religious foment. Joan of Arc had burned in the city's square for her heresy; Catherine de Medici had laid siege to the city's high walls for a year to rid her empire of the infidel Protestants living within. French kings regularly sent raiding parties of soldiers, accompanied by Catholic priests, into Rouen, to coax the citizens into joining the true church, under pain of death by hanging or burning. The ancestors of Samuel Dupont, like many other devout Protestants, swore faithfulness to the Catholic tenets and continued to practice the

teachings of John Calvin in private. Samuel could name many relatives whose lives had ended at the stake and whose children had been kidnapped during the night and sold into captivity at convents run by zealous Catholic priests. Only when he learned that the Montchanin family had for many generations been Protestants did he decide that Anne would make a suitable wife.

Religious persecution had, unfortunately, taught Samuel little. He wished not to see the Protestant church accepted in France, but to find a way to live happily under the Catholic oppression. A number of his friends had been dragged off to Paris prisons for their religious views. All, Samuel believed, had a single fault in common: they sought to educate themselves beyond their stations in life. Had they applied their energies to their work alone, they would never have brought the wrath of the government down upon themselves. Knowledge, Samuel believed, encouraged the mind to wander, the body to seek pleasures outside the fruits of hard labor. And so, since making watches did not require that he know the alphabet, Samuel had never learned to read.

Anne thought otherwise. After Pierre's country nurse nearly killed the infant by feeding him only watered-down flour, Samuel agreed to bring his son home to live. Anne resolved to give him an education befitting the son of a woman nobly born and raised.

Pierre, recovering from rickets, played at Anne's feet while she painted watchfaces. She amused him with stories of valiant men who had conquered physical shortcomings greater than his, and through courage and devotion to a gallant cause become the champions of mankind. In her idle hours Anne taught Pierre to read. By his third birthday he had far surpassed his father's meager ability to scrawl a few numbers. Anne continued to fill his head with tales of heroes and great warriors. Pierre's health remained delicate. He limped, and always would, and his legs were permanently bowed. He fell and broke the cartilage in his nose, which robbed him of the single physical characteristic he had inherited from Samuel. His growth lagged; he would never reach his father's height. He walked awkwardly and could not run at all. But while his body stagnated, his mind, under Anne's prodding, stretched and grew agile. Her son, Anne discovered, possessed a remarkable degree of intelligence. She began to conceive of it as a pathway out of the drudgery of her life and the tedium of her marriage.

Samuel Dupont had an easily ignited temper. Anne feared his rage nearly as much as she loathed his distrust of education. After her hus-

band's outbursts, she would gather Pierre in her arms, flee to a quiet room in the apartment above the workshop, and weep with the child over their lot in life. Soon Samuel became, for his son, the opposite of all Anne taught him to admire and respect in men.

Samuel agreed to Pierre's education on one condition: his son must not be taught to write poetry. Versifying far exceeded what a watchmaker's son might ever find useful in life. After nearly eight years of argument with her husband Anne made the concession readily.

A Dupont family friend had migrated from Rouen to open a private school in Paris, Anne discovered. She enrolled Pierre in the classes of schoolmaster Viard without difficulty. Struggling to establish himself and his school, Viard agreed to the prohibition against poetry. He soon found that he had struck a good bargain: his new student was a prodigy. Anything Viard set before Pierre, the boy could memorize; anything the schoolmaster explained, Pierre could understand.

Viard took Pierre from the classroom and tutored him individually. The lame boy's schoolmates became jealous, forcing him into numerous fights. Osborne, an English boy attending the school, taught Pierre to box; the other students learned to fear his small fists. They salved their envy by beating Pierre in schoolyard games that required physical agility beyond their rival's. The games were played for stakes of apples brought to class as luncheon desserts; in short order Pierre stood one hundred fifty apples in debt.

Schoolmaster Viard cared little for Pierre's recess fortunes: only his protégé's mind interested the teacher. Education, like all other institutions in Bourbon France, was monopolized by a nobility and clergy that closely guarded their privileges. Enormous class barriers kept men like Viard from achieving prominence—and attracting students from wealthy families. Rarely, a teacher from the lower classes captured the attention and imagination of the Parisian elite. Viard saw his opportunity in Pierre Dupont's unique mental abilities.

The schoolmaster decided upon a public display of the boy's intellect. He drilled Pierre in the *Institutes* of Justinian, Restaut's French grammar, Latin syntax, rhetoric, and the epistolary style. He announced that a student of his, a mere child of twelve, would answer questions on these and other subjects publicly, as well as present dissertations on French prose and orally translate excerpts from the most difficult Latin texts.

Four hundred people, including Samuel and Anne, turned out for the

exhibition of Pierre's learning and wit. The watchmaker's son triumphed; after the performance he was carried on a chair to where his parents stood weeping with pride. Pierre felt that, for once, his father loved him, and that he had conquered Samuel's prejudice against education. That evening Pierre's classmates gathered by torchlight at the Dupont home in the Rue de Richelieu to announce the cancellation of his schoolyard debt. The next morning Pierre brought his fellow students pastries and fresh cider, purchased with money Samuel gave him. He basked in the glow of public acclaim; he had tasted the sweet rewards of the orator's life, and an appetite for them had awakened within him. It would never be fully sated.

Viard arranged another display of Pierre's talents; he could not resist courting the prestige his prodigy might bring him. A hall was hired; printed invitations went to the intellectual elite of Paris, to the local administrators of government, to the faculty members of the Royal College and University of Paris. Viard pounded knowledge into Pierre's willing mind. Pierre's first exhibition had overwhelmed his classmates and friends; his second, Viard planned, would dazzle all Paris.

Pierre studied diligently and dreamed of genius and renown. His confidence and hopes soared. But on the eve of the demonstration the rector of the University of Paris forbade Viard to show off his student's acumen: the protégé of a private teacher, a child who had never taken classes at any recognized college, tutored by a provincial upstart without degrees from any reputable institute of higher learning, simply must not be permitted to capture the public limelight. The exhibition was cancelled. So, too, was Pierre's education under the schoolmaster Viard.

Samuel had seen enough. Powerful forces were being brought to bear on his son. Notoriety had already come his way, precisely what Samuel feared most. The time had arrived, Samuel told his son, for Pierre to take his place beside his father at the watchmaker's bench. Anne became distraught; Pierre felt his hopes dashed in his father's narrowmindedness. Together, mother and son plotted. Anne convinced Samuel that no Protestant child became apprenticed to a trade before taking his first communion in the church. She had pierced the single chink in Samuel's armor: he could not abide raising a child outside the dictates of his religion. He agreed that Pierre must undergo formal training in Protestant theology.

Anne was not satisfied. Outside Samuel's hearing she announced that Pierre would use his intellectual gifts to become a Protestant minister, a

dangerous endeavor in Catholic France. Prominent members of the Protestant faith were consulted; they directed Anne to the best teachers in Paris. Paul Bosc d'Antic, a graduate of the theological seminary in Lausanne, Switzerland, agreed to tutor Pierre. Daily they pored over texts in philosophy, physics, metaphysics, the principles of debate, Tacitus, Horace, and Cicero—and a small amount of Protestant theology. Samuel quickly grew suspicious of the range of subjects Pierre needed to master before being declared fit to pass his first communion. Anne explained that, since their son was a special pupil, he required an unusual course of study. It had been undertaken upon the advice of the Dutch ambassador to France: did Samuel wish to dispute so eminent an opinion? Samuel did not.

After eighteen months Pierre's first communion could no longer be delayed. Samuel demanded that his son begin learning the trade that would occupy his working life. Anne reasoned with her husband that if Pierre was to become a watchmaker he must at least rise to the top of his craft. No prominent *horloger* survived without a knowledge of mathematics. Samuel was forced to agree; he recalled that his own teacher, Julien LeRoy, had studied mathematical theory. Pierre's apprenticeship would be put off long enough to give him a solid grounding in the principles of algebra and geometry.

Anne had achieved her last victory: no excuses remained to keep Pierre from bending over the workbench at Samuel's side. Her lame child, still frail, with his enlarged joints and crooked nose, whose head she had filled with romantic visions of mythical warriors, would spend his life constructing timepieces in a tiny shop on a narrow Paris street. Anne resigned herself to her son's fate. Pierre, steeped in the profound writings of Horace and Tacitus, hungry for adventure and public acclaim, did not.

Samuel Dupont's sister, Marie, had married a ship's captain named Oulson. In a storm off the coast of Labrador, Oulson's ship was wrecked; the captain died soon after from exposure. Samuel offered to take his sister's daughter, Marianne, into the Dupont household. Pierre was not drawn to his cousin. Marianne was neither pretty nor intelligent. But when she was struck down with smallpox Pierre decided to nurse the girl day and night, as befitted a future warrior and hero; he had decided to become one of the valiant men his mother so deeply revered.

He had found the study of mathematics dull, but not so repulsive as a life spent making watches. Algebra and geometry, he reasoned, might be useful in a military career. Although young men were prohibited from becoming officers in the king's army without proof of four quarters of nobility—evidence that all their grandparents had noble blood flowing in their veins—and Pierre could display only the Montchanin coat of arms, it was possible to rise through the ranks by becoming an engineer, assuming a position of command on the battlefield, and earning a commission. Pierre bought books on strategy, tactics, and artillery manufacture. He slept on the floor to harden his body for the rigors of war. When Marianne became ill he resolved to test his courage.

Soon Pierre contracted the disease. Doctors were called in; they could do little. Marianne Oulson's case had been slight and she a healthy girl. Pierre's frail body succumbed more easily to the ravages of the pox. Marianne would recover, the doctors said. Pierre would not.

Anne nursed Pierre in vain. Within days, the doctors, unable to find a pulse, pronounced him dead. Anne prepared her son for burial and, as was the custom, called in a peasant woman to sit with Pierre through the night before his funeral. Just before dawn the woman screamed. Anne and Samuel found her cringing in a corner of Pierre's room. The dead child had stirred and moaned, she said: he was alive!

Anne brought Pierre gently back to health, remaining at his bedside day and night. No longer could he be recognized as the son of a handsome man and beautiful woman; deep pockmarks surrounded his disfigured nose, reached across his cheeks and down his neck. His eyes, too, had been affected. One had become extremely farsighted, the other severely nearsighted. Pierre reacted to his impaired sight as a boon to his talents.

"I call my left eye, which sees far, my eye for war," he wrote in his memoirs. "And my right eye, which is useful for fine work, my eye for science and peace. I have therefore to thank nature and accident for having given me two eyes covering the full range of vision while other men have only one eye in two volumes."

Pierre's flirtation with death ended his mathematical training. Samuel seized the moment to bring his son into the proper atmosphere for the child of a watchmaker: a watchmaker's shop. Mornings, Samuel announced, Pierre would devote to mastering his trade. Afternoons, if Pierre wished, he might study geometry at home. In the evenings father and son would fence, to strengthen Pierre's body and give him grace.

Pierre despised the regimen and turned to Anne for support. But Pierre's illness had broken Anne's will to do battle with Samuel; she admonished her son to respect his father's wishes and apply himself to learning the *horloger*'s trade.

Life in the Dupont household settled into a routine Samuel found acceptable. Business was good. Anne hired a cook and maid and returned to painting scenes on watchfaces. Together, father, mother, and son constructed timepieces. Samuel found great pleasure in his wife's final submission to his desires and his son's start on the road to what he believed would bring the boy true happiness. He and Anne drew closer than they had been since before Pierre's birth. Their satisfaction with life extended to the conjugal bed. Anne became pregnant.

She had last given birth ten years earlier, to a daughter Samuel sent off to Switzerland to be raised; beyond the borders of France a child was safe from the king's kidnappers. Anne's new child, a girl also, was ill from birth and died within weeks. Days later she discovered that she was once again carrying a life inside her womb. This, the fifth child she had borne, came easily, but was sickly too, and survived only a few days. Anne could not bear the loss of two children in less than a year; she never rose from her bed after the last baby's birth, and Pierre began a deathwatch at her side.

In six weeks, on July 21, 1756, Anne Alexandrine de Montchanin Dupont, aged thirty-six years, died, holding in one hand the fingers of the husband she had fought with through nearly two decades of marriage, and in the other those of the son she had fought for. Her last words, whispered as life slipped from within her, encompassed her repentance and despair. "Try to make each other happy," she said.

2

PIERRE DUPONT enjoyed the forty-mile hike from Paris south and east to the village of Nemours. Outside the teeming dirty city he could forget the anguish and failures of his life since his mother's death. Long ago he had left the Rue de Richelieu, humiliated and deeply hurt, rejected by his father, excised even from Samuel's will.

Father and son had fought bitterly almost since the moment of Anne Dupont's death. Pierre openly refused to accept the destiny Samuel had chosen for him; Samuel banished his son to an attic storage room, to meditate and repent his ways. Pierre climbed through a window and down an outside wall, to the waiting pleasures of Paris at night. He joined a crowd of itinerant writers and actors, composed poetry, and learned the inspirations a woman's flesh could arouse. Samuel discovered his son's transgressions, and for the first time in Pierre's memory, beat him, drawing more of a response than he had anticipated: Pierre attempted suicide with a rusty knife he found among the stored belongings in the attic. Marianne Oulson, since Anne's death the doyen of the Dupont household, surprised Pierre as he prepared to plunge the knife into his heart. Samuel, despairing of ever changing his son, threw him into the streets of Paris, penniless and without hope of employment. Pierre survived on the charity of friends.

Hunger and homelessness nurtured remorse in Pierre's heart. He apprenticed himself to a watchmaker, learned to pound silver into watchcases, and presented himself at the Dupont *horlogerie* each Sunday, where Samuel, as he ate dinner, ridiculed his son. Late each night Pierre slaved at his workbench to create a monument to his father, to discharge his debt to the man he hated and free himself from the guilt he carried. On a cold January day in 1763, Pierre appeared at the Dupont workshop bearing an exquisite timepiece he had crafted. On its edge he had engraved the words *Dupont Filius Composuit, Fecit, Dedicavit Patrio Suo:* Dupont the son designed, made, and dedicates this to his father. They were mocking words Pierre knew his father could neither

read nor understand. Silently he placed the watch in his father's hands and shut the door of the Dupont home behind him, never to return. Decades later, when Pierre walked freely down the corridors of Versailles, a confidant of princes and kings, Samuel died in Paris, a short carriage ride away. Pierre chose not to attend his father's funeral.

Pierre called the timepiece his "talisman of liberty." He had no profession, no trade save the hated work of making watches, and no money. He appealed to acquaintances for introductions to wealthy Parisians who had sons or daughters in need of tutoring. But people of wealth—which meant people of noble birth—would not consider hiring a wastrel and rake turned out by his father, who had had no formal education beyond the age of thirteen. Forever hungry, invariably in debt, Pierre found solace only in his freedom and his country walks to the home of Monsieur and Madame Dore in Nemours, family friends who looked kindly on Pierre's predicament.

Monsieur Dore was rarely at home; Madame Dore treated Pierre as she might a son. Pierre considered his benefactress pretentious and superficial. Still, he called her Maman, as did a young cousin who lived with the Dores, Nicole Charlotte Marie Louise le Dée de Rencourt, an eighteen-year-old woman whose name was a good deal more noble than her family. Marie's father, a minor collector of taxes, had inherited and could pass on no fortune. Madame Dore, childless herself, had agreed to take on the task of properly placing Marie in French society.

Madame Dore pressed Marie and Pierre upon each other. Pierre squired Marie through the verdant Nemours countryside; Marie listened wide-eyed to Pierre's tales of Paris life, his throbbing desires for greatness, his poetry. He recounted for Marie the duel he had fought, earning a deep scar in his chest, over a woman's honor. He described the horrors of studying medicine, which he had briefly done. He revealed the plans he and a friend, Berneron de Pradt, had laid for the conquest of Corsica, and how, as a benevolent king, he, Pierre Dupont, would rule wisely and well. Beneath the willow trees of the Dore estate Pierre poured the dreams and hopes he had hidden since his childhood into Marie's willing ears. Marie, gentle and modest and, Pierre believed, intelligent, soothed his tormented conscience and fell in love.

Pierre had not failed to notice Marie's beauty, her waterfall of black hair, her "figure of a nymph and soft black eyes." Madame Dore urged the young couple to embrace each other as brother and sister, but Pierre refused even a sibling closeness. He cherished, in his mind and heart,

fantasies of conquest and glory and rule; he wanted no ties, least of all those of romance or love.

One afternoon in the drawing room of the Dore home, Pierre's Maman announced that a husband had been chosen for Marie. She would wed the local collector of taxes, Monsieur Desnaudiers, a stolid fifty-five-year-old widower who was known to have treated his dead wife none too well. But Monsieur Desnaudiers offered Marie security, and, at eighteen, she was nearly past her most marriageable years.

Pierre protested loudly: how could Madame Dore think of marrying so lovely a young flower to a seedy tax collector with a reputation for wife beating? Marie would remain unhappy her entire life; she would be tempted from the path of virtue to the sin of adultery. What Madame Dore proposed amounted to a cruel fate.

Madame Dore shrugged off Pierre's objections. She had no choice: Desnaudiers offered stability, money, a comfortable home. Noble birth aside, Marie had no dowry, no lands, no social position. Who else could be found to marry the girl? Madame Dore asked.

Pierre found the answer on his lips: himself. If Madame Dore would give him two years to make his fortune he would marry Marie.

Maman hesitated—but not too long—and consented. That morning Marie had wept in Pierre's arms over her destiny. Now she cried on the shoulder of her fiancé. Toasts were drunk to the newly betrothed; Pierre slipped into the reverie of a young man suddenly in love. Friends arrived, slapped his back jovially, congratulated him on Marie's beauty. Pierre slept that night drunk with pleasure and romance.

At dawn his reverie fled. He did not really love Marie; he neither could support her nor had hopes of making his fortune. He and Berneron de Pradt had plotted for six months their invasion of Corsica, to free the island people from the oppression of dictatorship. Even if he had died fighting for Corsica's liberation, Pierre knew, a place in history would have been his. Now, and forever, he must struggle simply to support a wife—and that might mean returning to the hated watchmaker's bench. Anne had bequeathed him the principles of chivalry and valor as a guide for his life; to serve them he must sacrifice power, fortune, and glory. But he had given his word, and he resolved to keep it.

The Duc de Choiseul, noble to the very tips of the smallest twigs on his family tree, presided as first minister of Louis XV's kingdom over

weekly public audiences at the palace of Versailles. Here the lowest commoner could approach the king's chief adviser. One day a pock-marked, limping, unfashionably dressed young man appeared with a memorandum and petitioned the duc to read it. His words, Pierre Dupont said, concerned grave matters of national importance, foremost among them the rejuvenation of France's economy.

Choiseul thanked the young man and decided to forward the paper unread to his minister of finance. Pierre summoned the most eloquent phrases at his command; he flattered and charmed the duc into promising to read the memorandum himself. Choiseul dismissed Pierre with a wave of his scented handkerchief, ordering him to return the following week.

Since promising to wed Marie le Dée, Pierre had struggled to escape his poverty, not by constructing timepieces, but by bringing himself to the attention of France's ruling class. Berneron de Pradt had been understanding when Pierre announced that they must dissolve their plan to conquer Corsica; love must prevail over glory. Still, Pierre believed himself to be a military genius. France was then embroiled in the Seven Years' War with England. Between the nations stood the natural rock fortress of Gibraltar, in British hands. If only France could wrest it from her enemy, Pierre reasoned, the war would be won.

Pierre studied Gibraltar furiously, the size and appointments of its fort, the sieges laid upon it since Roman times. In exacting detail he constructed a plan that would—in his estimation—allow King Louis's soldiers to scale the island's ramparts, and he prepared to present this plan at Versailles. He tore his work to shreds when England and France signed a peace treaty days before Choiseul's next public audience.

Pierre's military genius became worthless specie. But peace had not ended France's ills. Extravagant kings and senseless wars had emptied its coffers. An idle, pampered noble class taxed and overtaxed the nation's masses. The fields and groves and vineyards yielded huge crops, yet millions lived in poverty. Pierre decided to create a plan that would remedy France's ills. Alone, in his sparse Paris room, he wrote another memorandum to the Duc de Choiseul, and he became a thinker of dangerously radical proportions for eighteenth-century France.

"The earth and waters are the only sources of wealth," Pierre wrote. From nature flows all prosperity and all that makes a nation wealthy. Therefore, the proprietors of the land, the farmers and their helpers, must have liberty, happiness, and immunity from oppression by all other

classes of people; only then will they do their job properly. He recommended, in the pages of his memorandum, suppression of the many taxes on the peasantry, freedom of commerce, and recruitment, rather than drafting, of soldiers for the royal army. He sought in precise ways to upset the class hierarchy that allowed a few thousand Frenchmen to live luxuriously while millions starved.

Pierre's thoughts impressed the Duc de Choiseul. He granted the young man a singular honor, the right to visit him at any time without an appointment. Pierre wrote an ode extolling the duc for ending the military draft, as he felt the minister surely would upon his recommendation. Fortunately, the poem never reached the duc; Choiseul had no intention of following Pierre's proposals.

Pierre visited Choiseul regularly. Always, he was received graciously and encouraged to continue his work. The duc seemed interested in the watchmaker's son, but offered him no position or money. Soon Pierre realized that the king's first minister intended to do little for him.

He appealed to friends for help. The Abbé de Voisenon, a minor Parisian writer and priest, met and liked Pierre. Voisenon knew Choiseul socially. He called on the duc in Pierre's behalf, drawing attention to the remarkable parallels between Pierre and Jean-Jacques Rousseau: both were watchmakers' sons; both had romantic temperaments; both possessed unusual character and brains.

Choiseul was unmoved. Rousseau had captured the imagination of the French people with his novels *Émile* and *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*. His immortal *Social Contract* had made him a god to the masses and a dangerous revolutionary to the ruling class. Choiseul could do little to stop Rousseau from gripping the people's minds, but he had no intention of creating another literary giant by accepting Voisenon's comparison. He dismissed the priest with a promise to do something for Dupont. He never fulfilled his pledge.

In May, 1763, Roussel de La Tour, a prominent nobleman and counselor to the Parliament of Paris, published a pamphlet, titled *La Richesse de l'Etat*, which said more about France's poverty than her wealth. La Tour proposed a daring change in government: replace the current tax system with a single levy based on the income of the taxpayer. The nation would be divided into classes of taxpayers; their contributions would provide a continuing source of revenue to the state.

La Tour's ideas captured the minds of most Parisians who could read,

Pierre Dupont among them. Pierre agreed with La Tour's concept of the single tax but believed the lawyer had badly overestimated the income it would produce. Working feverishly, he wrote a thirty-two-page rebuttal to La Tour. A bookseller, Moreau, bought Pierre's manuscript for two *louis*, which he never paid, and published it. The pamphlet carried no signature, to avoid the wrath of the king's censors; Pierre had neither La Tour's title nor position to keep him from being thrown into the Bastille for his radical views.

La Tour had created a sensation with his pamphlet; Pierre rode its tide. Another author answered Pierre's answer to La Tour, and Pierre decided to reply to that, too. The literary battle, such as it was, was joined, but Pierre earned as much from his second pamphlet as he had from the first. Poverty chased close at his heels. Still he called upon Choiseul, and still he drew comfort from his growing friendship with the Abbé de Voisenon. He was no closer to making his fortune than he had been on the day he promised to make Marie his wife, but he had chosen his profession: the watchmaker's son would become a writer.

Charles-Blaise Meliand, royal *intendant* of the district of Soissons, exerted the combined influence of governor, magistrate, and political ward heeler over the area he administered in the name of the king. On a visit to Paris, he met Pierre Dupont at the home of his distant cousin, the Abbé de Voisenon. Voisenon urged Meliand to hire Pierre as an assistant. Meliand, just then, needed a bright young man interested in agriculture to compile reports on conditions in Soissons. He offered Dupont a job and membership in the Royal Society of Agriculture of Soissons.

Pierre accepted immediately. Writing reports for Meliand, he could familiarize himself with the intricacies of government. In the Society membership rested his first opportunity to escape anonymity. Meliand gave his new assistant two books to read, *Theory of Taxation* and *The Friend of Man*, both by the Marquis de Mirabeau. Pierre devoured them; in clear, explicit language, they set forth thoughts that conformed to his own about the importance of agriculture to the regeneration of ailing France.

The Marquis de Mirabeau was one of the few noblemen who had not been magnetized to Versailles and the dissipation of the French elite. *The Friend of Man* had made him wildly popular with the common Frenchman unable to resist its lively style laced with lessons on how to

live. Mirabeau's own luxurious life-style, on vast lands at Bignon, in Nemours, could be forgiven; so, too, could his curious habit of keeping both a mistress and a wife in residence behind the gates of his estate. But after becoming a friend to the common soul, Mirabeau became an enemy to the government with his book on taxation, a violent attack on the nation's tax structure using inaccurate facts dreamed up in the marquis's head. The Duc de Choiseul ordered Mirabeau's arrest and imprisonment in the Bastille. He was set free after a few days—the people loved him too much for the minister to keep him in jail long—but he found himself banished to his country estate and ordered to cease writing against the king's policies.

Pierre impulsively dashed off a letter to the marquis after reading his books. Mirabeau answered warmly; he had read Pierre's two pamphlets and liked them. He encouraged the young writer to study two articles in Denis Diderot's encyclopedia, entitled *Fermiers* and *Grains*. The marquis discreetly failed to mention that the anonymous author of both was Dr. François Quesnay, personal physician to Madame de Pompadour, Louis XV's royal concubine.

François Quesnay loathed political influence. He refused titles for himself and would not seek favors from the king's mistress for his family or friends. He took no part in the intrigues of the court, seemingly content to minister to Madame de Pompadour's medical needs. Twice Louis offered him the position of physician to the king; twice Quesnay turned his monarch down.

His single passion outside the practice of medicine was the new science of political economy, which to Quesnay meant agriculture. He had no desire to milk cows or prod a mule, but he owned a large farm that his son ran. He walked quietly through the corridors of Versailles, possessed of huge power through his relationship with the king's consort; never was he known to exercise it. But under the very noses of the king and his ministers François Quesnay led a group of titled Frenchmen, the Marquis de Mirabeau among them, who disagreed violently with the way France was governed. In time, when he had constructed a new system for the government of France, the doctor believed he could, through Madame de Pompadour, change the face of the nation.

Mirabeau did not bring Pierre Dupont to François Quesnay's attention; his exile to Bignon had ended his regular meetings with the doctor. Nor did he intend to jeopardize Quesnay's position by revealing his

identity to the fledgling writer. But Quesnay thirsted for new material on agriculture; he found his own way to Pierre's pamphlets. He mentioned them to Bertin, the controller general of finance, and a member of his group. Bertin vaguely remembered that a friend, Intendant Meliand, had once introduced him to a young assistant, a rather ugly youth with a pockmarked face and crooked nose, whose ideas resembled those in the pamphlets. Quesnay decided to seek out the young writer.

Pierre accepted the messenger's salute in astonishment—and fear. The servant wore the royal livery of the king. Pierre had returned from an afternoon walk to find him standing outside the door to his shabby room. The messenger had made no mistake; the envelope he carried bore the name Pierre Samuel Dupont, assistant to Charles-Blaise Meliand.

Pierre watched the servant disappear and opened the envelope. It bore a summons for him to Versailles, to the presence of Dr. François Quesnay, physician to Madame de Pompadour. Perhaps, he reasoned, his pamphlets had offended the court. He considered fleeing Paris, but friends urged him to remain and answer the summons; if the court knew his name he could not hide from its long tentacles.

At the appointed hour Pierre appeared nervously before the doctor. Quesnay quizzed him on the grain trade, taxation, and agricultural economy. They discussed the principles Pierre had espoused in his pamphlets. Quesnay revealed his authorship of the encyclopedia articles, told Pierre of the group of men he led, and invited him to make his home at Versailles. He would be given a private apartment in the palace and enough money to buy clothing suitable to his new environment. Together they would construct a system of government and inaugurate a new era in the history of France.

Quesnay recognized in Pierre the potential of a great disciple for his teachings. Pierre found in the doctor the wise and patient father Samuel had failed to be. Each morning, in Quesnay's Versailles office, they worked on the intricacies of a new method for the administration of the nation. The physician attended his patient in the afternoons, and Pierre worked alone in Quesnay's apartment. Quesnay assigned his protégé a long essay on France's grain trade. Pierre rarely left the palace, forsaking the Paris nightlife he had learned to love in his poverty. His years of bohemian wanderlust, and his constant hunger, ended. The physician to the royal whore of King Louis XV taught Pierre to fill his stomach and discipline his mind.

Madame de Pompadour received her physician's young protégé in her elegant private apartment at the summer palace, Fountainbleu. She called him "our young agriculturist," spoke of Dr. Quesnay's glowing praise, and of the important plans she and her doctor were making for his future, including the creation of a special committee, with Pierre Dupont at its head, to study agricultural conditions throughout France.

Quesnay had arranged the meeting after he read Pierre's essay on the grain trade. It had pleased him enormously, and an interview with the king's mistress fit well into his plan to convert her to his way of thinking. Quesnay urged Pierre to dedicate his first book to Madame de Pompadour; what better way to assure her patronage toward him and at the same time promote the work among the people of France?

Exhilarated, Pierre burst into Madame Dore's drawing room with the news. A year had passed since his promise to marry Marie; this was the first evidence he could bring to her guardian that he was making his way in the world. Madame Dore was impressed; a connection with the king's mistress could be of priceless social value to her, as well as insuring Marie's happiness. Pierre returned to Versailles to begin revising his manuscript. He paid a visit to Mirabeau at Bignon. The marquis told him of Quesnay's words to him soon after the doctor and Pierre met.

"Let us encourage this young man," Quesnay had said. "As he will be talking long after we are dead."

Soon Pierre's book was ready for the presses, awaiting only his final corrections on long sheets of printer's proofs. Quesnay arranged another audience with his patient, who was ill and required his attention around the clock.

"The doctor has not neglected to tell you how in spite of my bad health we have been thinking of you," Madame de Pompadour said to Pierre. "We have been preparing a great career for your talents."

Quesnay found no cause for great concern in his patient's illness. She had long suffered from minor ailments, but none had ever threatened her life. After Pierre's audience with her, however, Madame de Pompadour's condition worsened. Quesnay's only serious rival, the Duc de Choiseul, who had long coveted the doctor's influence with the king's mistress, saw an opportunity to discredit him; the minister insisted that another physician be called in. He chose one with much less talent and experience than Quesnay.

Madame de Pompadour died, probably of pneumonia, under the new doctor's care. Choiseul had outmaneuvered Quesnay; the physician who had allowed his mistress to become ill in the first place was blamed for

her death. Without Madame de Pompadour's patronage Quesnay soon lost all influence at court.

Pierre's book, bearing a dedication to the dead mistress of the king, was on the presses. Quesnay and Mirabeau urged him to remove the few lines of praise for the dead courtesan; rumors floated through Versailles that Choiseul intended to imprison all those who had been intimate with the king's last mistress—or execute them.

Pierre knew that his recently bright future might now plunge into devastating darkness. Madame Dore informed him that his engagement to Marie was broken; Marie's father concurred. He forbade Pierre ever to see his daughter again.

But the months of living at Versailles, the exposure to court intrigue, and the belief Quesnay had given him in his talents and his cause had hardened Pierre. He recalled his mother's teaching that a man of genius, character, and substance must also have honor if he would achieve greatness. Pierre refused to stop the presses from printing his dedication to Madame de Pompadour. Instead, he added a line to its end.

"Woe to the man," he wrote, "who would fear to fling a flower on the tomb of one to whom he had offered incense."

3

MARIE LE DÉE embroidered ruffles for her forbidden lover's sleeves in a room overlooking the garden of her father's Paris house. She worked by lamplight, far past sundown, stopping now and then to peer down a hallway toward her father's bedroom, waiting for the sliver of light beneath his doorway to disappear.

When she was certain Papa le Dée had retired for the night, Marie turned her own oil lamp down low and placed it on the sill of her window. By the dim light she read one of her lover's letters until, growing sleepy, she undressed and lay still upon her bed, struggling to stay awake, listening intently for the soft pinging of a few dried peas thrown against a windowpane.

When the sound came she hastened to the garden, embraced Pierre, wept at their dilemma, kissed him tenderly, and slipped back into the house. Pierre stumbled through the hedges and wandered in the midnight darkness to his rented city room.

Monsieur le Dée and Madame Dore had broken Marie and Pierre's betrothal, but not their will. After a few weeks of moonlight encounters the lovers grew bold. Marie's elderly deaf aunt, Madame Benevault, discreetly accepted Pierre's visits while her niece happened to be sitting in her drawing room. Once or twice, when the risk of discovery was not great, Pierre and Marie chanced a few moments together in the dining room of the le Dée house. Letters passed between them frequently, carried by a midwife, Madame Saulnier, to Berget, the le Dée gardener, transferred to the hands of the le Dée governess and brought tucked in the folds of her dress to Marie's bedroom. Destitute as usual, Pierre paid for the servants' silence with cash pressed into his hand by Marie's kindly aunt.

Soon the desires of the flesh overcame both Marie and Pierre. A few francs and a bottle of wine bought a private afternoon in Berget's unlocked and unattended cottage. The midwife Saulnier's home chanced, too, to be vacant on occasion. Monsieur le Dée, preoccupied with collecting taxes, assumed that his daughter had broken off all contact with

the former protégé of Madame de Pompadour. He never discovered Marie's disobedience.

The editors of the *Gazette du Commerce*, a successful Parisian magazine designed to inform the public of the government's policies, found their columns filled with arguments for and against the controversial teachings of the *économistes*, as François Quesnay's friends had taken to calling themselves. The *Gazette* survived on the whims of the king's censors; controversy of any sort threatened its existence. Its proprietors decided to remove the burden of opinion from the magazine by printing a supplement, to be called the *Journal of Agriculture, Commerce, and Finance.*

They offered editorship of the *Journal* to Pierre Dupont, the *économistes*' youngest spokesman, with a salary attached that would allow him to propose marriage to Marie le Dée. Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, the *intendant* of Limoges and a baron, put forth Pierre's name for the position. Turgot sympathized with the principles of the *économistes* and liked Dupont; he believed Pierre had a fine administrative mind and a bright future.

Pierre thanked Turgot profusely and hungrily took the job. Already he was a year overdue in his promise to wed Marie. Over the winter of 1764, after François Quesnay's downfall, Pierre had done little but live off the doctor's charity—Choiseul's dreaded revenge had failed to materialize—and attend the theater. The stage triumph of the season, Pierre Belloy's *Siege of Calais*, became his favorite. When the text of the play was printed, Pierre bought a copy and decided it was badly written. He devised five hundred eighty corrections to the script and sent them to the playwright. Word of Belloy's anger at Pierre's gall reached him; he was genuinely surprised that the author did not agree with his criticisms.

Pierre fell easily into the gay Parisian nightlife, stumbling drunkenly from party to party after the curtain fell at the theater or opera. Marie understood; she advised him on what clothes to wear, turned his collars when they frayed, and encouraged him to continue making contacts in Parisian society. But Pierre's conscience soon overcame his enjoyment of the theater and cultured conversation in ladies' drawing rooms. At one of their garden trysts Marie was shocked to see that Pierre had cut off all the hair on one side of his head. She was pleased as well; her lover's strange haircut meant that he had forsaken the pleasures of the night for hard work during the day.

Pierre prepared to ask Monsieur le Dée for his daughter's hand in marriage. Now that he had a steady job editing the *Journal* and an income sufficient to support a wife, he would bare his secret courtship of Marie to her father. A date for the nuptials would be chosen at once.

Papa le Dée disagreed. The le Dées were, and had always been, devout Catholics. He had learned that Pierre Dupont subscribed to the Protestant faith. No daughter of his would ever marry one of those impious usurpers of the true faith.

Marie resigned herself to never marrying Pierre. Poverty might be overcome; Pierre's tendency to dream of royal favor could be excused; her noble family tree would even bend to embrace the common bush from which he sprang. But religion was too deep a chasm to cross. She wrote Pierre a tragic letter of farewell, pledged him eternal and undying love, and advised him to accept their lot.

Pierre refused to be discouraged. He wrote Papa le Dée a long letter denying that he had ever seen a Protestant and assured him that Marie's soul would not be consigned to hell if she married him. Conveniently, Pierre forgot his tortured and executed ancestors of Rouen, his kidnapped cousins, his own parents' fear of persecution. He had given his solemn word to marry Marie. And he had fallen in love with her.

Marie took heart at Pierre's display of nerve. She pleaded daily with her father, as Pierre continued to write, convinced that his words and her tears would soothe Monsieur le Dée's worried religious conscience. One evening Marie gingerly told her father that Pierre wished to call on him in person: would he object? No, Papa le Dée said, he would not; let the young man come and ask for her hand. Would he consent? Marie asked in a whisper. Yes, he would offer no further objections; Pierre obviously felt no allegiance to the outlawed faith. Marie fell on her father's neck, streaming tears of joy.

Pierre called on Monsieur le Dée. The betrothal was made formal—almost. Now Samuel Dupont, whose approval was required by law, chose to object to Marie's religious heritage. And, after his own marriage to a woman of high birth, he feared that Pierre's choice might lead him even farther from the path of righteous living than he had already strayed. Pierre appealed to his uncle, Pierre de Montchanin, to intercede with Samuel. After weeks of battle, Pierre's namesake won the watchmaker over.

On January 28, 1766, two days after the wedding contract was signed,

both parents—grudgingly—consenting, Pierre Dupont and Nicole Charlotte Marie Louise le Dée de Rencourt were united in holy matrimony in the Catholic church of Saint Sulpice in Paris.

Pierre and Marie engaged rooms in an ordinary Paris hotel, the Saint Martin. Marie, twenty-four, gentle and at the same time spirited, removed from her husband the drudgery of household chores. Pierre devoted his full energies to editing the new *Journal of Agriculture, Commerce, and Finance.*

The owners of the *Journal* had intended it to serve as a conduit to the people for the king's views on agricultural matters. Pierre worked diligently to turn its emphasis into support for the doctrines of François Quesnay. When letters attacking Quesnay's ideas were published Pierre added comments designed to destroy the arguments of the opposition. He devoted large spaces to articles by Quesnay, Mirabeau, and himself. The *Journal*'s circulation increased steadily; so too did its owners' anger with their editor.

Pierre's employers admonished him against allowing his own views to dominate the *Journal*'s pages; they forbade him to publish his own work. Pierre adopted pseudonyms. He convinced François Quesnay to write letters mildly critical of his own ideas and printed them over more false signatures. The *Journal*'s owners were neither amused nor fooled. They awaited an opportunity to free themselves of Pierre's services. When the Parliament of Brittany failed to register a tax ordered by the king, Pierre was ordered to castigate the provincial assembly in the *Journal*. He refused and was immediately dismissed: the *Journal* would not be turned into a vehicle for the propaganda of François Quesnay and his followers.

In his few months editing the *Journal* Pierre had become the sole public voice for a system of economics fathered by no less a luminary than Madame de Pompadour's former private physician. Even after Quesnay's fall from power the doctor held regular meetings of the *économistes* in his Versailles apartment, which Choiseul had graciously allowed him to keep. Pierre attended always, the favored disciple now of a school of thought endorsed by many powerful French noblemen.

Foreign visitors to Paris often fell into Quesnay's orb, among them the young tutor to the Duke of Buccleuch, a British subject named Adam Smith. From Quesnay and Mirabeau, the doctor's heir apparent,

and Pierre Dupont, Smith started to cull the ideas he eventually distilled into the *Wealth of Nations.*

Another Englishman, destined to become the most lionized personality of the age, and its most brilliant revolutionary, found Quesnay's thoughts engaging. The gentleman visited Paris briefly in 1766, called on the doctor, and expressed a desire to meet the young writer who carried the *économistes*' principles to the people with such daring and candor. Pierre was too busy to see the visitor; he seemed, in fact, not to have known until Benjamin Franklin left Paris that the inventor wished to make his acquaintance. A decade was to pass before they finally met.

But Franklin had made the *économistes* his friends. A few months after his visit to Versailles he received a copy of Pierre's latest published work, accompanied by a personal letter. The book fared less than well. It contained many of Quesnay's articles, with an introduction by Dupont. Turgot, Meliand, and even Mirabeau found Pierre's writing disappointing. But the unemployed editor had posed a thought that captured Benjamin Franklin's imagination: the fortunes of a nation, Pierre wrote, could be shaped into a science of human interaction.

Franklin answered Pierre's letter, embracing the young writer with all the charm at his command. He had, he wrote, read the book "with great pleasure, and received from it a great deal of Instruction. There is such a Freedom from local and national Prejudices and Partialities, so much Benevolence to Mankind in general, so much Goodness mixt with the Wisdom, in the Principles of your new Philosophy, that I am perfectly charmed with them."

Benjamin Franklin, Adam Smith, and Voltaire, the exiled Sage of Ferney, with whom Pierre had begun to correspond, knew that times of great turmoil loomed on the horizon. When the human order changed, by revolution if necessary, new methods would have to be found for governing nations. François Quesnay's principles held one possibility, but the doctor was aging rapidly, even, it was said, slipping into senility. Pierre Dupont seemed to be Quesnay's best young disciple and so held the interest of men with subtle intellects and great vision.

Yet Pierre found little time for Smith or Franklin or even Voltaire. Married less than a year, he was unemployed. Turgot and Meliand, to help him along, asked that he write reports on their districts, offering what funds they could, which amounted to little more than Pierre needed to cover the expense of hiring clerks who would compile statistics for him. Quesnay, who was indeed growing senile and spending

much of his time constructing strange mathematical systems by which he hoped to discover the secrets of the universe, could not help him. Mirabeau quietly relieved Quesnay of the leadership of the *économistes* and began holding weekly meetings in his Paris townhouse. Pierre rarely attended, for his mind was consumed with finding a way to support the coming addition to his family: Marie had become pregnant.

On October 1, 1767, Marie gave birth to a son. Pierre asked Mirabeau to stand as his firstborn's godfather. The marquis agreed, and the child was named Victor Marie Dupont, taking Mirabeau's given name as his own. Victor was a healthy, active baby. To his mother's comfort, for religious reasons, and his father's, for political ones, he was baptized a Catholic. Pierre dreamed still of rising to the summit of power through the morass of intrigue at Versailles; being a Catholic in good standing was among the first requisites.

Catholicism fit, too, with the new job Pierre had found. The Abbé Baudeau, a priest, had started a monthly magazine of church-inspired gossip called the *Éphémérides du Citoyen*. Mirabeau converted Baudeau to physiocracy, as the *économistes* called their system of thought. When the priest was offered a lucrative position abroad he approached Pierre with a proposal to take over the *Éphémérides*. If Dupont would edit the magazine for six months at a small salary, Baudeau would then sign over its ownership. Pierre's friends cautioned him against the arrangement; they knew his affinity for strong words and defiance of the king in print. Pierre shrugged off their objections: he must find a way to feed his wife and son. He accepted Baudeau's proposition.

Pierre made a short pilgrimage to visit Voltaire in Switzerland. He, Marie, and Victor journeyed out of Paris for a short holiday. They found an apartment convenient to the office of the *Éphémérides* in the Rue de Faubourg St. Jacques, with a small garden Pierre could plant and Victor might use as a playground. They held a quiet celebration in their new lodgings on the eve of Pierre's first day at the magazine. The toasts they drank were premature, and the garden more important as a provider of food than a yard: the *Éphémérides du Citoyen* was destined to fail from its start.

4

PIERRE EDITED the *Éphémérides* through four tumultuous years. Baudeau had promised him four hundred paid subscribers; less than one-fourth that number actually turned up. The columns of the magazine spouted a continuous stream of political heresy, much of it from Pierre's pen. Each month he was summoned before the king's censors to justify the articles he printed; in time, the censors threatened to ban the *Éphémérides*, and would have, but Pierre's good fortune held: five arbiters of public opinion fell from power before finding enough excuses to silence him.

Income from the magazine's subscribers barely paid Pierre's printing bills and left nothing for his salary. He could not pay writers and so took upon himself the enormous task of creating all the words he printed. In November, 1772, the *Éphémérides* lagged seven months behind schedule. Pierre's debts had mounted to fifteen thousand francs, a sum he could never hope to raise. The newest royal censor stamped him irresponsible and with a swirl of his pen left Pierre once more unemployed, this time deeply in debt. His creditors, sympathetic to the principles of physiocracy, agreed to wait for payment. Pierre was saved from debtor's prison, to the chagrin of the king's censor.

He could not so easily put off other obligations. Marie had borne another son in the spring of 1772, a healthy male child. Pierre asked Jacques Turgot to stand as the boy's godfather. Turgot, one of the few who did not desert Pierre in the face of royal disfavor, agreed and suggested that the child be named Eleuthère Irénée, "in honor of liberty and peace." Pierre hesitated; it was an unusual name. He wished nothing to stand in his son's way, and he needed no more notoriety for himself. But the honor of naming a newborn infant went to its godfather, and Pierre liked and respected the baron. He acquiesced; the founder of the world's largest manufacturer of gunpowder and explosives was baptized "in honor of liberty and peace."

Pierre could barely feed the woman he had married and the children

he had fathered. Marie had taken over the planting of vegetables in the garden outside their apartment. For months the Dupont family survived on freshly picked tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers, and grapes. Pierre soon realized that he had lost more than a job and meager income with the demise of the *Éphémérides:* his political influence, voice, and popularity, had died as well.

Prince Adam Czartoryski, brother of the king of Poland, scoured Europe for tutors worthy of educating his royally bred son. The prince encountered Pierre Dupont's name whenever he asked the advice of the Continent's more enlightened thinkers. Czartoryski himself had read much of Pierre's work and agreed with most of his ideas. He decided to raise his son according to the principles of physiocracy.

The prince offered Pierre ten thousand francs a year, apartments in his palace for the Dupont family, travel expenses from Paris to Warsaw, and a title, Honorary Councillor of the King and Republic of Poland. After ten years of service Pierre would receive a cash bonus of one hundred thousand francs, an estimable fortune.

Czartoryski's terms flattered Pierre; he could remember when not one of Paris's noble families would risk hiring him to teach its sons. But a singular honor had just come his way. The Margrave of Baden, supreme ruler of a small kingdom in the Black Forest, had named Pierre his representative to the king of France. Louis XV had balked briefly; Frenchmen did not often serve as emissaries from a foreign monarch to their own. The margrave intervened personally, and Louis approved the appointment. On July 1, 1774, Pierre was due to become an ambassador to his own king.

The Polish prince waved Pierre's objections aside and sweetened his offer. He would have his brother name Pierre Secretary of the High Council of National Education and Director of the Academy in Warsaw. He would mortgage a piece of property he owned in Holland and pay Pierre one-third of his bonus in advance.

Pierre's eyebrows lifted at Czartoryski's new terms. Acceptance meant an end to his frustrations at earning money; his influence in French intellectual circles would stop, too. The bonus would allow him to fulfill a dream and buy a country estate in Nemours; he and Marie and their sons would, however, be in far-off Warsaw, unable to enjoy their land. He might control the education of an entire nation's youth; unfortunately, they would be Polish children, not French. The Duponts

would reside in a princely castle, attended by liveried servants, fawned on by lesser mortals; the palace would not be Versailles. Prince Adam's proposition amounted to a decade of luxurious exile, Pierre realized.

Yet exile might be what he needed most. The wrath of the king's censors had kept him unemployed and poor for nearly two years. He had made enemies in high places. Wherever in France he attempted to preach his doctrine of the rule of nature, he encountered hostility and scorn. Perhaps he would never flourish under the iron rule of the Bourbon kings. Pierre wrote Prince Czartoryski that he would accept his newest offer, told Marie to pack their belongings, and prepared to desert his homeland.

Louis XVI, heir to the Bourbon throne, the Bourbon nose, the Bourbon obesity, and the ultimate destiny of the Bourbon dynasty, was not yet twenty when he donned the crimson robe of rule, clutched the scepter of Charlemagne in his hands, and knelt to be anointed from the vial of Clovis.

Louis was neither intelligent nor attractive. Mounds of bluish flesh cascaded down his neck and limbs and his eyes seemed to disappear into his corpulent face. His marriage to Marie Antoinette and his death under the blade of the guillotine elevated his brief life to legend and settled upon his memory forever the mark of a ruthless, plotting, and cruel dictator.

In reality, Louis ruled more benevolently than any other Bourbon king. Often he visited Parisian hospitals in disguise and when conditions in them repulsed him ordered immediate changes. He believed that the peasants of France deserved a greater share of the nation's wealth and set in motion drastic, at least to the entrenched nobility, measures to end their virtual serfdom. He studied the prisons of Paris and, long before the masses stormed it, planned to have the infamous Bastille torn down.

His flaws, and they were great, were dullness and stupidity. Notably weak-willed for a king, Louis allowed anyone with influence to ply his way through the antechambers of French power. Marie Antoinette, whom he married to unite France with her birthplace, Austria, loathed her master's company and had little trouble ridding herself of his annoying presence. Each night, while courtiers danced with their queen, Marie set the clocks of Versailles forward an hour and Louis simply retired an hour early to the royal bed. On July 14, 1789, when Paris's enraged citizens attacked the Bastille, Louis described the day's events in

his diary in a single word: "nothing," as he did each day the weather prevented him from going hunting.

In May, 1774, when Louis ascended the throne, Pierre Dupont had not yet left Paris for Warsaw. He knew that the new king brought with him to Versailles an open mind toward choosing the ministers who would run his kingdom. He dallied as long as he dared en route to Poland, taking a month to make a week's journey over summer-hardened roads. Baron Jacques Turgot had been brought into Louis's cabinet; Pierre hoped his old friend would find a place for him at Versailles. But Turgot wrote to Pierre that he might as well settle himself in Warsaw; no position worthy of bringing him back to France had materialized.

Then Louis elevated Turgot to the office of controller general of finance, charged with rejuvenating France's tottering economy. The baron wanted Pierre at his side. Louis was cooperative; with a swirl of the royal pen he named Pierre inspector general of commerce for the French nation and ordered him to Paris to assume the pressing responsibilities of his job. Pierre lingered a few weeks in Warsaw, enjoying the limelight of a lame-duck tutor turned confidant of the king of France. Aboard his carriage to Paris he wrote a long letter to François Quesnay, his patron and first teacher, spilling onto the paper all the frustration and insecurity of his years of poverty and the exhilaration he felt at constructing a new France at Jacques Turgot's side. Pierre addressed himself to a dead man; Quesnay, senile and lonely, perished two days before Pierre took up his pen.

In twenty months of office Jacques Turgot and Pierre Dupont extorted from Louis XVI greater reforms than France had seen in a thousand years. Together they ended internal tariffs and restrictions on the grain trade, abolished the craftsmen's guilds, stopped the hated forced labor on public roads, granted royal funds to inventors of new farming and manufacturing methods, established public-work projects, and installed a fair property tax that applied even to the nobility. Pierre came to know and revere the pliable Louis as a dog knows its master: it is his master, murderer and saint alike. He learned that rulers can be ruled and manipulated; he came to respect his monarch's desire for change. Never, even when all France turned away from Louis XVI, did Pierre desert him or, even after his downfall, Jacques Turgot.

Turgot had proclaimed that the reign of women was over in France.

He slashed the expenditures of the king's household, to the point where Marie Antoinette ruled over a staff of only fifteen thousand, an unheard-of paucity of servants for a French queen. He demanded a reduction of Marie's budget; no longer would she be able to buy diamonds or dole out lifetime pensions to flattering—and useless—courtiers. Marie fumed. She demanded that her husband throw Turgot in prison. Louis, admiring the changes Turgot had wrought and the discomfort he inflicted upon Marie, refused. Marie set about to ruin the controller general of her finances.

She and a few faithful courtiers conjured a set of letters, purportedly to and from Turgot, that contained treasonous remarks about the king and open references to his famous sexual impotence. Mysteriously, the letters surfaced beside Louis's bed one morning. Pierre noted an indecent amount of joy at court when Louis asked for Jacques Turgot's resignation.

Dupont's work with Turgot forced him into retirement. He had used the advance from Prince Czartoryski to put a down payment on a country estate in Nemours, not far from the Marquis de Mirabeau's château at Bignon. Louis decided to be lenient with Pierre; he had, after all, been forced to relinquish a lucrative post abroad to serve his king. He would be allowed to retain the eight-thousand-franc salary that made up his sole income. But he was to remove himself from Versailles to his country home, Bois-des-Fosses, to await the pleasure of his monarch. Louis's command amounted to exile less than fifty miles from Paris. And it deprived Pierre of the idea-rich society he had enjoyed since coming to Versailles.

As Jacques Turgot's assistant Pierre had been welcomed into the innermost circles of France's intellectual elite. He had befriended a young scientist, Antoine Lavoisier. Noble, wealthy, and dedicated to the infant science of chemistry, Lavoisier still respected those who sought to change France's social order. He did not neglect human relationships, as many brilliant scientists have. The discoverer of oxygen enjoyed the company of children and spent much time with Pierre's sons, Victor and, as he liked to be called, Irénée.

Once, when Irénée was fourteen, Lavoisier noticed the boy growing plants on a windowsill in his father's home. On his next visit Antoine brought an envelope of white powder to his friend's son and sprinkled it on the plants. The green shoots miraculously grew into mature plants in days rather than weeks. Lavoisier had introduced the lad to one of his

discoveries, nitrogen used as a fertilizer. Four years later, when the scientist headed the French Powder Commission during the revolution, he gave Irénée Dupont a job as an assistant bookkeeper. Irénée learned then that this same white powder, nitrate of soda, could be used as a basic ingredient in gunpowder.

In the countryside of Nemours, Pierre awoke each morning to the aroma of fertilized fields rather than the scent of perfumed and powdered wigs. He listened to the cock's crow rather than the gentle strains of Couperin and Rameau played upon harpsichords by court musicians. Instead of the frilled cravats of courtiers, the dank and austere corridors of Versailles, and the delicate elegance of mansion drawing rooms, he saw the coarse shirts of peasants, the small rooms of his manor house, and the crude, if tasteful, furnishings selected by his wife.

Marie had greeted the chore of running Bois-des-Fosses with ambition and optimism. She was content to stay outside Paris with her sons, their tutors, a small domestic staff, and the people of Nemours, while Pierre pondered matters of state at Versailles. She had assumed the posture of genteel countrywoman with ease; in weeks she had become the lady of open and noble grace the local peasants often approached with problems, questions, and requests.

Marie acted in amateur theatricals, cultivated the land, dined two or three times a week with the Mirabeaus, and raised her sons. Victor and Irénée roamed the woods and fields, roughhoused with the peasant children, and spent sweaty hours with private tutors learning the classical facts of life as their father had studied them. Their Papa, they knew, was a man of some importance, but he was away much of the time. They looked to their mother for daily guidance.

Marie Dupont struggled alone to make the estate pay for itself. Pierre returned from Versailles after Turgot's dismissal to find Bois-des-Fosses a hive of activity that pleased his most discerning physiocratic eye. Marie had raised calves, chickens, and ducks, and cultivated wheat and oats and large vineyards of healthy grapes that were crushed, fermented, and sold as wine. Bois-des-Fosses produced enough food to supply the family and an excess that Marie sold at market to pay the debts Pierre had amassed in his various failures. Pierre even approved of the tutor Marie had hired for the boys, Philippe Nicholas Harmand.

The master of Bois-des-Fosses found that he had little to do on his estate. He could retire to his study, which Marie had furnished to his

taste, and write, or to the small island in one of the property's streams, where Marie set up an office for him in the summer heat. Still in his mid-thirties, Pierre Dupont discovered awaiting him in Nemours all the pleasantries of life as a country squire, and he hated them: he had not come so far to end up with so little.

5

KING LOUIS XVI replaced Jacques Turgot with a Swiss financier rumored to be the wealthiest man in Europe. Jacques Necker had amassed millions through ruthless international trading in gold and currency. He seemed, to Louis, the perfect choice for a man who must rescue France from the brink of bankruptcy. Within weeks after Necker arrived at Versailles every reform Turgot and Pierre Dupont had instituted was reversed. Necker earned the confidence and trust of Marie Antoinette. The king found his wife much easier to live with and praised Necker for his brilliant work.

But Jacques Necker had no idea of how to run a nation. He searched the French bureaucracy for someone capable of keeping the country's economy alive. He discovered, much to his displeasure, that only Pierre Dupont, living in exile at Bois-des-Fosses, was qualified to administer the nation's department of finance.

Necker hated Pierre. For years, in his magazines, Pierre had attacked Necker's monopoly over the European trade with the Indies. Pierre distrusted Necker, but when the king's order to return to Versailles arrived in Nemours, the gentleman farmer leaped at the chance to resume his public service.

Marie Dupont rented a large flat in Paris's fashionable Cul-de-Sac de la Corderie, with eight rooms and separate servants' quarters. She indulged in dresses of silk and taffeta, a few fringed with squirrel. She traveled the city in a lacquered carriage, drawn by four horses with three liveried attendants astride. She purchased elegant furniture and brocaded draperies to fill the new Dupont apartment. Marie's shrewd management of Bois-des-Fosses had erased her husband's debts; she planned to spend four or five months each year in Paris and at Versailles, to be near Pierre and take advantage of the social status his new position brought.

Pierre worked diligently at Jacques Necker's side but allied himself with France's foreign minister, the Comte de Vergennes, who resented,

as did many Frenchmen, Necker's Swiss birth. Vergennes coaxed Louis into granting Pierre a patent of nobility. Pierre designed a coat of arms for himself, a shield with one perpendicular column on a field of scarlet, surmounted by a helmet, visor raised. Beneath the shield ran the new Dupont family motto, *Rectitudine Sto,* Be Upright. Pierre quickly became fond of swearing by the uprightness of his column.

The Dupont coat of arms adorned the carriage Marie had purchased. Each morning when he was not at Versailles Pierre rode in the carriage to Bellechase, the Passy house of a young priest, Charles-Maurice de Périgord. The eldest son of a count and heir to one of France's most ancient family trees, the priest had been crippled at the age of four by a fall, condemned forever to drag one leg along as he walked. Parisian wits snickered that each generation of the Périgord family, now in its seventh century, produced at least one clubfoot. Before his twentieth birthday Charles-Maurice earned the nickname "talons." Benjamin Constant, one of the many lovers Germaine Necker de Staël, Jacques Necker's daughter, took during her lifetime, believed the priest's character had been fashioned after his feet. He had good reason to hate Périgord; Constant inherited Germaine's favors from the priest. In later years Napoleon Bonaparte entrusted his empire's foreign policy to Charles-Maurice, whose elegance and aloofness became legendary. Privately, Napoleon referred to the priest as "shit in a silk stocking"; publicly, he called him by his favorite name, Talleyrand.

Pierre considered himself one of Talleyrand's closest friends. Talleyrand cultivated Pierre's esteem, used him as a pawn during the French Revolution, and rescued his son's foundering gunpowder business from bankruptcy in 1807 with a large loan.

The cream of Parisian intellectuals joined Pierre at Bellechase each day, and at Antoine Lavoisier's house each night. Lavoisier demonstrated his latest experiments, served fine wines at his table, and encouraged open discussion of ways to improve France. Nearly all Lavoisier's guests were monarchists, dedicated to keeping the Bourbon dynasty in power, at least in name; yet many were excited by news of the revolution in Britain's American colonies, brought to Lavoisier's drawing room by the Marquis de Lafayette, freshly returned from his heroic—and overblown—campaign beside the rebels. Lafayette's stories were confirmed by the aging inventor Pierre introduced to Lavoisier's circle of friends, Benjamin Franklin.

The fledgling United States had sent Benjamin Franklin to Paris as its

first foreign ambassador. At Lavoisier's dinner parties Franklin sat silent much of the time, smiling wisely, running his wrinkled hands through the gray wisps of hair that trailed from his head. Pierre and his friends interpreted the ambassador's simple style of dress as faithfulness to the spartan principles of the new American nation; no one guessed that he had no funds to use for buying new clothes. They attributed his quiet manner to his obvious wisdom; they never guessed that his French was, at best, as poor as his purse.

Pierre and Franklin saw each other often. Franklin had been charged with convincing Louis XVI that the United States should be favored with French foreign trade. Pierre oversaw the administration of the nation's foreign commerce. Franklin and Marie Dupont had in common a fascination for the newest rage, hot-air ballooning. The ambassador escorted Marie to a spring balloon demonstration in Paris a few days before she was due to leave the city for Nemours, where she would oversee the seasonal planting.

Marie wrote to Pierre in late summer that she had attended another hot-air ascent. She felt slightly ill, she told her husband, perhaps from the changing seasons. Pierre found no cause for alarm; it was not uncommon for his wife to be affected by the weather. Four days later Nicole Charlotte Marie Louise le Dee de Rencourt Dupont lay buried beneath freshly turned earth in the graveyard of the parish church in Chevannes, a town near Bois-des-Fosses. The doctors told Pierre his wife had died of a lung congestion contracted during her outing to watch the balloon ascent.

Pierre prepared to turn Bois-des-Fosses over to a tenant farmer. He instructed Victor and Irénée to pack their belongings; they would return with him to Paris. Not since Victor's birth, seventeen years earlier, had Pierre been called upon to serve as a full-time parent. He decided to take the boys' tutor, Philippe Harmand, with him to the city to continue his sons' education and watch over them while he worked at Versailles and maintained his social status. Pierre did not intend to allow Marie's death to interfere with the life he had built for himself.

Pierre sat in his favorite armchair in the parlor at Bois-des-Fosses, his hat on his head, his sword girded about his waist. A marble bust of Marie Dupont on a pedestal at Pierre's left cast shadows in the candlelit room. To his right, on a lower chair, rested another sword and the hat of a young man. On the floor at Pierre's feet lay a small pillow.

From the doorway of the room Victor Dupont called out, "My father, I bring my brother to receive your blessing and his first arms."

Victor led Irénée into the parlor, to the front of Pierre's armchair. The younger boy bowed his head.

"My son," Pierre said, "I had hoped that your mother's presence would honor the ceremony in which I endow you with your rank. I no longer have a wife, you have no mother. But we have here her likeness, and perhaps from Heaven she looks down on us and is glad to see whatever we do that is worthy and good."

Pierre stood up on the platform that elevated his chair.

"You must understand," he continued, "I have told you that no privilege exists that is not inseparably bound to a duty. The nation confides the privilege of bearing arms to such families as she deems most distinguished by education, by the virtues that are supposed to be hereditary, by a finer honor, by a stricter honesty, by an unconquerable desire to use all one's strength and to sacrifice even one's life for the general welfare."

Pierre sat down and motioned to Irénée to kneel before him.

"Promise to God your master, to mankind your brothers, to the French your compatriots, to the memory of your mother, to me, that you will never give way to anger and still less to hatred . . . promise at the same time that you will not allow yourself to be cowed by any danger when you are called upon to defend your country, or your wife, or your children, or your brother, or yourself, or any other human being who, in danger not deserved by his own wrong-doing, has need of your help."

Irénée gave his solemn word. Pierre took the sword from the lower chair, reached down, and fastened it around his son's waist. He admonished his younger son against engaging in duels, lest he kill in cold blood, but urged him never to fear to fight in the cause of righteousness. He ordered Irénée to learn the art of fencing, so that he might never cower before those stronger than he.

Pierre stood once again, drew his sword, and struck Irénée on the left shoulder with it.

"The blow I am giving you, my son," he said, "is to teach you that you must bear any blow when it is honorable and right. Rise and embrace me."

Father and son held each other briefly. Pierre placed Irénée's hat upon his head and called Victor forward.

"Draw your swords, my children," he said. "Salute and embrace each other. Promise each other to be always firmly united, to comfort each other in every sorrow, to help each other in all efforts, to stand by each other in all difficulty and danger. . . . Love each other always."

"We promise it, my father," Victor and Irénée said in unison. "We promise it to you and to the memory and portrait of our mother."

The ceremony ended; Irénée Dupont was thirteen years old. Within a day the Dupont men left Bois-des-Fosses for Paris in the carriage emblazoned with the family's coat of arms. Victor and Irénée soothed their grief in the pact they had made to each other a day earlier. Pierre comforted himself by clutching the one thousand thirty-five letters Marie had written to him during their marriage.

6

WHAT BROUGHT Thomas Jefferson, the Apostle of Democracy, and Pierre Dupont, the Apostle of Physiocracy, together was the soil.

"Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens," Jefferson wrote to John Jay from France. "They are . . . the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country, and wedded to its liberty, by the most lasting bonds."

Pierre shared Jefferson's view, but not because he sought to protect the dignity of man. Dupont saw the land as the way to wealth; Jefferson perceived it as insurance for liberty.

In the years between the American and French revolutions, the Virginian and the Frenchman became unlikely friends. Jefferson looked upon titles with disgust; Pierre coveted them. Jefferson believed every man should have a vote; Dupont wished to enfranchise only landowners. Jefferson, while President, refused to divulge his birthdate to reporters, believing that public celebration of a chief executive's first day on earth did not coincide with the principles of democracy; Pierre ritualized even giving a sword to his son.

The Virginian had come to Versailles to replace Benjamin Franklin as ambassador from the United States. Franklin, old, ill, and frail, was weary of the plots and intrigues of the French court. He had become a legend to the French people. Jacques Turgot wrote that the inventor "ravaged the lightning from the skies and the sword from tyrants." Parisian women plotted to spend a few moments in his parlor—and bedroom. Louis XVI's ministers feared the wily ambassador's ability to manipulate them and respected his towering intelligence and wit.

When Thomas Jefferson called upon the Comte de Vergennes to present his credentials, Vergennes assessed his spare, bony frame, his backwoods manners, and his simple, ill-fitting clothes, and sighed with relief: France would be rid of the United States' annoying pleas for money at last. Vergennes decided to disgrace Jefferson in the eyes of the court im-

mediately. He asked the Virginian if he had come to take Franklin's place. Jefferson's backwoods manner evaporated. In impeccable French he answered that no man alive could replace the inventor; he had come to Versailles only to succeed him. Vergennes scowled; Jefferson's reputation was made.

Benjamin Franklin had emptied the French treasury to help the thirteen colonies win their independence. Congress charged Jefferson with scraping the vaults to keep the new nation afloat. Vergennes knew this and knew that the United States might hold the key to frustrating England's goals of conquest on the high seas.

But the comte also realized that the American states were more united in name than reality, that Spain and France laid claim to huge chunks of the western continent, that land speculators were already counting bags of gold from get-rich-quick schemes, that the government of the United States was unworkable, that only the magnetism of George Washington, serving as President, held the states together. Jefferson asked for a share of France's foreign trade. Vergennes considered the request, decided that the United States would not receive his nation's largesse, and, in true French style, appointed a committee to study the situation.

He assigned Pierre Dupont to the American Committee. Pierre was France's expert on foreign commerce and, since he owed both his position and his title to Vergennes, could be controlled. The Marquis de Lafayette joined Pierre; Lafayette would give the appearance that France was seriously trying to help the United States. Pierre and Jefferson plodded through the centuries of treaties and cross-treaties that enveloped France in a tangled web of commerce with other European nations. Pierre soon realized that no small cry would be raised if France broke her treaties to deal with a band of rebels who had usurped Britain's sovereign power. When Vergennes's opposition to the United States became obvious—Pierre discovered a loophole in France's treaties that the minister immediately plugged—Jefferson suggested they spend less time reading musty documents and discuss their common personal problems. Aside from their love for the soil, both the Frenchman and the Virginian had recently lost their wives to illness, and both had young children to raise.

Thomas Jefferson's daughters, one with him in Europe, the other soon to arrive accompanied by the Virginian's mulatto lover, Sally Hemings, had, like Pierre's sons, only their father to guide them through the

But Jefferson's offspring were female; he needed only to raise them with proper manners and find them suitable husbands. They would live out their lives in a nation already beyond the horrors of revolution, where their father was a hero destined to become President. Pierre's sons would soon be caught up in France's most difficult times, the children of a member of the despised nobility.

Jefferson perceived in France the seeds of revolution. Had he wished to, he might have taught the French liberal faction a good deal about the art of shaking off a monarch's rule. But the United States needed France's money, and so Jefferson refrained from political involvement. Pierre still cherished the hope of reforming France under Bourbon rule. Louis XVI, interpreting his work on the American Committee as a mark of loyalty to the crown, elevated Pierre to the position of counselor of state and raised his salary to thirty thousand francs. The Dupont family lived comfortably amid a France spiraling into revolution. Pierre seemed unaware of the undercurrents that would turn the Seine into a river of blood. He sought professions for his sons suitable to their newly titled heritage. But neither Victor nor Irénée seemed suited for anything.

Victor—tall, handsome, elegantly turned out in velvet coats and silver boot buckles—walked, talked, and spent like a nobleman's son. Nearing twenty, he had already failed as an undersecretary in Pierre's office, preferring to gamble and carouse rather than work. Out of desperation Pierre begged Vergennes to attach Victor to the French mission to the United States; he could not support his son's extravagances. Vergennes agreed to make Victor an unpaid and untitled aide to France's ambassador to America. Jefferson wrote letters of introduction for Pierre's elder son to prominent men in the United States. Pierre stuffed a note to Ben Franklin in Victor's pocket as he was about to leave Paris, entrusting his firstborn to the inventor's care.

Irénée Dupont was a different sort of child, studious, sober, awkward in social situations. At fourteen, out of admiration for Antoine Lavoisier, he wrote an essay on the manufacture of gunpowder. Pierre acknowledged the effort without praise; he knew little of the science and considered any manufacturing process far beneath the study of agricultural economics. But he fixed upon Irénée's studious bent and, as was his right since becoming a nobleman, enrolled his younger son in the Collège Royal in Paris. Pierre had mistaken interest for dedication. Irénée lasted less than one unremarkable year at the college.

Antoine Lavoisier had been appointed head of the French Powder

too young to be helped by Vergennes or Jefferson, so Pierre asked Lavoisier to give his second son a job. Since Marie Dupont's death Lavoisier and his wife had treated Pierre's children as their own. The chemist offered to make Irénée an assistant bookkeeper in his office; even in the case of a close friend Lavoisier would allow only hard work and proven value to rule his choices for responsible positions in the national gunpowder administration.

Irénée began at the age of fifteen to learn how a gunpowder business functioned. In his spare hours he sat quietly watching chemists under Lavoisier's direction as they experimented to improve the powder-making process. Lavoisier noticed Irénée's interest in the deadly black substance; soon the bookkeeper was allowed to perform experiments on his own after the day's columns of figures had been added. Within a few months Eleuthère Irénée Dupont had learned the rudiments of gunpowder manufacture.

Victor and Irénée wrote to each other often across the Atlantic Ocean. Victor filled his pages with requests for more and better clothes, descriptions of his exploits among the American women with their amazingly relaxed morality, and tales of the toasts drunk even to an unpaid attaché to the French embassy. Irénée wrote back telling of a strange and wondrous parade he had witnessed.

Deaths are often followed by funeral processions. Irénée watched the grandest cortege of all time take place years before life slipped from its subject, the Bourbon dynasty. Perched high on a balcony above the town of Versailles, he viewed the opening of the Estates General of France.

It was a sunny morning in May, Irénée wrote to his brother. The windows lining Versailles's streets filled early with noble ladies who paid absurd prices for the only seats in town. In stunning regalia, the king and queen, the archbishops and cardinals, the clergy and nobility marched down the street. Behind them, humbled in simple black dress by the order of the king, came the representatives of the Third Estate. Irénée could pick out his father among the delegates, walking not far from the Marquis de Mirabeau's son.

Irénée's heart jumped with pride in his father. Since the king had ordered the nation's representative body convoked—for the first time in two centuries—to solve France's financial blight, Pierre had been an influential and respected man. Nemours, with ease, elected him its dele-

gate to the Estates General; he had been chosen to write the list of grievances from the district and would present it to the gathered delegates.

Irénée's letters carried no political commentary. He did not see that, beneath their simple black gowns, the delegates from the Third Estate represented not the common people of France but the wealthy and conservative bourgeoisie. Among the delegates there were, it was true, serious reformers, many of them friends and supporters of Pierre Dupont. Nor did Irénée envisage the anarchy and chaos that would halt his education in the manufacture of gunpowder.

When the Third Estate demanded vote by head, not order, so that the common people would have at least equal representation with the nobility and clergy in the Estates General, Pierre cast his ballot in favor of the motion. The First and Second Estates of course refused. An impasse was reached and the orderly procession Irénée had watched dissolved into a morass of spite, jealousy, and confusion.

Pitched battles began over who would certify the credentials of the various delegates. The Third Estate wanted to pass not only on its own members, but on the noblemen and priests as well. Delegate Dupont de Nemours—he added the last two words to avoid confusion with other Duponts who sat in the ranks of the Third Estate—found his name on the list of delegates assigned to negotiate with the clergy and nobility. His primary duty would be to report to the Third Estate on the negotiators' progress.

After days of intense discussions Pierre rose to say that nothing had been accomplished. He attempted to blunt his colleagues' wrath by adding that the royal family had removed itself to Marly to grieve over the death of one of Louis's children. The delegates were in no mood for excuses; they decided to call the roll of all the representatives in all three estates. Those that answered would be considered present. Those who did not would be marked absent. A motion was made to proceed with the business of the Estates General: the rejuvenation of France. Pierre joined in the unanimous approval.

Dupont de Nemours was assigned to a committee to consider the credentials of the delegates. He found that the representatives from Brittany demanded that no law passed by the Estates General be considered valid until the Breton Parliament also approved it. Dupont judged the demand unacceptable; he believed that only centralized

authority would bring France back from the brink of economic chaos. He attacked the Breton mandate fiercely on the floor of the Estates. Accusations flew at him: his opponents claimed his objections were a guise to serve the aristocratic interests of the nobility, of which he was a part.

Pierre's confidence was shaken. After the session ended he hastened to the Café Amaury on the Avenue de Saint-Cloud, where the Brittany delegates congregated, to plead his views. In minutes he was jeered into silence and out of the café. A few months later the faces he had confronted in the Avenue de Saint-Cloud reappeared as the charter members of a bloodthirsty group called the Jacobins. High on their list of expendable Frenchmen was the balding delegate from Nemours.

Louis XVI was out riding to the hounds on the day the Estates General reconstituted itself as the National Assembly of France. The Abbé Sieyès, a renegade priest and author of the pamphlet that asked, "What is the Third Estate? Nothing. What does it aspire to be? Everything!" had congratulated Pierre Dupont in the pamphlet's second edition as a man dedicated to bringing orderly reforms to the French government. When the priest thundered from his delegate's seat that the Estates General must turn itself into a truly legislative body, Pierre roared his assent.

A friend of Pierre's, the astronomer Bailly, was nominated as the Assembly's first president, in addition to his new post as mayor of Paris. Pierre stood behind Bailly's election. Jacques Necker, who had been dismissed by Louis and then recalled as a last resort in the nation's financial struggle, trembled: the bourgeoisie of the Third Estate were threatening the very sovereignty of the king.

Necker sought out Louis on his hunting trip and pleaded that the monarch control the Estates General before it became impossible to overrule. Louis decided to call a royal session of the delegates, at which he would speak, for June 22, 1789. On the twentieth the representatives arrived at the delegates' hall for their usual day's work to find the doors locked and royal guards barring the way inside. Placards posted on the building proclaimed the meeting place closed while preparations for the king's appearance were being made.

Enraged, the delegates gathered on the steps. If force could be used to bar them from inside their meeting room, then force might be used to make them disband. As a body, they charged to a nearby tennis court,

convoked a session of the National Assembly, and drew up a pact not to disband until France had a formal constitution guaranteeing the rights of man. In his turn, Pierre Dupont de Nemours signed the Tennis Court Oath.

Pierre set his final solution to France's ills before the National Assembly: seize all church property and income, he said, then sell some of the land and retire the national debt.

A gasp arose from the clergy, then a cataclysmic response. How dare a country bumpkin tamper with the property of the keepers of the Lord's flocks? Let the state sink into poverty: God's kingdom must prevail!

Up from his hard bench rose the lame priest, Talleyrand, to muster all his force behind Pierre's bold proposal. He, a member of the clergy, saw the need to nationalize church lands, and he would suffer along with his holy brethren. Listen to delegate Dupont, he urged, for he is not a radical, but, rather, a reasonable man, an open supporter of the monarchy, a member of the leading group of royalists, the Society of 1789, who all—Lafayette and Sieyès included—support Pierre's idea.

A single speech even by Talleyrand would not have spurred the delegates into confiscating the church's wealth. He had lobbied secretly for weeks among the most powerful representatives. He could, at any time, have brought the matter before the Assembly, at the risk of losing support from many quarters. A pawn had been needed. Pierre had made dozens of monotonous speeches to the delegates that often contained strange ideas which were generally disregarded. Talleyrand had brought the idea of confiscating church property to Pierre's attention in a casual conversation. Soon afterward it reached the rostrum of the Assembly. Within ten days the church's property had become the state's and, purposely or not, Pierre had in some measure avenged the Protestant Duponts who had been tortured and persecuted for their religious beliefs.

Pierre's popularity increased. He believed in, and preached, constitutional monarchy as the ultimate government for France. He and his fellow monarchists held a strong hand, at least for the time being; nearly all the delegates feared that removing the king would make the uneducated masses of peasants uncontrollable. If the bourgeoisie could retain control of the government the people's historic allegiance to the king would make them pliable. Pierre's political beliefs did little damage to

his reputation. Except by the clergy, he was considered a moderate, and his moderation provoked no one in power.

The National Assembly elected Pierre its president in August, 1790, a post held only for fifteen days to keep any one man from gaining too much power. The delegates had rewarded his work on eleven important committees, if not his droning voice at the podium. Pierre believed, along with most of the other members of the National Assembly, that a new France would be created out of the old without either violence or bloodshed.

Thomas Jefferson watched the people of Paris attack the Bastille. He witnessed the destruction of public order and law that heralds the crumbling of a social system; he saw starvation and disease creep among the masses. He packed his belongings and left France: Benjamin Franklin's successor had failed in his mission. He grasped Pierre Dupont's hand warmly on his last day in Paris and promised that they would remain close friends.

From across the Atlantic, Jefferson wrote Pierre of the difficulties in the new United States. There were enormous problems in feeding the people, establishing trade, and stabilizing the government. But, he added, they were the troubles of youth, sure to disappear when the nation matured. Pierre could imagine a new world, free from centuries of treaties and alliances and monarchic dynasties so entwined that even the loyalties of his own king now had to be questioned.

Pierre had followed his principles in the National Assembly, and days after he relinquished the Assembly's presidency he had fallen from popularity by opposing the issuance of paper money to replace gold. He damned the *assignats* from the podium as inflationary and destructive of the nation's already weak economy. Outside the Assembly's meeting hall a crowd of angry Parisians attempted to drown him in the Seine; only a passing squad of police saved his life. Thomas Jefferson's new nation across the sea became steadily more attractive.

The ship *Missouri* brought Pierre more news of America. Late in 1789, the National Assembly recalled France's ambassador to the United States. His entourage, including Victor Dupont, returned with him. Victor recounted to his father and brother the wonders of the New World, and his exploits in it. He had partaken of the rich American life, growing fat and content outside Paris's constricting social customs. He had become friendly with many of the nation's leading thinkers and

politicians; he had become intimate with Alexander Hamilton, drunk toasts at George Washington's inauguration, paid homage at Benjamin Franklin's bedside. He had traveled the backwoods of New York State, lived briefly among hardy pioneers, acquired their habit of speaking their minds without fear of a king's police. He had drunk the sweet new wine of liberty.

Back in France, Victor took to strutting about Paris, ready to join any quarrel that happened by, even political arguments between soldiers and civilians. He kept his sword about his waist; he drew it readily. Soon the son of the moderate delegate from Nemours became widely known as *Victor l'intrépide:* Victor the Fearless.

Pierre recognized the danger immediately. If his elder son were ever to reach his twenty-third birthday alive, he must be silenced. New York society had sharpened Victor's tongue; it might just be the barb to drive Pierre himself out of the political arena and into serious trouble with the people of Paris. Pierre lectured and warned Victor; Victor refused to heed his father's advice. Pierre banished Victor to Bois-des-Fosses, to look after the estate and stay out of trouble. If his son wished to shout his views in public, a village square was much more appropriate than the center of Paris.

But Victor had become too popular for Pierre to keep him isolated. The people of Nemours elected him to a provincial assembly where, due to a rule that all delegates be at least twenty-five years old, Victor was refused his seat. The peasants of Nemours did not desert their newest hero; Victor was appointed the district's representative to the Fête of the Federation in Paris, a celebration marking the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille.

Pierre refused to have his son walking freely about the city. He appealed to Lafayette, newly named commander of the National Guard: would his compatriot find Victor a place among his subordinates? Since Victor had already been commissioned a lieutenant in the militia, Lafayette named him an aide-de-camp. Victor Marie du Pont de Nemours—he reveled in splitting the syllables of his last name and adding the aristocratic de Nemours to it—took to shouting his views at the side of France's most revered military hero.

In a very few weeks Lafayette decided that Victor's boldness was less than helpful in the impossible task of keeping order in revolutionary France. When the National Assembly appointed a new minister to the United States Pierre and Lafayette found Victor a place in the ambassa-

dor's retinue. Victor protested that he had been promised the next vacant secretaryship to Germany; the opening might come up in only two or three months. But Pierre felt that even so short a delay might endanger his son's life, and perhaps his own. Within days Victor was out of France, aboard a ship bound for Philadelphia. With his other son bent over account books at Lavoisier's side, Pierre felt, mistakenly, that he could draw his political breath more easily now.

Powerful Jacobins, urged on by their ruthless leader, Robespierre, twice took the floor of the radical club's meetings to denounce Dupont de Nemours for his reactionary ideals and faithfulness to the king—which meant, of course, fickleness to the people. Each time, Pierre appeared to answer the charges; his words were met first by silence, then angry jeers.

Pierre's physiocratic ideals sat him on a political fence. True to the doctrines of François Quesnay, Pierre advocated renunciation of feudal rights and privileges. But he also demanded that the monarchy be kept intact and in power. For the first he was praised; for the second, damned.

The monarchists were losing power; the common people believed that the Assembly was in league with the nobility to deprive them of their security, rights, and food: why else would Lafayette's National Guardsmen ride, swords flashing, into the angry crowds surging through Paris? Robespierre reigned in Paris. His powerful radical faction grew daily in number; its members had taken to wearing blood red bonnets as symbols of their political feelings.

As the summer of 1791 ended the red hats could be seen everywhere in Paris. Pierre found little support for his views, even among old colleagues like Lafayette, Talleyrand, Bailly, and Sieyès: each had his own head to protect. The National Assembly's avowed purpose, to create a constitution for France, neared reality. By September the document was finished. On the first day of the month Pierre stood before the Assembly with a motion.

"Now that the constitution is finished," he said, "I ask that it can in no way be changed." The delegates roared their approval.

Louis XVI reluctantly signed the document into law and secretly informed the other European monarchs that he had done so only to save his family's lives. The constitution called for election of a new representative body for the nation, a Legislative Assembly; the National

Assembly prepared to disband. Exhausted by two years of intrigues and unrest, the delegates heard last-minute motions from the floor. One came from Robespierre, his ashen complexion even more pale than usual: to insure that no one involved in writing the constitution benefited from it politically, he said, let us resolve that no delegate here be allowed to stand for election to the Legislative Assembly. The proposal seemed truly patriotic, since Robespierre himself would fall under its provisions. The motion was easily passed.

Pierre blanched at Robespierre's words: his political career was now surely ended. The tired men of the Assembly did not realize that Robespierre and his Jacobins could now dictate from Paris. Many of the delegates, in fact, seemed relieved that their years as representatives were over; they cared little that the Legislative Assembly would be composed of inexperienced amateurs Robespierre might bend to his will without difficulty. But Pierre did not find the courage to debate the Jacobin's proposal. The National Assembly passed Robespierre's motion and adjourned.

Pierre trudged wearily from the Assembly's meeting hall. He had quit his government jobs and renounced the income from them as a gesture of his support for economy in government. He was devoid of political influence, left behind by the onrush of the revolution and Robespierre's wily maneuvering. He was, once again, unemployed and nearly destitute. Pierre limped slowly through the garbage-cluttered, winding streets of Paris. By the time he reached his apartment, in the Avenue de Saint-Cloud, a new resolve had formed in his mind. He would spend the remainder of his life plying the trade Benjamin Franklin had followed at the start of his: as a printer and publisher of books. He might be neither influential nor famous, but he would at least escape the wrath of Robespierre. Like thousands of other unfortunate Frenchmen, Pierre failed to hear the sound of hammers constructing the guillotine.

7

FALL CAME EARLY to Paris in 1792. By the first day of August dead leaves were piled against the marble walls of the Tuileries, the Parisian residence of Louis XVI. Since their abortive attempt to flee France a month earlier, Louis and Marie Antoinette had found the Tuileries more prison than palace.

Late on the morning of August 10, a small procession passed through the tall doors of the Tuileries, led by Louis himself. The king, queen, their daughter, and a son destined never to ascend the throne of Charlemagne huddled against the palace walls and began the short walk to the Manège, a converted riding school where the Legislative Assembly held its meetings. On the other side of the Tuileries, a battle raged between eight hundred Swiss Guardsmen, Louis's last remaining loyal army unit, and thousands of French National Guardsmen from Marseilles and Brest.

Angry mobs of citizens threatened to make Louis's walk to the Manège a funeral march; the people had gathered through the previous night and early morning to await the victory of the National Guardsmen, ransack the Tuileries for Marie Antoinette's legendary jewels, and murder the king and queen. Louis spied a familiar face in the crowd. A short, spindly man in his forties, adept with a sword despite a marked limp and advancing gout, pushed his way through the crowd.

"Ah, Monsier Dupont," Louis said. "One always finds you where one has need of you."

With a band of fifteen ragged men, Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, counselor of state, former president of the National Assembly, of late a printer by trade, had come to save his king. Since April, Pierre had drilled his small band of fighters, loyal monarchists all, grandly named by him the Chasseurs and Grenadiers of the Army of Paris, for a single mission: to protect the lives of the royal family.

The Grenadiers arrayed themselves around Louis. Amid a flurry of bullets and blades the king made his way to the Manège, threw himself

on the mercy of the Assembly, and surrendered the oldest throne in Europe. Pierre gathered what remained of his band of fighters, including his younger son, Eleuthère Irénée, and marched them quietly down the narrow streets leading away from the Tuileries, as though they were a band of National Guard irregulars. He and Irénée bade the other Grenadiers a hasty farewell in the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs and melted into the crowds; no time could be spared to mourn their seven dead comrades. Pierre was a well-known figure in Paris and had very likely been recognized defending Louis and his family. With the monarch out of the way, the radically controlled Assembly, dominated by Robespierre's Jacobins, would hunt down the enemies of the revolution.

Maximilien de Robespierre, in the name of Revolutionary Virtue, dispatched men on a house-to-house search for Pierre Dupont. Irénée heard of the Jacobin's orders and persuaded his father to seek a hiding place safer than the family printing establishment, where since the adjournment of the National Assembly father and son had labored.

Pierre appealed to his royalist friends; none would risk harboring a most hunted fugitive of the revolution. He considered fleeing to Bois-des-Fosses but realized that Robespierre would not be satisfied with his exile. Philippe Harmand, Victor and Irénée's former tutor, now supervisor of the Dupont printshop, offered to ask a friend, Jerome Lalande, to hide Pierre in the dome of the Paris astronomical observatory, which Lalande ran.

Lalande agreed. In the barren dome of the observatory Pierre slept on the floor, ate dry bits of bread smuggled to him in the pockets of Harmand's coat, and listened to his employee relate news of the revolution—none of it, from Pierre's viewpoint, very good.

Three days after the battle at the Tuileries the royal family, stripped of titles and power, was imprisoned in the Temple, a medieval tower surrounded by a ditch and built of unscalable walls. Four days later the Assembly yielded to public and Jacobin pressure and set up a special court to try the "criminals" who had defended the king on August 10. Within a week three had been condemned to death; before the end of the month Paris's nine jails held twenty-six hundred prisoners. Revolutionary justice had begun.

On August 20, General Lafayette, having failed to inspire the troops under his command to march on Paris and resurrect the monarchy,

stepped across the French border into Austrian exile. With him went a young military architect named Bureaux de Pusy.

Three days after Lafayette's defection the Prussian army under the Duke of Brunswick culminated an eleven-day march by capturing, with little resistance, the French city of Longwy. Seven days later the commandant of French troops at Verdun placed a gun to his forehead and blew out his brains. Verdun fell; foreign troops were less than one hundred miles from the locked gates of Paris. Philippe Harmand received orders to report to his National Guard unit, and Pierre's meager supply of food stopped.

The people of Paris rioted in fear of Prussian conquest. In the confusion the city's gates were left open. News of the disorders reached Pierre in his hideout. Weak from hunger and inactivity, Pierre decided to flee Paris or die in the streets trying. He descended through the deserted observatory, walked slowly and safely past the tall gates of the city, and trudged the ten miles from Paris to the village where Philippe Harmand maintained a small cottage.

During his youth Pierre had studied medicine for a few weeks. Now he played the country doctor, an eyeshade pulled low over his face, treating the minor ills of the peasants who lived near Harmand's cottage. In the long solitary evenings he wrote a memoir, in the form of a letter to his children, of how a watchmaker's penniless son migrated to the most inner chambers of national power and the confidence of kings. Soon, he believed, Robespierre's henchmen would discover his hiding place and disguise, and he would ride the tumbril to the guillotine. He prepared himself for death, resigned to his fate, but, thanks to Philippe Harmand, not sad.

In his last visit to Pierre at the observatory Harmand had brought a bit of good news to the fugitive. A year earlier Irénée—over his father's objections—had married a woman of common birth, Sophie Madeleine Dalmas. On the last day of August, Sophie had given birth to a healthy girl, named, out of a desperate need for hope amid the chaos of the revolution, Victorine Elizabeth. Should the justice of the revolution descend upon him, Pierre knew at least that the Dupont blood would continue.

The Committee of General Security, run by Robespierre, issued an order for the arrest of Pierre Dupont on July 13, 1793. Pierre had eluded capture for nearly a year. He had decided that Bois-des-Fosses

would be as safe as Harmand's cottage, and he had developed an overwhelming desire to see his granddaughter.

Unknown to Pierre, spies had followed him from Harmand's house to Nemours. They reported to Paris that Citizen Dupont treated the local people's illnesses and spent much time in meditation and writing; his political activities were nil.

On a stormy summer night a company of soldiers burst into Bois-des-Fosses, dragged Pierre from his bed, and shackled him in a carriage for the ride to Paris. Pierre's daughter-in-law, Sophie, begged the soldiers to allow her to accompany him; he was ill and aged, she said. The soldiers refused. In an open wagon Sophie drove through the rain to Paris to tell Irénée, working in the printing house, of his father's imprisonment.

Pierre outlined the plan to his fellow prisoners: they would adopt the ancient order of battle. Since, in all, twelve of them occupied the same cellblock, they would form a wedge: one man in front, two behind him, three behind them, four in the rear. The other two inmates, chosen as the strongest, would guard the flanks.

The alarm bell had sounded hours earlier and rumors flared, first that Robespierre had been put in chains, then that he had regained the upper hand. But information came slowly to the men imprisoned at La Force, and it was rarely reliable. Still, Robespierre's downfall might signal an attack by the mobs on the prison; Pierre judged that they must have a plan for their defense, even if they would be armed only with pocketknives and table legs. He asked his fellow inmates to join in a rehearsal of his plan. They refused; all knew, however, that if an attack came, they would follow Citizen Dupont's orders.

Pierre had found prison life bearable. On the day he was seized he wrote to Sophie asking that she send him a bed, four towels and two washcloths, writing paper, a straw armchair, a small hairbrush, and a box to hold his belongings. Pierre set up classes in political economics for his fellow prisoners. He talked with the men at length, inquring into their health, their families, the state of their personal affairs. He strolled with them in the little prison courtyard every afternoon. Sophie, staying in Paris even though Victorine Elizabeth remained at Bois-des-Fosses, came each day to the prison gates disguised as a peasant woman, bearing fresh food for her father-in-law.

Pierre had been in prison a week when Robespierre fell from power: for once, the rumors that reached La Force were true. He said goodbye

to all of the eleven other inmates in the days that followed. Robespierre's followers made no haste to release him; they feared that his time in prison had already turned him into a living political martyr. Irénée petitioned and bribed numerous officials. A month later the prison's turnkey called the name of Citizen Dupont, and Pierre walked into freedom. For the moment, the revolution had ceased to covet the physiocrat's head.

Gabrielle Josephine de La Fite de Pelleporte, daughter of a marquis and brother to three counts who had fled France at the start of the revolution, thought that Victor du Pont was the most handsome man she had ever seen. Victor returned home from the United States in 1793 and, at the height of the Reign of Terror, needed to prove his loyalty to the revolution. He applied for a position on the police force in Chevannes; at the end of August he was named a gendarme.

Victor believed that a policeman's uniform looked well on him. Gabrielle, whom he met at a party in Nemours, thought it disgusting: she hated the revolution and all it stood for. It had cost her family its fortune, lands, and titles. She could no longer practice the religion of her ancestors and her now dead king; Catholicism had been outlawed.

Gaby, as Victor called her, although she preferred her second given name, Josephine, fell in love with the elder Dupont son despite his uniform. Pierre was pleased when Victor announced that he intended to marry the noblewoman. Gabrielle was not. She loved Victor but could not bear being wed to anyone who wore the uniform of the revolution. And she would never submit to marriage by civil ceremony; she could conjure no worse sin than entering wedlock without Catholic rites.

Victor, by dyeing his skin green with spinach juice, convinced the revolutionary committee in Chevannes that they ought to issue him a medical discharge from the police force. He searched Nemours for a priest who would perform the ceremony; discovery meant death for them all under the guillotine's blade. The Abbé—supposedly the *former* Abbé—of Branles agreed to marry Victor and Gabrielle after Victor vowed that the ceremony would be carried out in the strictest secrecy: not even Gabrielle would know that it was to take place.

A well-concealed room at Bois-des-Fosses was chosen. Inside, Pierre, a distant cousin called to serve as witness, and the priest waited. Victor fetched Gaby from the parlor, where she and her sister had been watching visitors play backgammon. Gabrielle pleaded with Victor to call her

sister in to the ceremony. Victor said no: it was marriage now and in this way, or never. Gabrielle felt that she was taking the most important step in her life under "circumstances so precipitate, so incomprehensible to myself, that I could scarcely believe it."

The marriage remained secret for three weeks. Gaby continued to live with her sister, a former nun, at a retreat for ex-Catholics. Victor remained at Bois-des-Fosses. When the proper documents had been obtained the couple presented themselves in Chevannes for a civil ceremony under the laws of the revolution. Gabrielle noted, with disdain, that their union was solemnized by a former carpenter.

Pierre strode from La Force directly to his printing plant, housed in a former convent where kidnapped Protestant children had, before the revolution, been taught the principles of Catholic life. Irénée and Sophie welcomed him jubilantly; Pierre removed his coat and set about planning a new magazine that he would edit and publish.

He had many debts to pay. Bois-des-Fosses had been mortgaged, to Antoine Lavoisier, for enough money to buy the printing presses and paper and type and ink Pierre had needed to begin his publishing enterprise. The guillotine had claimed Lavoisier's head and, on the same day, that of his wife's father. Madame Lavoisier had turned recluse since her husband's and father's deaths. She was, in the years following Robespierre's downfall and the end of the Reign of Terror, the most eligible widow in Paris: rich, educated, cultured, and heir to Lavoisier's reputation.

Pierre grew tired of paying off the mortgage on Bois-des-Fosses. His new magazine, *L'Historien*, sold well and, as a survivor of Robespierre's regime, he became a celebrated, and respected, fount of administrative knowledge. The new and prestigious Institute of France elected him to its morality and politics section. Each week Pierre met with other scholars in the great hall of the Paris observatory, one hundred feet beneath where he had hidden from the revolution's vengeance. The people of Nemours chose him as their delegate to the Council of Ancients, the upper house of France's new legislature.

Pierre's sons were both happily married. Sophie had given birth to another daughter, Evalina Gabrielle. Josephine became pregnant early in 1795. Pierre began to dislike being without a wife almost as much as he loathed owing Madame Lavoisier money. He decided to remedy both situations at once: he asked his friend's widow to marry him. Madame

Lavoisier spurned Pierre and left for Switzerland to escape his daily calls at her home, first arguing with him over back payments on the mortgage she held. Pierre winced under her insult but was overcome by the urge to find a wife.

"I wish I could forget her," he wrote to Irénée soon after Madame Lavoisier left France. "But her husband, who was my friend, entrusted her to my care when he was about to die. . . . Sometimes I think I will end it all by writing to Citizeness Poivre, getting her to come here, and marrying her. But that is a very radical step to take."

Pierre took it. Madame Françoise Robin Poivre was the widow of another old friend of Pierre's, Pierre Poivre, former governor of Ile-de-France, a French colony. Citizeness Poivre accepted Pierre's proposal at once and rode from her country house to Paris to be wed. She brought with her an excellent pension and a beautiful daughter, named Ile-de-France, who was married to Bureaux de Pusy, Lafayette's fellow prisoner in Austria. All of chic Paris applauded the marriage of one of its leading publishers and public servants. Pierre paused to celebrate only briefly; his new wife's inheritance was not sufficient to pay off the mortgage on Bois-des-Fosses.

On September 4, 1797, three members of the French Directory, which ran the government in cabinet style, bolted under Napoleon Bonaparte's influence and overthrew the ruling moderate faction. Days earlier Pierre had ended his term as president of the Council of Anciens. Napoleon's radical directors wanted desperately to dispose of Pierre and his conservative supporters. Napoleon ordered that they suppress *L'Historien*, which frequently took issue with the wisdom of pursuing the wars that gave Bonaparte his power. Pierre and Irénée, working quietly in their printing house, were arrested and carried off to La Force.

That same day Pierre's name headed the list of prisoners destined for passage aboard ship to French Guiana, the penal colony that would earn fame as Devil's Island. Napoleon Bonaparte had chosen Citizen Dupont as the first casualty in his bid to become Emperor of France.

Word of Pierre's arrest and planned deportation spread quickly to his friends. On the floor of the Council of Five Hundred, the Council of Anciens' larger sister, Jean-Marie Chénier, one of the Council's most powerful members, deplored the arrest of Pierre Dupont: he was an old man, nearing eighty, Chénier said, exaggerating by more than twenty

years, and an outstanding supporter of the French Republic. To deport Pierre, Chénier added, would be an act worthy of the Reign of Terror, but not of civilized France. Germaine Necker de Staël, pressed by her newest lover, Talleyrand, hurried about Paris entreating friends and former bedmates to use their influence in Pierre's behalf. Late on the night of Pierre's imprisonment, Napoleon's Directors decided that Citizen Dupont and his son did not, in truth, belong among the steerage passengers destined for Devil's Island.

Just after dawn Pierre and Irénée heard a key turn in the lock of their cell at La Force and were surprised and pleased to find themselves set free—until they reached the Dupont printing house. During the night, on orders from Bonaparte, a gang of men had broken into the office, scattered papers and type, and smashed the presses. Memories of the Reign of Terror echoed in Pierre's mind. A few days later, pleading ill health, he resigned from the Council of Ancients.

Irénée Dupont had spent eight years running the family printing business. He was willing to rebuild the presses and start anew, but Papa Dupont felt the political climate in Paris too close for himself and his children: they needed cleaner air to breathe, he decided, the air of the United States.

Pierre sent Irénée to see Robert Fulton, then experimenting with submarines in the Seine, who was an old correspondent of Pierre's. Fulton was encouraging: good farmland could be bought for as little as ten francs an acre in Virginia, where ownership of a single piece of property made one a citizen. A sizable farm's products could be sold easily in the markets of Philadelphia and Baltimore. Irénée returned to his father convinced they could succeed as planters in America.

Pierre's imagination soared; he would organize a huge company, Dupont and Sons, to take over a large tract of Virginia land. He would reign as feudal baron over millions of acres. When the venture became profitable enough he would ask for separate status from Virginia, and the Dupont family would own a kingdom.

Irénée printed and sent out advertising circulars. Pierre journeyed to Holland and Switzerland to raise money. He needed, he believed, four million francs to make his plan work. But Swiss and Dutch bankers found no reason to sink cash into Pierre's company. After eighteen months, Pierre discovered that he was 3,800,000 francs short of his goal.

Since the end of the Terror, Victor du Pont had found his diplomatic talents valued by the rulers of the new France. He and Gabrielle had been posted to the United States, first to Philadelphia, then to Charleston, South Carolina. They had encountered yellow fever and, worse for Victor's career, the growing anti-French sentiments of the Americans. Victor brought his family back to France in 1799, after four disappointing years as charge d'affaires in Charleston, to find himself deeply embroiled in his father's plans. Pierre had named Victor one of the new company's principal partners, praising his son's diplomatic expertise and his contacts in American commercial and business circles. Victor attempted to convince Pierre that his plan would not work. He argued that land prices were skyrocketing in the United States, that the government looked askance at any foreign plan to establish a business in the country, that the newly passed Alien Act, a piece of legislation created by President John Adams, made obtaining citizenship difficult and deportation, at the whim of the government, a possibility.

Pierre was in no mood to be discouraged; he told Victor not to worry. He was raising the needed capital and lobbying to have all three Dupont men named *savants voyageur*—traveling scholars—by the Institute of France. Irénée had been studying botany at the National Gardens to justify the Institute appointment. A prestigious mission for a respected intellectual establishment would cover all their political tracks, making them immune to attack by the American government and allowing them to return to France if necessary. And, of course, Pierre expected help from his old friend Thomas Jefferson: his American Plan, as Pierre called it, would surely succeed. Victor resigned himself to following his father and brother back across the Atlantic Ocean.

Pierre charged Victor with finding a vessel to carry the Dupont family across the sea. Victor secured passage aboard the *American Eagle*, a commercial schooner wasting away in a French port, held there by order of Napoleon. He used his influence with the diplomatic corps to free the ship; in return, the captain agreed to transport the Dupont entourage, its baggage—including two pianos—and its hopes, for a modest sum.

The *American Eagle* was not a very seaworthy ship. After two years in port barnacles encrusted its hull. The captain was able to find only a cargo of salt to transport on his return across the Atlantic; the schooner's torn sails and leaking hull encouraged no one to provide him

with better freight for its hold. But the captain did not wish to linger making repairs; he had seen enough of French hospitality.

On October 2, 1799, the *American Eagle* set sail for North America. The winds were not favorable; the captain proved himself a poor navigator. Seldom was the ship on course. Twice, British ships bound for Europe came upon the *Eagle* and gave her captain provisions and bearings. More often than not, the flag of distress flew from a mast to attract help.

Passage by sailing ship across the Atlantic usually required less than thirty days. After two months at sea, fighting broke out between the crew and the *Eagle*'s passengers. With his sword drawn Pierre defended his party of eighteen: Victor, Gabrielle, and their two children; Irénée, Sophie, and their three offspring; Pierre's step-daughter, Ile-de-France Pusy and her infant child, born only days before the ship's departure; Charles Dalmas, Sophie's brother; three nurses; and two male servants.

Pierre struggled to keep the family's spirits high. By day he played with the children, wrote poetry, and plotted the success of his new company with his sons. At night he stood armed guard over the family's belongings. Victor and Irénée did their best to hide their fears of being lost or shipwrecked from the women and children, with little success. The food from the British ships ran out, and the Duponts resorted to eating a soup of boiled rats to keep from starving.

After ninety-three days at sea the *American Eagle* docked in Newport, Rhode Island, far from its destination of New York Bay. The hungry passengers ran to the nearest house, which they found warmly lit but empty; its occupants were at church, but a fulsome dinner awaited their return, warming over a roaring fire. Pierre led his band of emigrants inside, seated them at the dinner table, and instructed the servants to dish out the food. After eating his fill Pierre found himself guilty of a crime and fined himself one coin of gold, which he left at the head of the table. He hurried his family away from the house to search for the nearest inn.

Pierre had paid a high price for one meal, but he had robbed the house's owners of more than a dinner: the calendar read January 1, 1800. The Dupont family had stolen a celebration.

8

MADAME FRANÇOISE ROBIN DUPONT sailed for the United States two weeks before Pierre led the main party of Dupont emigrants aboard the *American Eagle*. Her crossing had been uneventful and swift. In New York City letters to Pierre from George Washington and Thomas Jefferson awaited her. Washington, retired at Mount Vernon, greeted Pierre on behalf of all the citizens of the United States. Jefferson, now the Vice President, welcomed his old diplomatic comrade warmly. Unaware of Pierre's plight at sea, Jefferson expressed relief that his friend's ordeal in France had ended and that he had landed safely on American soil.

Françoise did not despair over her husband's life when the *American Eagle* lagged weeks behind its scheduled arrival. Pierre had survived the wrath of the revolution; a bad sea voyage would not end his life. Calmly, she selected a home for the Dupont family and business in the New World. Pierre had envisioned an elegant Manhattan townhouse as a suitable base for his scheme to colonize a part of Virginia. Françoise found the bricks of New York City dearly expensive; a townhouse would devour most of the funds Pierre had wangled from European investors. She chose, instead, a ramshackle wooden farmhouse on the coast of New Jersey, west and south of New York.

After their stolen feast and a night in a roadside inn, the Dupont band of immigrants set out for New York City. The January winds were harsh; nine days later Pierre embraced Françoise in her New York hotel and read the letters from Washington and Jefferson. Aboard the *American Eagle* he had planned the streets and buildings, homes and schools, farms and factories that would distinguish his wilderness estate. He had chosen a name: Pontiania. It would commemorate the first ruler of the world's only physiocratic state.

Jefferson warned Pierre in his letter that land speculation could be dangerous. Many, the Vice President wrote, had plunked down hard cash and been fleeced; many more would be before the land fever

ended. The Virginian omitted more serious barriers to Pierre's plan. President John Adams, in a rage against everything and everyone French, had actually signed an arrest order for the senior Dupont, should he ever be found on American soil. The warrant had expired before Pierre landed in Rhode Island, but the sentiment had not. The people of the United States feared that the nightmare of Europe's past might become America's future. Stringent laws had been enacted to prevent foreign ownership of land and, except in Virginia, citizenship was difficult to acquire.

Pierre decided to heed Jefferson's warning. He informed Victor and Irénée that the plan to build Pontiania would be abandoned. In its place the family would establish a great house of commerce. They would, first, settle themselves in their new home in New Jersey and then construct a scheme that would make them invaluable international agents to the governments of the world.

Twenty acres of fertile land, promising mounds of vegetables each summer, surrounded the house Madame Dupont had purchased. Streams on the property glimmered with fish; deer and other game wandered through nearby forests. Pierre assessed the house and land and pronounced it fit for his family. He named it Good Stay; here the Duponts would set their roots and flourish.

Good Stay thrust upward from a windswept beak of land on the edge of the New Jersey peninsula. From his bedroom window Pierre could see richly-laden schooners tacking up New York Bay, their masts flying the colors of the United States, their cargoes bound for frontier settlements up the Hudson River. The bay reminded Pierre of the Seine where it broadened at Rouen before reaching into the sea, but here, unlike in France, government agents would not pound on his door at midnight, to drag his family off to prison or exile on a remote tropical island. Pierre exuded confidence: the very air seemed filled with liberty and opportunity.

He outlined to Victor and Irénée his ideas for their new venture. An international house of commerce, designed to deal with foreign governments, must first have the backing of its own. He dispatched Victor to New York to see Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton had introduced Victor to American society when the elder Dupont son first came to the United States as an unpaid attaché of the French diplomatic mission. As John Adams's Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton could help counter the

President's dislike of the Duponts' French blood. Victor offered Hamilton a retainer and the Secretary of the Treasury became the Dupont family's first lawyer in the United States. Victor hurried home with the news; Pierre was jubilant.

Hamilton advised that at least one of the Duponts become an American citizen. Pierre instructed Victor to journey to Virginia, buy a small house, and petition the state's legislature for citizenship. Victor hesitated. His wife, Gabrielle, had given birth to an infant girl shortly before the family left France. The child had died. After the horrors of the sea voyage Gaby had slipped into a deep depression. Pierre urged Victor not to worry about his wife; she would be well cared for by Françoise and Irénée's wife, Sophie. Victor prepared to ride a carriage to Virginia.

Pierre announced that he himself would undertake the most important task before them: securing the backing of the United States government. He would visit the American heads of state in Philadelphia. He would remind John Adams of his fervor for liberty and tell him that his youngest grandchild, Irénée's firstborn son, brought into the world while the Duponts still lived in France, had been named Alfred Victor Philadelphe in honor of his adopted homeland's capital city. Pierre believed that his long association with Thomas Jefferson would convince the government to conduct its foreign trade through his new house of commerce, and that John Adams would be unable to ignore Pierre's many contacts throughout Europe.

Adams received Pierre coldly, tossed aside his compliments and pleadings, and asked if Madame Dupont's son-in-law, Bureaux de Pusey, might be interested in designing fortifications for New York City. Otherwise, the United States government had no business to do with the Duponts. Pierre found himself dismissed quickly. His hopes dashed, he boarded a carriage back to Good Stay, hardly able to believe that his years of learning to wangle patronage from noblemen and kings at Versailles had had little effect on John Adams.

Victor returned from Alexandria, Virginia, a landowner and citizen. He noticed that Pierre had become depressed and had lapsed into dreaming once again of Pontiania. Gabrielle, although her spirits had improved, clearly hated living in the country. Over the years of Victor's diplomatic career she had grown accustomed to the luxuries of city life. She had no desire to grow vegetables or hunt game.

Victor suggested to his father and brother that part of the family move from New Jersey to Manhattan. After only a few weeks' living in Good Stay the family was accumulating servants and even slaves. The crowded conditions had already grown irksome. At best, the land surrounding the house might produce a few bushels of wheat to be sold at market in the city. Irénée, Victor proposed, could be left in New Jersey to run Good Stay; he would be of little use in a house of commerce, where the diplomatic talents of Pierre and Victor would spell the difference between failure and success. Irénée offered no objections. Pierre pronounced the matter decided. They would acquire a home in New York's business district and issue a prospectus announcing the formation of Du Pont Father, Sons, and Company, international house of commerce (the syllables of the family name looked far more impressive separated).

Irénée was pleased to be staying behind in New Jersey. He did not mind that the new company's prospectus contained pages of praise about his father and brother and only a single line adding that the younger du Pont son would, too, be available to serve the house's clients. Near Good Stay, Irénée had found gardens run by Frenchmen that shipped American plants to Paris. In the workless weeks after Pierre and Victor left, Irénée's boyhood love for the flowers and trees of Bois-des-Fosses was rekindled. He hired Dutch farmers to till the land around Good Stay and indulged in long walks through the countryside, gathering specimens of the wonderful American flora.

Evenings he gave to entertaining the many French emigrants who called to pay tribute to Pierre and his family. They seemed not to mind that Pierre and Victor were absent; if Irénée appeared endlessly sober and melancholy, Sophie was gracious, and the conversation was less likely to center around Pierre's philosophical platitudes or Victor's empty banter.

Settled French-Americans came to Good Stay, too. One, Colonel Louis de Toussard, had fought beside Lafayette in the American Revolution. When Lafayette returned to France, de Toussard decided to stay behind. He liked the United States and had left a part of himself—an arm—on an American battlefield. Toussard was an avid hunter. He told Irénée of a gunpowder mill in Pennsylvania owned by William Lane and Stephen Decatur. Their product, he said, was inferior to French powder in strength and accuracy. Often it misfired when damp. Lane and Decatur's mill was, for the moment, the only working gunpowder

factory in the nation. Toussard invited Irénée to join him in a visit to the Pennsylvania mill.

Irénée was astounded at what he saw. Lane and Decatur made black powder using methods France had abandoned a century earlier. Yet the Pennsylvanians charged nearly as much for it as French powder, brought across the Atlantic, sold for. If this was the best powder Americans could produce, he, even with his rusty knowledge of the manufacturing process, could do infinitely better.

Irénée returned to Good Stay brimming with enthusiasm. He could not, he knew, rely on his father's courtly arts of intrigue and innuendo to support the du Pont family. Pierre's heart and mind, no less than those of the unfortunate Frenchmen who had ridden the tumbril to the guillotine, lay severed on different sides of revolution's sharp blade. His father had not come to America to turn boulders out of fields, and Victor, for all his desire to open a house of commerce, still hoped that France would find a place for him in its diplomatic ranks. Only he and Sophie, amid the survivors of a civilization, had learned to carve out a living—he in the family printshop; she, since the age of seventeen, running Bois-des-Fosses.

Irénée approached Pierre with a plan for a gunpowder factory of his own. Pierre scoffed at the idea. He intended to make millions trading with governments; no such fortune would rise from a gunpowder mill. It was not fit work for a du Pont, with all the dirt and complaining workers. Pierre's physiocratic ideals saw the soil as man's proper domain, or at least dealing in the products of the land. And a gunpowder mill would be useless to the grand dream he still cherished of building Pontiania.

But Pierre believed his quiet son would never be of use to Du Pont Father, Sons, and Company. He was preparing a number of proposals for Victor to take to France, plans that would make the family wealthy beyond any of their wildest fantasies. If Irénée wished it, he would add the idea for a gunpowder mill to his list of proposals, but only at its end. Irénée might accompany his brother to Paris to seek backing for his factory: none of the family funds could be spared to finance his enterprise.

Scarcely a year after the *American Eagle* deposited them in Rhode Island, Victor and Irénée boarded the *Benjamin Franklin*, bound from New York to Le Havre. Sealed in their luggage were eight proposals from Pierre to his friends and backers in Paris. Seven were grandiose

schemes for reaping mountains of gold from international trade, shipping, and banking. The eighth suggested that a modest gunpowder mill be constructed on the site Irénée du Pont had chosen along the banks of a stream in the tiny, isolated state of Delaware.

Napoleon Bonaparte walked slowly through the grand hall of the Hotel Gallifet, bowing from side to side, on occasion granting a word or two to a favored subject. Guards clad in gold army uniforms, two-foot-high white feathers adorning their caps, walked before and behind him. Talleyrand, his lameness exaggerated by rheumatism and age, shuffled along near the first consul, making an introduction here, soothing a slighted citizen there.

The Hotel Gallifet, in Paris's fashionable Rue de Bac, housed Talleyrand's ministry of foreign affairs. Twelve hundred guests had assembled to honor Napoleon, at Talleyrand's invitation. Carriages began arriving at nine in the evening; not until well past dawn did the Parisian elite stop coming. Homage to Bonaparte was not governed by the hours on the clock.

The first consul noticed two men standing together, one tall, slender, almost young, the other older, portly, with a shock of brown hair that belied his age. Talleyrand dropped away with a bow: he did not need to introduce Napoleon to General Lafayette. Bonaparte asked about the health of the general's son, a soldier, who had been wounded recently in Italy. They chatted about the French army's many successful campaigns and in a few moments the first consul moved on to receive the adulation of other guests. He had not spoken to Lafayette's companion, Victor du Pont.

Victor and Irénée had arrived in Paris four days prior to Talleyrand's celebration. Everywhere, Victor found himself welcome: the du Pont name, a surviving relic of the old France, was social magic. Victor dined and danced each night until dawn, or gambled, a habit he had picked up in New York, with the rulers of French government and commerce. By day he called upon the wealthy and powerful, showing to each Pierre's elaborate proposals. Pierre wanted France to turn all the business of its island colonies to him. He would supply the French navy, provide lumber for the rebuilding of ships, sell sugar from Guadeloupe and French Guiana, and outfit Napoleon's forces for an attack on Santo Domingo. The du Pont house of commerce would market French goods in the United States, run a string of packet boats across the Atlantic, and,

Pierre suggested, handle a loan to the United States government that would ease France's trade debt to the Americans. Pierre counted his commissions for the work in tens of millions of francs each year.

The ministers and bankers listened politely to Pierre's seven proposals, urged Victor to convince his father that France would welcome the former counselor of state if he wished to return, and invited Victor to a dinner or ball. As to business for Pierre's New York firm—that was out of the question. Napoleon had returned from the disaster of his Egyptian campaign in triumph, overthrown the Directory, and seized absolute power. Tribute poured in from Europe's trembling monarchs. Talleyrand's clever treaties installed puppet governments that dared not even whisper unless Paris pulled a string. For the first time since the revolution, Victor was told again and again, France believed in herself. Why should Napoleon trade when he could conquer? Why should bankers send money abroad when the first consul had opened wide the markets of Europe? Least of all did they wish to do business with an émigré philosopher, a remnant of the old regime who had abandoned France and demanded enormous sums as the price of doing business with the house of du Pont.

Soon Victor ran out of ministers and financiers to call upon. Paris had stunned him, with its dirty streets, ragged crowds, gangs of roaming criminals, and women parading about in bare-breasted gowns. He found himself longing for New York, with its air of cleanliness and optimism. Before he boarded the *Benjamin Franklin* in New York, Gabrielle had told him that she believed his mission was folly, a desperate clutching for business that would never be made available to the du Ponts. Victor began to agree. Even when Madame Germaine Necker de Staël, at Talleyrand's fête for Napoleon, fawned over him and introduced him to her friends as Victor the Superb, he found Parisian society as empty and difficult as dealing with Parisian bankers.

Jacques Bidermann, Pierre's largest investor, urged Victor to cross the Pyrenees into Spain: business might be better there. Talleyrand offered to provide him with a passport across the border if he would accompany the minister's former secretary as far as Bayonne. Talleyrand's man was retired now, but he would meet Lucien Bonaparte in Spain—nothing important, really, just some dreary discussion with Napoleon's brother about the Spanish colonies in North America. In April, 1801, Victor boarded a carriage for Bayonne. His traveling companion, under the guise of guiding a prominent American businessman across the Pyre-

nees, carried with him Napoleon Bonaparte's demand that Spain secretly cede to France its land in North America—an area equal to the original thirteen states, from which the first consul could launch an invasion of the American nation.

Irénée said goodbye to his brother in Paris. He had not accompanied Victor on his nightly forays into Parisian society, nor had he called upon businessmen during the day. Irénée had spent the months since their arrival in France at Essonnes, the national gunpowder factory a short distance from Paris, reviving old friendships and studying the newest techniques the French used to manufacture black powder.

The French government had disagreed with Pierre's assessment of his son's plan to open a gunpowder mill in the United States. Irénée had taken his proposal to Talleyrand. The foreign minister trusted Pierre's younger son; he was a man of solid character and uncomplicated purpose. Talleyrand knew that a gunpowder mill on American soil, backed by the French treasury, would sharply undermine England's trade with the United States. And he saw clearly Napoleon's bottomless greed for world power. Talleyrand had constructed the language of Bonaparte's demand that the Spanish turn over the Louisiana Territory to France. If Napoleon ever ordered an invasion of the United States, Irénée du Pont's gunpowder mill would be invaluable.

Talleyrand opened the heavily-guarded doors of Essonnes's laboratory to Irénée: the French chemists would reveal to him even their most secret new processes. Irénée needed machinery that only the French could make. Talleyrand ordered it built to his specifications. He needed men to work the mills when they were established. If they were willing to leave France, Talleyrand said, the government would be pleased to let a few of its experienced powdermakers go. And Irénée needed money, at least twelve thousand dollars, to buy machinery and land. Talleyrand guided him to open French pocketbooks.

Irénée repaid the minister's kindness with seeds from American trees and plants for his gardens. Talleyrand introduced the young powdermaker into his own circle of friends. When Josephine Bonaparte heard that Irénée had been giving away American seeds she asked him for a few to plant in her own garden. Irénée regretted that he had already given away the seeds he had brought with him but promised to send her a large assortment as soon as he returned to the United States. Josephine assured Irénée of the French government's patronage for his new enter-

Talleyrand suggested that Irénée spend a few days shopping for gifts to take back to his family; he himself would see that all the business preparations went well. Irénée booked passage aboard the *Franklin*, due to leave Le Havre on May 1, 1801. The minister assured him that his new company's articles of incorporation, being printed on government presses, would be ready in time for his sailing. The articles would name Irénée director of the gunpowder concern, at a salary of eighteen hundred dollars a year, give him sole right to run the business as he saw fit, and allow him to sell shares to anyone he chose: the French government would not demand ownership, even in part, as a return for its generosity.

And, as Irénée had requested, the articles of incorporation would give his gunpowder factory a name: E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company. Neither Pierre nor Victor would be mentioned. Talleyrand agreed that the gunpowder mills should rise or fall on Irénée du Pont's strength and ability alone.

During the summer and fall of 1801, Victor learned from Talleyrand's former secretary, D'Autremont, that his visit to Lucien Bonaparte in Spain was no casual stopover on a pleasure trip: he had informed Lucien that Napoleon wanted Louisiana. D'Autremont told Victor that the first consul planned an extraordinary expedition to Santo Domingo, thirty-five thousand men under his brother-in-law, General Leclerc, with orders to decimate the rebellious slaves. From Haiti, Leclerc could easily invade the American mainland, if France owned Louisiana. The United States would be trapped in a ring of foreign domain: Canada, the Floridas, and the Louisiana Territory, each controlled by a different government. Talleyrand would then carve up America as he had Europe.

Victor left France for the United States late in November. He had been separated from his wife and family for nearly thirteen months. Yet after three days in New York he hurried Gabrielle aboard a coach that galloped day and night for Washington. On the road he explained to Gaby that he had come upon information in Europe which would make Du Pont Father, Sons, and Company a giant success. If the French government would allow him to outfit Leclerc's expedition, even a small percentage of what the ships and men would need in provisions and cargo would amount to millions of francs. He revealed his reason for asking Gabrielle to pack her finest gowns for their stay in the capital: they would be dining with the President. But first, he would consum-

mate his arrangement with the French consul general in Washington, Louis Pichon.

Louis Pichon was one of the few Frenchmen who knew of Napoleon's plan to recapture Santo Domingo. Victor had known the diplomat when both were junior members of the French delegation to the United States. He revealed to the consul general the depth of his knowledge of Napoleon's scheme to take North America. Pichon said he would be glad to do business with Victor, when the time came to outfit Leclerc's forces—but not with Victor's father.

While Victor and Irénée visited France, Pierre had called upon Pichon in Washington. He had demanded the consul general's help in his attempts to draw patronage from the United States government. Pierre had treated him like a child, Pichon complained to Victor, ordering him about on a valet's errands and scolding him like a servant. No, France would not deal with Pierre du Pont, but if Victor were willing to leave the family business and start one of his own the entire Santo Domingo trade would be his. Victor replied that he would be happy to ease his father into retirement. Pichon added that he would be most appreciative if Victor saw fit to return a portion of his commissions to the man who had directed the Santo Domingo trade his way. Victor smiled: how else was business done? They shook hands on their agreement, and Victor hurried off to pick up Gabrielle on his way to the White House.

He had much to tell the President; many of Jefferson's French acquaintances sent their regards and best wishes on his election to the nation's highest office. Life had changed in Paris since the rise of Bonaparte, Victor said: Jefferson would not recognize the city if he saw it now. The President pushed aside Victor's views of French society; he needed desperately to know the state of French diplomacy. Rufus King, his ambassador in England, had managed to secure a copy of France's secret treaty with Spain. Few were in Victor's position to know what Bonaparte and Talleyrand truly intended: was the Treaty of San Ildefonso real, or just another of Talleyrand's clever ploys?

Jefferson felt certain that he could count on Victor to relate all he had learned in Paris and Madrid. Pierre had visited the President to press for his support of Irénée's new gunpowder mill. It would be acceptable—even correct—for Jefferson to place the weight of his office behind the powder mill, and the other du Pont family enterprises, if he could count on the unquestionable loyalty of the du Ponts to the United States.

Victor made his decision instantly. Since he had arranged with Pichon only to supply Leclerc's forces as far as Santo Domingo, he could still proclaim his loyalty to the United States and tell Jefferson all he knew. He and Gabrielle dined at the White House on five consecutive nights. Soon after they boarded a coach back to New York an astonished nation heard Thomas Jefferson speak publicly about an alliance with England, his avowed enemy, against France, his dearest friend, should Napoleon Bonaparte even whisper plans to land French soldiers on American soil.

Madame Françoise du Pont ran weeping from her husband's bedroom, a lace handkerchief pressed to her eyes. Pierre murmured that she needed only a moment to compose herself, but his voice carried little conviction. The others gathered around his desk—Victor, Irénée, Sophie, and Gabrielle—knew the truth: the grand dreams of Pierre du Pont de Nemours were near an end. Their money, more than two hundred thousand francs, had dwindled to almost nothing. Du Pont Father, Sons, and Company, since opening its office at 91 Liberty Street in New York, had done precisely no business. The family faced ruin.

Irénée, as usual in family councils, said nothing. Sophie and Gabrielle deferred to their father-in-law's wisdom as always. Victor, too, rarely spoke except to agree with Pierre. Now, however, he was on his feet, his voice decisive, his manner far from the bored detachment he typically affected. Only one course remained for the family, he said. They must separate, Irénée to build his gunpowder mill, Pierre to go whatever way he wished. He, Victor, would stay in New York and, under a new business name, Victor du Pont de Nemours and Company, bear the entire burden of the older firm's losses, both in money and reputation. He would even undertake to answer the outrage that was certain to come from Pierre's European investors.

Victor's offer carried with it a single proviso: his father was in no way to interfere in the new company. Pierre agreed at once. Exclusion from Victor's new firm carried a bitter sting, but his son's offer of a way out of his embarrassment soothed it. Pierre thanked Victor privately for so generously considering his reputation in France. Victor did not tell him that he had sacrificed Pierre on the altar of money at the demand of the French government.