

# **THE OUTRAGE**

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The outrage by Annie Vivanti Chartres

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**ANNIE VIVANTI CHARTRES**

# **THE OUTRAGE**



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# THE OUTRAGE

## BOOK I

### CHAPTER I

CHÉRIE was ready first. She flung her striped bath-robe over her shoulders and picked up Amour who was wriggling and barking at her pink heels.

"*Au revoir dans l'eau,*" she said to little Mireille and to the German nursery governess, Frieda.

"Oh, Frieda, *vite, vite, dégrafez-moi,*" cried Mireille, backing towards the hard-faced young woman and indicating a jumble of knotted tapes hanging down behind her.

"Speak English, please, both. This is our English day," said Frieda, standing in her petticoat-bodice in front of the mirror and removing what the girls called her "Wurst" from the top of her head. In the glass she caught sight of Chérie making for the door and called her back sharply. "Mademoiselle Chérie, you go not in the street without your stockings and your hat."

"Nonsense, Frieda! In Westende every one goes

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to bathe like this," and Chérie waved a bare shapely limb and flicked her pink toes at Amour, who barked wildly at them.

"I do not care how every one goes. You go not," said Frieda Rothenstein, hanging her sleek brown Wurst carefully on the mirror-stand.

"Then what have we come here for?" sulked Chérie, dropping Amour and giving him a soft kick with her bare foot.

"We have come here," quoth Frieda, "not for marching our undressed legs about the streets, but for the enjoyment both of the summer-freshness and of the out-view." Whereupon Mireille gave a sudden shriek of laughter and Amour bounded round her and barked.

Chérie crossed the room to the chair on which her walking clothes had been hastily flung. "Won't sand-shoes do?"

"No. Sand-shoes *and* stockings," said Frieda. "And hat," she added, glancing down at the comely bent head with its cascade of waving red-brown locks.

Chérie hurriedly drew on her black stockings, glancing up occasionally to smile at Mireille; and nothing could be sweeter than those shining eyes seen through the veil of falling hair. Now she was ready, her flapping *bergère* hat crushed down on her careless curls, Amour hoisted under her arm again, and with a nod of commiseration to Mireille she ran down

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the narrow wooden staircase of Villa Esther, Madame Guillaume's *appartements meublés* and was down in the rue des Moulins with her smiling face to the sea.

The street was a short one, half of it not yet built over, leading from a new aeroplane-shed at the back to the wide asphalted promenade on the sea-front. Chérie met some other bathers—a couple of men striding along in their bathing suits, their bronzed limbs bare, a damp towel round their necks, their wet hair plastered to their cheeks. They barely glanced at the picturesque little figure in the brief red bathing-skirt and flapping hat, for all along the sands—from Nieuport, twenty minutes to the right, to Ostend half an hour to the left—there were hundreds of just such charming school-girl figures darting about in the sunlight, while all the fast and loose “daughters of joy” from Brussels, Namur, and Spa, added their more poignant note of provocativeness to the blue and gold beauty of the summer scene.

Chérie passed the bicycle shop and waved a friendly hand to Cyrille Wibon, who was kneeling before his racing Petrolette and washing its shining nose with the tenderness of a nurse and the pride of a father.

“Remember! the two bicycles at eleven, on the sands,” cried Chérie in Flemish, and Cyrille lifted a quick forefinger to his black hair, and nodded.



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Chérie ran on, crossed the wide promenade, and skipped down the shallow flight of steps leading to the sands, those vast sweeping sands of Westende that begin and end in the wide, wild dunes. She dropped Amour, who rolled over, righted himself, dug a few rapid holes with his hind paws in the sand and then trotted off to lead his own wicked dog's life with certain hated enemies of his—a supercilious leveret, a scatter-brained Irish terrier, and a certain mean and shivering black-and-tan, whose tastes and history would not bear investigation.

Chérie plunged through the quarter of a mile of dry, soft sand, into which her feet sank at every step, and as she reached the smoother surface that the outgoing tide left hard and level, she flung off her bathrobe and her hat, her sand-shoes and her stockings; then she ran out into the water.

Lithe and light she ran, skipping over the first shallow waves and on until the water lapped her knees and the red skirt bulged out all round her like a balloon—on she ran with little chilly gasps of delight, raising her white arms above her head as the water rose and encircled her with its cool, strong embrace. The sun cast a net of dancing diamonds on the blue satin sea, and the girl felt the joy of life bound within her like some wild, living thing. She joined her finger-tips and dived into the dancing waters; then she emerged, pushing her wet hair from

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her eyes with her wet hand. She swam on and on toward the azure horizon, and dreamed of thus swimming on for ever and losing herself in the blue beauty of the world.

An aeroplane passed above her with its angry whirr returning from Blankenberghe to Nicuport, and she turned on her back and floated, looking up at it and waving her small gleaming hand. She thought the plane dipped suddenly as if it would fall upon her, and she watched it, holding her breath for the pilot's safety till it was almost out of sight. Then she turned and trod water awhile and blinked at the distant shore for a sight of Mireille.

Yes, surely, there was the skimpy figure of Frieda, and beside it ran and hopped the still skimpier figure of Mireille, whose thin legs had only scampered through ten Aprils and whose treble voice cut the distance with the shrill note of exceeding youth.

"Chéreee! . . . Chéreee! . . . Come back. Come back and fetch me!"

So Chérie, with a sigh, turned and swam slowly landward.

Mireille came running out to meet her with little splashes and jumps and shrieks, while Frieda stopped behind in a few inches of water and went through a series of hygienic rites, first wetting her forehead, then her chest, then her forehead again, and finally sitting down solemnly in the water until she had

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counted a hundred. This concluded her bath, and she went home to dress.

When, an hour later, she came down to the sands again neatly clothed in her Reformkleid, with the Wurst reinstated high and dry on the top of her otherwise damp head, she saw her two charges lying flat and motionless in the sand, the broiling sunshine burning down on their upturned faces and closed eyes. They were pretending to be dead; and indeed, thought Frieda, as she saw them lying, so small and still on the immensity of the sands, they looked like drowned morsels of humanity tossed up by the sea.

Before Frieda could reach them, Cyrille, the bicycle teacher, passed her—the monkeyman, as the girls called him—pedalling along on one machine and guiding the other towards the two small recumbent figures. They jumped up when they heard him, and by the time Frieda reached the spot, Mireille was being hoisted on to a very rusty old machine, while Chérie, a slim, scarlet figure, with auburn locks afloat and white limbs gleaming, was skimming along in the distance on the smooth resilient sands.

"I do not approve," panted Frieda, running alongside of the swaying Mireille, while the monkey-man trotted behind and held the saddle,—“I do not approve of this bicycle-riding in bathing costume.”

“Oh, Frieda,” gasped Mireille, “do stop scolding, you make me wobble—” and with a sudden swerve