JOHN GALSWORTHY

TATTERDEMALION

John Galsworthy

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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PART I

OF WAR-TIME

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I

THE GREY ANGEL

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Her predilection for things French came from childish recollections of school-days in Paris, and a hasty removal thence by her father during the revolution of '48, of later travels as a little maiden, by diligence, to Pau and the then undiscovered Pyrenees, to a Montpellier and a Nice as yet unspoiled. Unto her seventy-eighth year, her French accent had remained unruffled, her soul in love with French gloves and dresses; and her face had the pale, unwrinkled, slightly aquiline perfection of the 'French marquise' type—it may, perhaps, be doubted whether any French marquise ever looked the part so perfectly.

How it came about that she had settled down in a southern French town, in the summer of 1914, only her roving spirit knew. She had been a widow ten years, which

she had passed in the quest of perfection; all her life she had been haunted by that instinct, half-smothered in ministering to her husband, children, and establishments in London and the country. Now, in loneliness, the intrinsic independence of her soul was able to assert itself, and from hotel to hotel she had wandered in England, Wales, Switzerland, France, till now she had found what seemingly arrested her. Was it the age of that oldest of Western cities, that little mother of Western civilisation, which captured her fancy? Or did a curious perversity turn her from more obvious abodes, or was she kept there by the charm of a certain church which she would enter every day to steep herself in mellow darkness, the scent of incense, the drone of incantations, and quiet communion with a God higher indeed than she had been brought up to, high-church though she had always been? She had a pretty little apartment, where for very little—the bulk of her small wealth was habitually at the service of others—she could manage with one maid and no "fuss." She had some "nice" French friends there, too. But more probably it was simply the war which kept her there, waiting, like so many other people, for it to be over before it seemed worth while to move and re-establish herself. The immensity and wickedness of this strange event held her, as it were, suspended, body and spirit, high up on the hill which had seen the ancient peoples, the Romans, Gauls, Saracens, and all, and still looked out towards the flat Camargue. Here in her three rooms, with a little kitchen, the maid Augustine, a parrot, and the Paris *Daily Mail*, she dwelt as it were marooned by a world event which seemed to stun her. Not

that she worried, exactly. The notion of defeat or of real danger to her country and to France never entered her head. She only grieved quietly over the dreadful things that were being done, and every now and then would glow with admiration at the beautiful way the King and Queen were behaving. It was no good to "fuss," and one must make the best of things, just as the "dear little Queen" was doing; for each Queen in turn, and she had seen three reign in her time, was always that to her. Her ancestors had been uprooted from their lands, their house burned, and her pedigree diverted, in the Stuart wars—a reverence for royalty was fastened in her blood.

Quite early in the business she had begun to knit, moving her slim fingers not too fast, gazing at the grey wool through glasses, specially rimless and invisible, perched on the bridge of her firm, well-shaped nose, and now and then speaking to her parrot. The bird could say, "Scratch a poll, Poll," already, and "Hullo!" those keys to the English language. The maid Augustine, having completed some small duty, would often come and stand, her head on one side, gazing down with a sort of inquiring compassion in her wise, young, clear-brown eyes. It seemed to her who was straight and sturdy as a young tree both wonderful and sad that *Madame* should be seventy-seven, and so frail—*Madame* who had no lines in her face and such beautiful grey hair; who had so strong a will-power, too, and knitted such soft comforters "*pour nos braves chers poilus*." And suddenly she would say: "*Madame n'est pas fatiguée?*" And *Madame* would answer: "No. Speak English, Augustine—Polly will pick up your French! Come here!" And, reaching up

a pale hand, she would set straight a stray fluff of the girl's dark-brown hair or improve the set of her fichu.

Those two got on extremely well, for though madame was—oh! but very particular, she was always "*très gentille et toujours grande dame*." And that love of form so deep in the French soul promoted the girl's admiration for one whom she could see would in no circumstances lose her dignity. Besides, *Madame* was full of dainty household devices, and could not bear waste; and these, though exacting, were qualities which appealed to Augustine. With her French passion for "the family" she used to wonder how in days like these *Madame* could endure to be far away from her son and daughter and the grandchildren, whose photographs hung on the walls; and the long letters her mistress was always writing in a beautiful, fine hand, beginning, "My darling Sybil," "My darling Reggie," and ending always "Your devoted mother," seemed to a warm and simple heart but meagre substitutes for flesh-and-blood realities. But as *Madame* would inform her—they were too busy doing things for the dear soldiers, and working for the war; they could not come to her—that would never do. And to go to them would give so much trouble, when the railways were so wanted for the troops; and she had their lovely letters, which she kept—as Augustine observed—every one in a lavender-scented sachet, and frequently took out to read. Another point of sympathy between those two was their passion for military music and seeing soldiers pass. Augustine's brother and father were at the front, and *Madame's* dead brother had been a soldier in the Crimean war—"long before you were born, Augustine, when the

French and English fought the Russians; I was in France then, too, a little girl, and we lived at Nice; it was so lovely, you can't think—the flowers! And my poor brother was so cold in the siege of Sebastopol." Somehow, that time and that war were more real to her than this.

In December, when the hospitals were already full, her French friends first took her to the one which they attended. She went in, her face very calm, with that curious inward composure which never deserted it, carrying in front of her with both hands a black silk bag, wherein she had concealed an astonishing collection of treasures for the poor men! A bottle of acidulated drops, packets of cigarettes, two of her own mufflers, a pocket set of drafts, some English riddles translated by herself into French (very curious), some ancient copies of an illustrated paper, boxes of chocolate, a ball of string to make "cat's cradles" (such an amusing game), her own packs of Patience cards, some photograph frames, post-cards of Arles, and—most singular—a kettle-holder. At the head of each bed she would sit down and rummage in the bag, speaking in her slow but quite good French, to explain the use of the acidulated drops, or to give a lesson in cat's cradles. And the *poilus* would listen with their polite, ironic patience, and be left smiling, and curiously fascinated, as if they had been visited by a creature from another world. She would move on to other beds, quite unconscious of the effect she had produced on them and of their remarks: "*Cette vieille dame, comme elle est bonne!*" or "*Espèce d'ange aux cheveux gris.*" "*L'ange anglaise aux cheveux gris*" became in fact her name within those walls. And the habit of filling that black silk bag and

going there to distribute its contents soon grew to be with her a ruling passion which neither weather nor her own aches and pains, not inconsiderable, must interfere with. The things she brought became more marvellous every week. But, however much she carried coals to Newcastle, or tobacco pouches to those who did not smoke, or homœopathic globules to such as crunched up the whole bottleful for the sake of the sugar, as soon as her back was turned, no one ever smiled now with anything but real pleasure at sight of her calm and truly sweet smile, and the scent of soap on her pale hands. "*Cher fils, je croyais que ceci vous donnerait un peu de plaisir. Voyez-vous comme c'est commode, n'est ce pas?*" Each newcomer to the wards was warned by his comrades that the English angel with the grey hair was to be taken without a smile, exactly as if she were his grandmother.

In the walk to the hospital Augustine would accompany her, carrying the bag and perhaps a large peasant's umbrella to cover them both, for the winter was hard and snowy, and carriages cost money, which must now be kept entirely for the almost daily replenishment of the bag and other calls of war. The girl, to her chagrin, was always left in a safe place, for it would never do to take her in and put fancies into her head, and perhaps excite the dear soldiers with a view of anything so taking. And when the visit was over they would set forth home, walking very slowly in the high, narrow streets, Augustine pouting a little and shooting swift glances at anything in uniform, and *Madame* making firm her lips against a fatigue which sometimes almost overcame her before she could get home and up the stairs.

And the parrot would greet them indiscreetly with new phrases—"Keep smiling!" and "Kiss Augustine!" which he sometimes varied with "Kiss a poll, Poll!" or "Scratch Augustine!" to *Madame's* regret. Tea would revive her somewhat, and then she would knit, for as time went on and the war seemed to get farther and farther from that end which, in common with so many, she had expected before now, it seemed dreadful not to be always doing something to help the poor dear soldiers; and for dinner, to Augustine's horror, she now had nothing but a little soup, or an egg beaten up with milk and brandy. It saved such a lot of time and expense—she was sure people ate too much; and afterwards she would read the *Daily Mail*, often putting it down to sigh, and press her lips together, and think, "One must look on the bright side of things," and wonder a little where it was. And Augustine, finishing her work in the tiny kitchen, would sigh too, and think of red trousers and peaked caps, not yet out of date in that Southern region, and of her own heart saying "Kiss Augustine!" and she would peer out between the shutters at the stars sparkling over the Camargue, or look down where the ground fell away beyond an old, old wall, and nobody walked in the winter night, and muse on her nineteenth birthday coming, and sigh with the thought that she would be old before any one had loved her; and of how *Madame* was looking "*très fatiguée*."

Indeed, Madame was not merely *looking "très fatiguée"* in these days. The world's vitality and her own were at sad January ebb. But to think of oneself was quite impossible, of course; it would be all right presently, and one must not

fuss, or mention in one's letters to the dear children that one felt at all poorly. As for a doctor—that would be sinful waste, and besides, what use were they except to tell you what you knew? So she was terribly vexed when Augustine found her in a faint one morning, and she found Augustine in tears, with her hair all over her face. She rated the girl soundly, but feebly, for making such a fuss over "a little thing like that," and with extremely trembling fingers pushed the brown hair back and told her to wash her face, while the parrot said reflectively: "Scratch a poll—Hullo!" The girl who had seen her own grandmother die not long before, and remembered how "*fatiguée*" she had been during her last days, was really frightened. Coming back after she had washed her face, she found her mistress writing on a number of little envelopes the same words: "*En bonne Amitié.*" She looked up at the girl standing so ominously idle, and said:

"Take this hundred-franc note, Augustine, and go and get it changed into single francs—the ironmonger will do it if you say it's for me. I am going to take a rest. I sha'n't buy anything for the bag for a whole week. I shall just take francs instead."

"Oh, *Madame!* You must not go out: *vous êtes trop fatiguée*."

"Nonsense! How do you suppose our dear little Queen in England would get on with all she has to do, if she were to give in like that? We must none of us give up in these days. Help me to put on my things; I am going to church, and then I shall take a long rest before we go to the hospital."

"Oh, *Madame!* Must you go to church? It is not your kind of church. You do not pray there, do you?"

"Of course I pray there. I am very fond of the dear old church. God is in every church, Augustine; you ought to know that at your age."

"But *Madame* has her own religion?"

"Now, don't be silly. What does that matter? Help me into my cloth coat—not the fur—it's too heavy—and then go and get that money changed."

"But *Madame* should see a doctor. If *Madame* faints again I shall die with fright. *Madame* has no colour—but no colour at all; it must be that there is something wrong."

Madame rose, and taking the girl's ear between thumb and finger pinched it gently.

"You are a very silly girl. What would our poor soldiers do if all the nurses were like you?"

Reaching the church she sat down gladly, turning her face up towards her favourite picture, a Virgin standing with her Baby in her arms. It was only faintly coloured now; but there were those who said that an Arlésienne must have sat for it. Why it pleased her so she never quite knew, unless it were by its cool, unrestored devotion, by the faint smiling in the eyes. Religion with her was a strange yet very real thing. Conscious that she was not clever, she never even began to try and understand what she believed. Probably she believed nothing more than that if she tried to be good she would go to God—whatever and wherever God might be—some day when she was too tired to live any more; and rarely indeed did she forget to try to be good. As she sat there she thought, or perhaps prayed, whichever it should

be called: "Let me forget that I have a body, and remember all the poor soldiers who have them."

It struck cold that morning in the church—the wind was bitter from the northeast; some poor women in black were kneeling, and four candles burned in the gloom of a side aisle—thin, steady little spires of gold. There was no sound at all. A smile came on her lips. She was forgetting that she had a body, and remembering all those young faces in the wards, the faces too of her own children far away, the faces of all she loved. They were real and she was not—she was nothing but the devotion she felt for them; yes, for all the poor souls on land and sea, fighting and working and dying. Her lips moved; she was saying below her breath, "I love them all"; then, feeling a shiver run down her spine, she compressed those lips and closed her eyes, letting her mind alone murmur her chosen prayer: "O God, who makes the birds sing and the stars shine, and gives us little children, strengthen my heart so that I may forget my own aches and wants and think of those of other people."

On reaching home again she took gelseminum, her favourite remedy against that shivering, which, however hard she tried to forget her own body, would keep coming; then, covering herself with her fur coat, she lay down, closing her eyes. She was seemingly asleep, so that Augustine, returning with the hundred single francs, placed them noiselessly beside the little pile of envelopes, and after looking at the white, motionless face of her mistress and shaking her own bonny head, withdrew. When she had gone, two tears came out of those closed eyes and clung on the pale cheeks below. The seeming sleeper was thinking of

her children, away over there in England, her children and their children. Almost unbearably she was longing for a sight of them, not seen for so long now, recalling each face, each voice, each different way they had of saying, "Mother darling," or "Granny, look what I've got!" and thinking that if only the war would end how she would pack at once and go to them, that is, if they would not come to her for a nice long holiday in this beautiful place. She thought of spring, too, and how lovely it would be to see the trees come out again, and almond blossom against a blue sky. The war seemed so long, and winter too. But she must not complain; others had much greater sorrows than she—the poor widowed women kneeling in the church; the poor boys freezing in the trenches. God in his great mercy could not allow it to last much longer. It would not be like Him! Though she felt that it would be impossible to eat, she meant to force herself to make a good lunch so as to be able to go down as usual, and give her little presents. They would miss them so if she didn't. Her eyes, opening, rested almost gloatingly on the piles of francs and envelopes. And she began to think how she could reduce still further her personal expenditure. It was so dreadful to spend anything on oneself—an old woman like her. Doctor, indeed! If Augustine fussed any more she would send her away and do for herself! And the parrot, leaving his cage, which he could always do, perched just behind her and said: "Hullo! Kiss me, too!"

That afternoon in the wards every one noticed what a beautiful colour she had. "*L'ange anglaise aux cheveux gris*" had never been more popular. One *poilu*, holding up his

envelope, remarked to his neighbour: "*Elle verse des gouttes d'ciel, notr' 'tite gran'mè*." To them, grateful even for those mysterious joys "cat's cradles," francs were the true drops from heaven.

She had not meant to give them all to-day, but it seemed dreadful, when she saw how pleased they were, to leave any out, and so the whole ninety-seven had their franc each. The three over would buy Augustine a little brooch to make up to the silly child for her fright in the morning. The buying of this brooch took a long time at the jeweller's in the *rue des Romains*, and she had only just fixed on an amethyst before feeling deadly ill with a dreadful pain through her lungs. She went out with her tiny package quickly, not wanting any fuss, and began to mount towards home. There were only three hundred yards to go, and with each step she said to herself: "Nonsense! What would the Queen think of you! Remember the poor soldiers with only one leg! You have got both your legs! And the poor men who walk from the battlefield with bullets through the lungs. What is your pain to theirs! Nonsense!" But the pain, like none she had ever felt—a pain which seemed to have sharp double edges like a knife—kept passing through and through her, till her legs had no strength at all, and seemed to move simply because her will said: "If you don't, I'll leave you behind. So there!" She felt as if perspiration were flowing down, yet her face was as dry as a dead leaf when she put up her hand to it. Her brain stammered; seemed to fly loose; came to sudden standstills. Her eyes searched painfully each grey-shuttered window for her own house, though she knew quite well that she had not reached it yet. From sheer

pain she stood still, a wry little smile on her lips, thinking how poor Polly would say: "Keep smiling!" Then she moved on, holding out her hand, whether because she thought God would put his into it or only to pull on some imaginary rope to help her. So, foot by foot, she crept till she reached her door. A most peculiar floating sensation had come over her. The pain ceased, and as if she had passed through no doors, mounted no stairs—she was up in her room, lying on her sofa, with strange images about her, painfully conscious that she was not in proper control of her thoughts, and that Augustine must be thinking her ridiculous. Making a great effort, she said:

"I forbid you to send for a doctor, Augustine. I shall be all right in a day or two, if I eat plenty of francs. And you must put on this little brooch—I bought it for you from an angel in the street. Put my fur coat on Polly—he's shivering; dry your mouth, there's a good girl. Tell my son he mustn't think of leaving the poor War Office; I shall come and see him after the war. It will be over to-morrow, and then we will all go and have tea together in a wood. Granny will come to you, my darlings."

And when the terrified girl had rushed out she thought: "There, now she's gone to get God; and I mustn't disturb Him with all He has to see to. I shall get up and do for myself." When they came back with the doctor they found her half-dressed, trying to feed a perch in the empty cage with a spoon, and saying: "Kiss Granny, Polly. God is coming; kiss Granny!" while the parrot sat away over on the mantelpiece, with his head on one side, deeply interested.

When she had been properly undressed and made to lie down on the sofa, for she insisted so that she would not go to bed that they dared not oppose her, the doctor made his diagnosis. It was double pneumonia, of that sudden sort which declares for life or death in forty-eight hours. At her age a desperate case. Her children must be wired to at once. She had sunk back, seemingly unconscious; and Augustine, approaching the drawer where she knew the letters were kept, slipped out the lavender sachet and gave it to the doctor. When he had left the room to extract the addresses and send those telegrams, the girl sat down by the foot of the couch, leaning her elbows on her knees and her face on her hands, staring at that motionless form, while the tears streamed down her broad cheeks. For many minutes neither of them stirred, and the only sound was the restless stropping of the parrot's beak against a wire of his cage. Then her mistress's lips moved, and the girl bent forward. A whispering came forth, caught and suspended by breathless pausing:

"Mind, Augustine—no one is to tell my children—I can't have them disturbed—over a little thing—like this—and in my purse you'll find another—hundred-franc note. I shall want some more francs for the day after to-morrow. Be a good girl and don't fuss, and kiss poor Polly, and mind—I won't have a doctor—taking him away from his work. Give me my gelseminum and my prayer-book. And go to bed just as usual—we must all—keep smiling—like the dear soldiers—" The whispering ceased, then began again at once in rapid delirious incoherence. And the girl sat trembling, covering now her ears from those uncanny sounds, now her

eyes from the flush and the twitching of that face, usually so pale and still. She could not follow—with her little English—the swerving, intricate flights of that old spirit mazed by fever—the memories released, the longings disclosed, the half-uttered prayers, the curious little half-conscious efforts to regain form and dignity. She could only pray to the Virgin. When relieved by the daughter of *Madame's* French friend, who spoke good English, she murmured desperately: "*Oh! mademoiselle, madame est très fatiguée—la pauvre tête—faut-il enlever les cheveux? Elle fait ça toujours pour elle-même.*" For, to the girl, with her reverence for the fastidious dignity which never left her mistress, it seemed sacrilege to divest her of her crown of fine grey hair. Yet, when it was done and the old face crowned only by the thin white hair of nature, that dignity was still there surmounting the wandering talk and the moaning from her parched lips, which every now and then smiled and pouted in a kiss, as if remembering the maxims of the parrot. So the night passed, with all that could be done for her, whose most collected phrase, frequently uttered in the doctor's face, was: "Mind, Augustine, I won't have a doctor—I can manage for myself quite well." Once for a few minutes her spirit seemed to recover its coherence, and she was heard to whisper: "God has given me this so that I may know what the poor soldiers suffer. Oh! they've forgotten to cover Polly's cage." But high fever soon passes from the very old; and early morning brought a deathlike exhaustion, with utter silence, save for the licking of the flames at the olive-wood logs, and the sound as they slipped or settled down, calcined. The firelight crept fantastically about the walls covered with tapestry of

French-grey silk, crept round the screen-head of the couch, and betrayed the ivory pallor of that mask-like face, which covered now such tenuous threads of life. Augustine, who had come on guard when the fever died away, sat in the armchair before those flames, trying hard to watch, but dropping off into the healthy sleep of youth. And out in the clear, hard shivering Southern cold, the old clocks chimed the hours into the winter dark, where, remote from man's restless spirit, the old town brooded above plain and river under the morning stars. And the girl dreamed—dreamed of a sweetheart under the acacias by her home, of his pinning their white flowers into her hair, till she woke with a little laugh. Light was already coming through the shutter chinks, the fire was but red embers and white ash. She gathered it stealthily together, put on fresh logs, and stole over to the couch. Oh! how white! how still! Was her mistress dead? The icy clutch of that thought jerked her hands up to her full breast, and a cry mounted in her throat. The eyes opened. The white lips parted, as if to smile; a voice whispered: "Now, don't be silly!" The girl's cry changed into a little sob, and bending down she put her lips to the ringed hand that lay outside the quilt. The hand moved faintly as if responding, the voice whispered: "The emerald ring is for you, Augustine. Is it morning? Uncover Polly's cage, and open his door."

Madame spoke no more that morning. A telegram had come. Her son and daughter would arrive next morning early. They waited for a moment of consciousness to tell her; but the day went by, and in spite of oxygen and brandy it did not come. She was sinking fast; her only movements

were a tiny compression now and then of the lips, a half-opening of the eyes, and once a smile when the parrot spoke. The rally came at eight o'clock. *Mademoiselle* was sitting by the couch when the voice came fairly strong: "Give my love to my dear soldiers, and take them their francs out of my purse, please. Augustine, take care of Polly. I want to see if the emerald ring fits you. Take it off, please"; and, when it had been put on the little finger of the sobbing girl: "There, you see, it does. That's very nice. Your sweetheart will like that when you have one. What do you say, *Mademoiselle*? My son and daughter coming? All that way?" The lips smiled a moment, and then tears forced their way into her eyes. "My darlings! How good of them! Oh! what a cold journey they'll have! Get my room ready, Augustine, with a good fire! What are you crying for? Remember what Polly says: 'Keep smiling!' Think how bad it is for the poor soldiers if we women go crying! The Queen never cries, and she has ever so much to make her!"

No one could tell whether she knew that she was dying, except perhaps for those words, "Take care of Polly," and the gift of the ring.

She did not even seem anxious as to whether she would live to see her children. Her smile moved *Mademoiselle* to whisper to Augustine: "*Elle a la sourire divine*."

"*Ah! mademoiselle, comme elle est brave, la pauvre dame! C'est qu'elle pense toujours aux autres.*" And the girl's tears dropped on the emerald ring.

Night fell—the long night; would she wake again? Both watched with her, ready at the faintest movement to administer oxygen and brandy. She was still breathing, but

very faintly, when at six o'clock they heard the express come in, and presently the carriage stop before the house. *Mademoiselle* stole down to let them in.

Still in their travelling coats her son and daughter knelt down beside the couch, watching in the dim candle-light for a sign and cherishing her cold hands. Daylight came; they put the shutters back and blew out the candles. Augustine, huddled in the far corner, cried gently to herself. *Mademoiselle* had withdrawn. But the two still knelt, tears running down their cheeks. The face of their mother was so transparent, so exhausted; the least little twitching of just-opened lips showed that she breathed. A tiny sigh escaped; her eyelids fluttered. The son, leaning forward, said:

"Sweetheart, we're here."

The eyes opened then; something more than a simple human spirit seemed to look through—it gazed for a long, long minute; then the lips parted. They bent to catch the sound.

"My darlings—don't cry; smile!" And the eyes closed again. On her face a smile so touching that it rent the heart flickered and went out. Breath had ceased to pass the faded lips.

In the long silence the French girl's helpless sobbing rose; the parrot stirred uneasily in his still-covered cage. And the son and daughter knelt, pressing their faces hard against the couch.

II

DEFEAT

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She had been standing there on the pavement a quarter of an hour or so after her shilling's worth of concert. Women of her profession are not supposed to have redeeming points, especially when—like May Belinski, as she now preferred to dub herself—they are German; but this woman certainly had music in her soul. She often gave herself these "music baths" when the Promenade Concerts were on, and had just spent half her total wealth in listening to some Mozart and a Beethoven symphony.

She was feeling almost elated, full of divine sound, and of the wonderful summer moonlight which was filling the whole dark town. Women "of a certain type" have, at all events, emotions—and what a comfort that is, even to themselves! To stand just there had become rather a habit of hers. One could seem to be waiting for somebody coming out of the concert, not yet over—which, of course, was precisely what she *was* doing. One need not forever be stealthily glancing and perpetually moving on in that peculiar way, which, while it satisfied the police and Mrs. Grundy, must not quite deceive others as to her business in life. She had only "been at it" long enough to have acquired a nervous dread of almost everything—not long enough to have passed through that dread to callousness. Some