

## The Family Circle.

"Home, Sweet Home."

## A Race for Life.

By the Author of "Danesbury House," "A Life Secret," &c.  
CHAPTER II.

THE FIRM OF CARINE AND LETELLIER.

The summer evening sun streamed on a pleasant French scene; for never had the Terrasse du Jardin, that favorite promenade of Grenoble, been filled with a gayer crowd. On the right hand rose the Prefecture, its clusters of lovely orange trees wafting on the air their delicious perfume; on the left hand were alcoves, chairs, benches, and small tables, where ices, lemonade, and syrups were to be had for the paying; behind the hotel of the "Trois Dauphins," and if you chose to pass out at the opposite end of the terrace, that before you, a few minutes' walk would take you to the cool waters of the Isere, which flows through the town, and to the beautiful scenery for which the environs of Grenoble are so famous.

The terrace was crowded; all the rank and fashion of Grenoble seemed to be there. Groups, elegantly attired, met and passed each other, the men lifting their hats, the women with an elaborate curtsy; or they stood to converse; or they formed into parties, to sit and eat ices. One lovely girl, with an elastic step and smiling face, came on, nodding everywhere; it was Annette Carine, and the town could not boast a more gentle or affectionate spirit. She was with some friends this evening, the Pavon family.

"But, Annette, where's Mademoiselle your aunt?" was asked from more than one quarter.

"Oh, my aunt has an attack again, and keeps her chamber to-day," was the answer, merrily delivered, as though the speaker thought little of the attack.

Miss Carine, a maiden lady, who ruled her niece with an iron hand, was subject to attacks—not of apoplexy, but of indigestion. She had one about every ten days, when she would be shut up in her chamber for four and twenty hours. Like her brother, Pere Carine, she was fond of good living; in him it induced gout, in her, indigestion. She had lived with them since the death of Annette's mother, three years now; and she made quite a favor of it, especially to the ears of the world in general, for she possessed a nice little fortune of her own, the being disinherited from which Annette was threatened with ten times a day. The young lady could be saucy on occasion; she had gone the length of telling Mademoiselle her aunt that she hoped she'd leave her fortune to somebody else, for she'd rather be without it than with it. These attacks were the sunny spots of Annette's life; while they lasted, and her aunt was invisible, she could go roaming about the house and the garden as she would, carolling like a bird.

The Pavons walked twice to and fro the length of the terrace, showing themselves and their fine plumage to their townspeople—for that is too generally the end and aim of a Frenchwoman's existence—and critically scanning their plumage in return, lest it might be richer than their own; like so many peacocks—as the whole lot of exhibitors were. Then the Pavons took their seats in an alcove, in full view still of the promenaders, and called for ices.

A gentlemanly-looking man passed, raised his hat, and bowed; and the party returned the salutation. Annette Carine played with her bonnet strings, and the rest fell to talking of him who had gone by.

"We hear, Annette, that he finds more favor with your father day by day—that he says the business could not get on without Letellier. Is it so?"

"I don't concern myself with the business," returned Annette, whose color was deepening.

"And report goes that M. Carine will be making him an equal partner."

"May be," carelessly rejoined the young lady.

"He has proved himself a true Letellier," cried an old gentleman who had joined them. "Had uninterrupted prosperity been his, why I don't know how it might have been—perhaps played and frittered his life away; but when adversity came, he turned to with a purpose. Some feared the result; I did not; for I knew young Robert had the right stuff in him and would be worthy of his name. How long is it now, Miss Annette, that he has been with your father?"

"As if I kept count of the time?" was Miss Annette's retort, with a shrug of her shoulders.

"It is getting on for two years—twenty-one months about now," spoke up Pere Pavon; "and M. Carine told me himself this week, that he would not be without him for a great deal. Young Letellier will make his way in Grenoble yet; never doubt it."

Robert Letellier had certainly got on well, and you will think so when you hear that he had been for twelve months M. Carine's partner. It was, however, self-interest which had prompted the Pere Carine to take him in. The former clientele of the house of Letellier did not, as its new head had fondly anticipated, come much to the house of Carine with their orders, and the Pere found that to join the name of Letellier to it would be a means of securing them. So the firm was made Carine and Letellier—Robert receiving but a very small share of the profits, and retaining his active management; it was a fact that the business could scarcely have got along without him.

The party finished their ices, shook out their fine feathers, took another turn or two for the benefit of admiring eyes, and then left the Terrasse du Jardin for the night, escorting Annette to the door of her father's house.

It was twilight then. Annette threw off her bonnet, proceeded to Miss Carine's room, and softly opened the door. "Are you better now, aunt?"

"Not a bit," groaned Miss Carine; "my chest is on the rack, and I think it's going on to the liver. Don't come here, child," she crossly added; "nobody wants you. I have swallowed down five quarts of tisane, and yet it doesn't go away."

Singing sweetly under her breath, Annette went down, entered the court yard, and passed into the garden, where she seated herself under the lime trees, thinking of other things than her aunt's indigestion.

The truth is, that between Robert and Annette there had sprung up an attachment, very natural under the circumstances. She had seen and admired his good qualities; and

Robert had cherished hopes of winning the charming daughter of Pere Carine, who was not his superior in anything except wealth. Before making any declaration to Annette, however, he very properly sought an interview with her father. The old man told him to put such presumptuous folly out of his head, and that she was going to be asked in marriage by the son of the Prefet, who would himself be a Prefet one of these days. Robert knew that Annette cared nothing for the rich Prefet's son; but he was too honorable to interfere with family arrangements after this interview. He continued to devote himself to the duties of his position, and committed to Providence the issue of events.

The months dragged their slow length along, and there was no more joyousness at Pierre Carine's. Annette, who had kept the family alive with her innocent mirth, whose light step and loving laugh had been pleasant things in the household, was now sad and silent. She was no longer allowed to meet Robert Letellier; she was told that they were parted for ever; and she bowed to the decision, knowing there was no appeal from it, for neither son or daughter, in France, can marry without the parental consent. M. Carine had the gout more frequently; Mademoiselle, his sister, complained incessantly of her attacks; altogether, things were by no means comfortable; and, to crown the whole, Annette had displayed the unheard of hardihood of daring to refuse the Prefet's son.

In the midst of these untoward circumstances, winter set in in earnest—snow, hail, sleet frost; never had a longer or a worse winter been known in the department of the Isere; and the kind monks of the Grande Chartreuse (which establishment you may be aware, is but a day's journey from Grenoble) were out with their dogs incessantly, to find those who might be lost in the snow.

The unusually severe winter brought its consequences. The poor were starving; and crimes, long sunk in abeyance, began to be rife. Houses were broken into, money and provisions stolen—chiefly provisions; the depredators' children were wallowing for bread. And if this was the case in the town, far worse off was the country; the long and hard frost precluded agricultural labor, and hunger made the peasants desperate. Travellers were attacked in the lonely roads, and their pockets rifled; sometimes violence was done. It was a winter that will long be remembered throughout the Isere.

## CHAPTER III.

## A MOONLIGHT RIDE.

One morning in February, Pere Carine, when he came into the sitting room to breakfast, advanced to the window, and peered out through its frosted panes. "Any signs of its abating?" asked he.

"I think it is freezing harder than ever," said Annette, who would put on a semblance of cheerfulness before her father. "Pauline says the water in the rain-barrel is a mass of ice to the bottom."

"A pretty cold journey I shall have," grumbled Pere Carine. "Are you going out, papa?"

"To-morrow, child; as far as Chambéry."

"Chambéry! why, what can ever take you to Chambéry?" screamed out Miss Carine, from her place at the breakfast table.

"Business takes me to Chambéry. I have been told of a fine lot of skins lying there to be disposed of—real kids that once ran wild on the Alps; and I mean to see them for myself before the news gets wind, and buy them up if they are worth it."

"Why, you'll be a day and a night going; the diligence will get along the roads at the rate of two miles an hour; you'll be frozen to the seat before you arrive," snapped Miss Carine.

"Very likely I should; but the diligence is not going to get me. I shall take the chaise and Belotte. What is the matter, Annette?"

Annette Carine had turned pale as she listened; absorbed though she might be in her own troubles, she loved her father with an intense love. Have you forgotten the unsafe state of the country?" she breathed.

"I don't put much faith in the reports," he slightly returned; "I am sure they have been exaggerated. I shall carry only enough silver for the journey, and if they clear me out of that they must. But I shall take my pistols, and one glimpse of their bright barrels will put a dozen such fellows to flight. They are not systematic robbers, remember, but starving peasants forced by want to puny essays of crime."

Annette shivered, she scarcely knew why; a presentiment of coming evil seemed to steal over her. "Oh, papa, go by diligence!" she cried, in a wailing tone of entreaty. "Do not risk the lonely chaise; go in company, if you must go."

"What a goose you are, Annette," laughed Pere Carine; "you always were frightened at shadows. I would not go by the crawling diligence to have the pick of all the skins in the market of Annanay I should be frozen to my seat on the road."

Pere Carine started next morning with the daylight, Robert Letellier seeing him off. They were perfectly good friends. Apart from Robert's presumptuous flight in the summer, touching Annette, Pere Carine was very fond of his junior partner. He would arrive at Chambéry some time that evening, early or late, according to the roads; it is the frontier town of Savoy; and the deliberate old diligences would make a day's journey of it in good weather. His intention was to examine the skins that night, if he reached there in time; if not, the first thing the following morning, and then immediately leave for home again.

Wearily enough wore the day for Annette. Miss Carine was unusually well, and consequently unusually cross and worrying. When they arose the next day, Grenoble was in a commotion at some news which had been brought into the town, and it struck a chill to the heart of Annette. A solitary traveller, coming from Sassenage (the little hamlet where the famous cheese is made, situated about a league from Grenoble) had been attacked, and—killed; he was found in the road dead, his pockets rifled. Annette closed her eyes; a mist was gathering before them. "Only in coming from Sassenage," she shuddered; and he has to come from Chambéry!"

"Well, it's a good thing he took his pistols," said Miss Carine.

But he had not taken his pistols. He had done what many a wiser man had done before him, and will do again—forgotten them. As evening drew on, Annette, in her restless wanderings—for she was too uneasy to be still, came upon them in their case, in a little room opening on the court-yard. Whether her father trusted to his servant to put them into the chaise, and the servant thought his master had done so, certain it is there lay the case and the pistols.

All the blood in Annette's heart seemed to leave it as she gazed upon them. One moment's self-debate of what could be done, and the next she burst into the counting-house of the manufactory, case in hand, where Robert Letellier sat alone. "You must go to him, Robert," she uttered, after an incoherent explanation; "you must go to his succor."

He took the case from her hand, but he seemed to hesitate.

"Are you afraid?" cried Annette, a touch of scorn in her tone.

He turned his clear, fearless eyes upon her. "You would not think it, Annette, were you less excited. I am in doubt where to look for him. He told me that, in returning from Chambéry, he should probably turn off at the cross road, and call at Vertpre; but he was not sure."

Annette's very breath seemed to stand still. "Vertpre!" she uttered; he never mentioned that.

"No; he said they were sufficiently timorous indoors at his travelling on the traffic road from Chambéry, without being told that he might risk the lonely one from Vertpre. I know not which he may have chosen."

"Go and seek him somewhere," gasped Annette; "God can guide you to the right."

Robert Letellier placed a belt round his waist and put the pistols in it, first seeing that they were loaded and in order. He caused a horse to be got ready with all speed, mounted it, passed out at the town gate which led to the road to Savoy, galloped to where two ways branched off, and there he halted. Annette's fears and agitation had somewhat infected his own mind; Pere Carine might be in danger.

But now, which way to choose? The one would lead him in due course to Chambéry, the other to Vertpre—a farm house some miles away, whose inmates were friends of the Carines. How was he to know which to fix upon? Annette's words came to his mind. "God can guide you to the right." For a moment he bowed his head to the saddlebow, and a fervent prayer went up from his heart to be guided—a prayer not only of hope but of trust, and he never doubted that he was heard. He raised his head, recovered it, and urged his horse on by a word, not touching the bridle to guide it, but suffering it to take its own course, under, he hoped, the guidance of God. The animal flew off in the direction of Vertpre.

And now, where was Pere Carine? He had arrived at Chambéry safe and sound, found the skins were really good, bargained for and secured them, starting for home again betimes in the morning. About midway between Chambéry and Grenoble he came to the road which branched off to Vertpre; having some time before him, he took it, and arrived at the farm. There he spent an hour or two, and started for home in excellent spirits, jogging along in his chaise. I don't quite know how to describe this chaise to you, since we have nothing that answers to its make in England. An armchair stuck upon two high wheels, with a head to it, is as much like it as anything, and that's near enough for description. It was a fine moonlight night; but the clustering trees, in the thick wood to his left, looked dark and weird. Little cared Pere Carine whether they looked dark or light. Having travelled unmolested so far, he was now disposed to regard the tales of thieves and assaulters as being little better than pure fables invented by the timid; and he laughed to think—

What noise was that? It was like nothing earthly—a low groaning sound, half wail, half howl. Pere Carine checked his mare to listen; but the animal raised her ears, and trembled violently.

"It must have been the wind sighing in the forest," cried he. "It does make a doleful noise at times. But it's a still night—Belotte, old girl, what ails you?"

He gently shook the reins and urged the mare on. It was a plain he was travelling on, not a road; more like a tract of waste land, wild, bare, and very unfrequented. As his eyes ranged over it—so white with its lying snow in the moonlight—he thought of the vast dreary plains where travellers lost their way in the pathless waste, and never found it again.

"Cheer up, my Belotte; no fear of thieves coming here to disturb us," laughed he; "the villains lie in wait for more travel-beaten roads. This one does not see a passenger for a week together. If Annette knew I was on it, though, and my pistols nowhere, her little heart would flutter. Steady, Belotte, you are roughshod, you know; no excuse for slipping; there's a good feed of corn at the journey's end, and—"

There it came again; the same sound, only nearer. A prolonged, discordant bay, or groan; not like the cry of a human being, not like the growl of an animal, and yet not very unlike either. Belotte shook till her coat became wet, and the awful sound died away in the stillness of the night.

"That's not the wind," ejaculated Pere Carine; "it's not like any beast that I ever heard; and it can't be highwaymen; they don't announce their approach. So, ho! Belotte; stop, my girl; we'll have a look out backwards."

He pulled up. He did not care to descend, but he rose in the chaise, unfastened the joints of the head, pushed it back, and stood gazing over the extended plain. At first he could discern nothing—nothing but the wide tract of land, so cold, and still, and dreary. But again rose that terrific howl, nearer and clearer; it served to guide his eyes to a certain spot, where he discerned something moving, trotting steadily onwards in pursuit of prey—in pursuit of him.

Pere Carine gave a shout of dismay, and the perspiration broke out from the pores of his skin, as it had from poor Belotte's. He had heard tales of the wolves—of the wolves appearing in the department of the Isere during a hard and prolonged winter, and devouring travellers; but the case had not come under his own knowledge. The wolves were after him, then.

He sank down on his seat; he whipped up his old mare to her utmost speed, little as the terrified animal needed it. "A race for life, Belotte," he murmured, "a race for life."

A race in which he was pretty sure to lose, and he knew it; for the French chaises are never built to be light and swift; they cannot skim along and outstrip an enemy—with every moment the wolves would gain upon him. The sky was of a dark intense blue, looking black to the eye by night, and a few stars peeped out. Grenoble was two leagues off yet—two leagues; and the dreaded animals close upon him.

Once more he rose in the chaise, and strained his eyes backwards. No need to strain them now; the danger was all too near. He could but see one animal—a large, hideous she-wolf, whose fierce teeth were gleaming in the moonlight. He supposed there might be but one; he knew, at least he had heard, that they had been seen out singly in other hard winters, hunting for human spoil—the one would be enough for him.

"On, on, Belotte! on for life!"