

190 The Pomp of the Lavillettes

A cry of astonishment went up from the officers and the men without. They had expected to see Nic, but Nic was on his way to the horse beneath the great elm tree, and from the elm tree to the State of New York — and safety!

The men and the officers fell back as Castine and Ferrol clinched in a death struggle. Ferrol knew that his end had come. He had expected it, hoped for it. But before the end he wanted to kill this man, if he could. He caught Castine's head in his hands, and with a last effort twisted it back with a sudden jerk.

All at once blood spurted from his mouth into the face of his enemy. He shivered, tottered, and fell back, as Castine struck blindly into space. For a moment Ferrol swayed back and forth, stretched out his hands convulsively, and gasped, trying to speak, the blood welling from his lips. His eyes were wild, anxious, and yearning, his face deadly pale and covered with a cold sweat. Presently he collapsed like a loosened bundle upon the steps.

Castine, blinded with blood, turned round, and the light of the fire upon his open mouth made him appear to grin painfully — an involuntary grimace of terror.