

**ANNETTE
AND
SYLVIE**

**Being Volume One of
The Soul Enchanted**

**By
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THE END

Annette and Sylvie is the prelude of a work in several volumes, that bears the title: *The Soul Enchanted*.

*Love, the first born creatures,
Love, who later shall engender Thought. . . .*

RIG-VEDA

FOREWORD

Upon the threshold of a new journey which, without being as long as that of "Jean-Christophe," will include more than one stage, I would remind my readers of the friendly prayer which I addressed to them at a turning-point in the story of my musician. At the commencement of *Revolt*, I admonished them to consider each volume as one chapter of a moving work, whose thought unrolled only as rapidly as the life represented. Citing the old adage, *La fin loue la vie, et le soir le jour*, I added: When we shall have made an end, you may judge the worth of our effort.

Of course, I understand that each volume has its own character, that it must be judged separately as a work of art; but it would be premature to judge the general thought from a single volume. When I write a novel, I choose a human being with whom I feel certain affinities,—or, rather, it is he who chooses me. Once this person has been selected, I leave him perfectly free, I beware of mingling my personality with his. It is a weighty burden, a personality that one has borne for more than half a century. The divine boon of art is to deliver us from this burden, by giving us other souls to quaff, other lives to assume—(our Indian friends would say, "other of *our* lives"; for all is in each . . .).

So, when I have once adopted Jean-Christophe, or Colas, or Annette Rivière, I am no more than the secretary of their thoughts. I listen to them, I see them act, I see through their eyes. In the measure that they come to know their own hearts and men, I learn with them; when they make mistakes, I stumble; when they recover themselves, I pick myself up, and we set off again upon the

road. I do not say that this road is the best. But this road is ours. Whether or not Christophe, Colas and Annette are right, Christophe, Colas and Annette are life is not the least of justifications.

Seek here neither thesis nor theory. Behold in this work merely the inner history of a life that is sincere, long, fertile in joys and sorrows, not exempt from contradictions, abounding in errors, yet always struggling to attain, in default of inaccessible Truth, that harmony of spirit which is our supreme truth.

R.R.

August, 1922.

ANNETTE AND SYLVIE

PART ONE

I



he was seated beside the window, with her back turned to the light, so that the rays of the setting sun fell upon the firm column of her neck. She had just come indoors. For the first time in months, Annette had spent the day in the open, tramping and finding intoxication in the spring sunlight. Topsy sunlight, like pure wine, diluted by no shadow of leafless trees, and brightened by the cool air of the winter that had flown. Her head was humming, her veins pulsing, and her eyes were drenched in torrents of light. Red and gold beneath her closed eyelids. Gold and red in her body. Immobile, bemused, upon her chair, for an instant she lost consciousness. . . .

A pool, in the midst of woods, with a patch of sunlight like an eye. Around about, a circle of trees, their trunks befurred with moss. She must bathe her body; she finds herself undressed. The icy hand of the water rubs her feet and knees. Voluptuous torpor. In the pool of red and gold she contemplates her nudity. . . . A feeling of shame, obscure and indefinable, as though other spying eyes were watching her. To escape them she advances further into the water, which rises to her chin. The sinuous water becomes a living embrace; and slippery creepers twine themselves about her legs. She seeks to free herself, she sinks into the slime. Above, the patch of sunlight sleeps upon the pool. Angrily she thrusts her foot against the bottom and rises to the surface. The water now is gray,

dull, and muddied; but still the sunlight on its gleaming surface. . . . Annette grasps a willow branch that overhangs the pool, to lift herself free from the watery contamination. The leafy limb covers her naked back and shoulders like a wing. The shadow of night falls, and the air is chill Upon her neck. . . .

She emerges from her trance; only a few moments have flown since she sank into it. The sun is disappearing behind the hills of Saint-Cloud. The cool of evening has come.

Sobered, Annette rises, shivering a little; and, wrinkling her brows in irritation at the lapse she has allowed herself, she goes to sit down before the fire, within the depths of her room. It is a pleasant wood fire, designed to distract the eye and to furnish company rather than to give warmth; for from the garden, through the open window, with the damp breeze of an early spring evening, there enters the melodious chattering of homing birds settling down to sleep. Annette dreams; but this time her eyes are open. She has recovered a foothold in her accustomed world. She is in her own house: she is Annette Rivière. And, as she leans towards the flame that reddens her youthful face, teasing with her foot the black cat that stretches out its gold-barred belly, she once more becomes conscious of her sorrow, that for an instant had been forgotten; she recalls the image (escaped from her heart) of the person she has lost. In deep mourning, with the trace of grief's passage not yet effaced from her brow or from the corners of her mouth, with her lower lids still slightly swollen from recent tears; but healthy, fresh, and bathed in sap like youthful nature itself, this vigorous young girl who is not beautiful but well made—with heavy chestnut hair, lightly tanned neck, starry eyes and flower-like cheeks—seeking to enfold anew her wandering glance and round shoulders in the dispersed veils of her melancholy—this girl,

sitting thus, seems like a young widow watching the departure of the beloved shade.

Widow, indeed, Annette was in her heart; but he whose shade her fingers sought to detain was her father.

Six months had passed already since she had lost him. Towards the end of autumn, Raoul Rivière, still young (he was not quite fifty), had been carried off in two days by an attack of uremia. Although for several years he had been obliged to show some consideration for the health he had abused, he had not expected so brusque a lowering of the curtain. He was a Parisian architect, an old student of the Villa Romaine, handsome, congenitally cunning and possessed of inordinate desires, lionized in drawing-rooms and honored by the official world; and all his life long he had known how to collect commissions, honors and windfalls without ever appearing to seek them. His was a typically Parisian face, popularized by photographs, magazine sketches and caricatures,—with bulging forehead, swelling at the temples, head lowered like a charging bull; round, protuberant eyes with an audacious glance; white bushy hair cut in a brush, and a little tuft of hair below his laughing, voracious mouth; the whole expression being marked by wit, insolence, charm, and effrontery. In the Parisian world of arts and pleasures, he was known by everyone. And yet none knew him. He was a man of dual nature, who knew admirably how to adapt himself to society for the sake of exploiting it; but he also knew how to conduct his hidden life as a thing apart. He was a man of strong passions and powerful vices who managed to cultivate them all, while taking care to reveal nothing that might scare away his clients; he had his secret museum (*fas ac nefas*), but only the rarest initiates were allowed a glimpse of it; he cared not a hang for public taste and morality, but at the same time he conformed to

them in his outward life and in his official works. There was none who knew him, neither among his friends nor among his enemies. . . . His enemies? He had none. Rivals at the most, who had smarted that he might forge ahead. But they bore him no malice: having got the better of them, he was such an adept at the art of wheedling that they almost smiled and begged his pardon, like those timid persons on whose feet one treads. Hard and cunning as he was, he had accomplished the feat of remaining on good terms with the competitors he supplanted, and with the women he abandoned.

In his own household he had been somewhat less fortunate. His wife had had the bad taste to suffer from his infidelities. Although it seemed to him that she should have had ample time, during the twenty-five years of their married life, to habituate herself to them, she never learned resignation. Morosely virtuous, with a manner slightly cold as was her Lyonnaise beauty, possessed of feelings that were strong but concentrated, she lacked all adroitness in holding him; and she had still less of that eminently practical talent of ignoring what she could not help. She was too self-respecting to complain, yet she could not resign herself to hiding from him the fact that she knew and suffered. As he was sensitive (at least he believed he was) he avoided thinking of this; but he bore her a grudge for not knowing better how to veil her egotism. For some years they had lived practically apart; but by tacit accord they hid this from the eyes of the world, and even from their daughter, Annette, who never became cognizant of the situation. She had not sought to fathom her parents' misunderstanding; it was distasteful to her. And adolescence has enough preoccupations of its own. A fig for those of others! . . .

Raoul Rivière's cleverest act was winning his daughter to his side. Naturally, he made no move in this direction; it was a triumph of art. Not a word of reproach, not an allusion to the wounds inflicted by Madame Rivière; he was chivalrous, he left his daughter to find out these things for herself. Nor did she fail to do so, for she too was under her father's spell. And how could she fail to decide against the woman who, being his wife, was clumsy enough to spoil their happiness! In this unequal battle poor Madame Rivière was beaten in advance; and she crowned her defeat by being the first to die. Raoul remained sole master of the field,—and of his daughter's heart. For the past five years Annette had lived morally enveloped by her amiable father who was devoted to her, and who, intending no harm, lavished on her those charms that were natural to him. His generosity to her was augmented when he found less opportunity to employ these charms outside; for during the last two years he was kept closer to home by warnings of the illness that was to carry him off.

Nothing, then, had troubled the warm intimacy that united father and daughter, and filled Annette's unawakened heart. She was between twenty-three and twenty-four, but her heart seemed younger; its development had not been forced. Perhaps, like all those who have a long future before them, and because she felt a profound life pulsing within her, she let that life amass itself, in no hurry to take stock of it.

She took after both her parents: from her father she came by the outline of her features and the charming smile, which in his case promised more than he realized, and in hers, as she was still pure, more than she wished; while from her mother she inherited a surface tranquillity, a poise of manner, and a mind that was serious despite its extreme freedom. Doubly alluring she was, with the

charm of the one and the reserve of the other. It was impossible to guess which of the two temperaments was dominant in her. Her true nature still remained unknown,—to herself as well as to others. None suspected her hidden universe. She was an Eve in the garden, half slumbering. She had not yet become conscious of the desires that were within her; nothing had awakened them, for nothing had disturbed them. It seemed that she had but to stretch out her arm to gather them. She never tried, lulled by their happy humming. Perhaps she did not wish to try. . . . Who knows how far one tries to dupe oneself? One would rather not see the disturbing things within one. . . . And she preferred to ignore that interior sea. The Annette whom people knew, the Annette who knew herself, was a very calm, reasonable, well-regulated little person, mistress of herself, who had her own will and her own independent judgment, but who, so far, had never had occasion to oppose these to the established rules of the world or of her household.

Without in any way neglecting the duties of social life, nor being indifferent to its pleasures, which she enjoyed with a healthy appetite, she had felt the need of a more serious activity. She busied herself with fairly thorough studies, with following university courses, with passing examinations and taking a double degree. Possessed of a lively intelligence that demanded occupation, she loved exact studies, particularly the sciences, in which she was highly gifted. Perhaps it was that her healthy nature, with an instinct for equilibrium, felt the necessity of opposing the strict discipline of a clear method and sharply defined ideas to the disquieting attraction of that inner life which she feared to face, and which, despite her precautions, came beating on her door at each halt of the inactive mind. This clear, accurate, regular activity satisfied her for the moment. She did not care to speculate on what

would follow. Marriage held no attraction for her; she avoided thought of it. Her father smiled at her resolutions; but he was disinclined to oppose them, for he found them to his own advantage.

II

The disappearance of Raoul Rivière shook to its foundations the well-ordered edifice of which, without Annette's realizing it, he was the principal pillar. She was not unfamiliar with the face of death. Five years before she had made its acquaintance, when her mother had left her. But the features of this face are not always the same. After spending several months in a private hospital, Madame Rivière had departed silently, as she had lived, guarding the secret of her last terrors as she had the trials of her life; leaving behind her, in the candid egotism of the young girl, along with a gentle sorrow that resembled the first rains of spring, an impression of relief that was unconfessed, and the shadow of a remorse that was soon to be lost in the joy of living.

Quite different was the end of Raoul Rivière. Stricken in the midst of a happiness that he felt sure of enjoying for a long time still, he brought to his departure no philosophy. He greeted his sufferings and the approach of death with cries of revolt. Until the supreme breath of a gasping agony, like that of a galloping horse that climbs a slope, he battled fearfully. Those frightful images were stamped in Annette's burning brain as though in wax. She remained haunted by them at night. In the darkness of her room, in bed, upon the verge of sleep or suddenly awakening, she revived the agony and the face of the dying man with such violence that she was the dying man himself: her eyes were *his* eyes, her breath was *his* breath; she no longer distinguished between them; in the eye-sockets she recognized the appeal of a drowning glance. She came close to destruction; but robust youth enjoys such elasticity! The more the cord is stretched, the further flies the arrow of life.

The blinding light of those maddening images was extinguished by its own excess, and night fell upon the memory. The features, the voice, the radiance of the vanished man, all had vanished: Annette, determined to exhaust the shadow that was within her, could find no further trace of it. Nothing but herself. She alone. . . . Alone. The Eve of the garden was awakening without the companion at her side,—the man whom she had always felt near her, without seeking to define him; the man who, unknown to her and as yet indistinctly, was assuming the shape of love. And suddenly the garden lost its security. Disquieting breaths from without had entered it; both the breath of death and the breath of life. Annette opened her eyes, as did the world's first men at night, with the apprehension of a thousand unknown dangers ambushed about her, with the instinct of imminent battle. Of a sudden the dormant energies gathered themselves together, and held themselves tensely ready. And her solitude was peopled by passionate forces.

Her equilibrium was destroyed. Her studies, her work, now meant nothing to her; the place that she had accorded them in her life now seemed a mockery. But the other part of her life, which sorrow had just touched, revealed itself to be of immeasurable extent. The shock of the injury had awakened all its fibres: around the wound, opened by the disappearance of the beloved companion, gathered all the forces of love, hidden and unknown; sucked in by the void that had been hollowed out, they came hastening from the distant depths of her being. Surprised by this invasion, Annette strove to evade its significance; she persisted in relating everything to the precise object of her grief: everything,—the sharp, burning stimulus of Nature, whose spring breezes bathed her in moisture; the vague and violent longing for happiness . . . lost or desired?—the arms outstretched towards the absent one; and the bounding

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