MARY JOHNSTON

HAGAR

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CHAPTER I
THE PACKET-BOAT

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"*Low Braidge!*"

The people on deck bent over, some until heads touched knees, others, more exactly calculating, just sufficiently to clear the beams. The canal-boat passed beneath the bridge, and all straightened themselves on their camp-stools. The gentlemen who were smoking put their cigars again between their lips. The two or three ladies resumed book or knitting. The sun was low, and the sycamores and willows fringing the banks cast long shadows across the canal. The northern bank was not so clothed with foliage, and one saw an expanse of bottom land, meadows and cornfields, and beyond, low mountains, purple in the evening light. The boat slipped from a stripe of gold into a stripe of shadow, and from a stripe of shadow into a stripe of gold. The negro and the mule on the towpath were now but a bit of dusk in motion, and now were lit and, so to speak, powdered with gold-dust. Now the rope between boat and towpath showed an arm-thick golden serpent, and now it did not show at all. Now a little cloud of gnats and flies, accompanying the boat, shone in burnished armour and now they put on a mantle of shade.

A dark little girl, of twelve years, dark and thin, sitting aft on the deck floor, her long, white-stockinged legs folded decorously under her, her blue gingham skirt spread out, and her Leghorn hat upon her knees, appealed to one of the reading ladies. "Aunt Serena, what is 'evolution'?"

Miss Serena Ashendyne laid down her book. "'Evolution,'" she said blankly, "'what is evolution?'"

"I heard grandfather say it just now. He said, 'That man Darwin and his evolution'—"

"Oh!" said Miss Serena. "He meant a very wicked and irreligious Englishman who wrote a dreadful book."

"Was it named 'Evolution'?"

"No. I forget just what it is called. 'Beginning'—No! 'Origin of Species.' That was it."

"Have we got it in the library at Gilead Balm?"

"Heavens! No!"

"Why?"

"Your grandfather wouldn't let it come into the house. No lady would read it."

"Oh!"

Miss Serena returned to her novel. She sat very elegantly on the camp-stool, a graceful, long-lined, drooping form in a greenish-grey delaine picked out with tiny daisies. It was made polonaise. Miss Serena, alone of the people at Gilead Balm, kept up with the fashions.

At the other end of the long, narrow deck a knot of country gentlemen were telling war stories. All had fought in the war—the war that had been over now for twenty years and more. There were an empty sleeve and a wooden leg in the group and other marks of bullet and sabre. They told good stories, the country gentlemen, and they indulged in mellow laughter. Blue rings of tobacco-smoke rose and mingled and made a haze about that end of the boat.

"How the gentlemen are enjoying themselves!" said placidly one of the knitting ladies.

The dark little girl continued to ponder the omission from the library. "Aunt Serena—"

"Yes, Hagar."

"Is it like 'Tom Jones'?"

"'Tom Jones'! What do you know about 'Tom Jones'?"

"Grandfather was reading it one day and laughing, and after he had done with it I got it down from the top shelf and asked him if I might read it, and he said, 'No, certainly not! it isn't a book for ladies.'"

"Your grandfather was quite right. You read entirely too much anyway. Dr. Bude told your mother so."

The little girl turned large, alarmed eyes upon her. "I don't read half as much as I used to. I don't read except just a little time in the morning and evening and after supper. It would *kill* me if I couldn't read—"

"Well, well," said Miss Serena, "I suppose we shall continue to spoil you!"

She said it in a very sweet voice, and she patted the child's arm and then she went back to "The Wooing O't." She was fond of reading novels herself, though she liked better to do macramé work and to paint porcelain placques.

The packet-boat glided on. It was almost the last packet-boat in the state and upon almost its last journey. Presently there would go away forever the long, musical winding of the packet-boat horn. It would never echo any more among the purple hills, but the locomotive would shriek here as it shrieked elsewhere. Beyond the willows and sycamores, across the river whose reaches were seen at intervals, gangs of convicts with keepers and guards and overseers were at work upon the railroad.

The boat passing through a lock, the dark little girl stared, fascinated, at one of these convicts, a "trusty," a young white man who was there at the lock-keeper's on some errand and who now stood speaking to the stout old man on the coping of masonry. As the water in the lock fell and the boat was steadily lowered and the stone walls on either hand grew higher and higher, the figure of the convict came to stand far above all on deck. Dressed hideously, in broad stripes of black and white, it stood against the calm evening sky, with a sense of something withdrawn and yet gigantic. The face was only once turned toward the boat with its freight of people who dressed as they pleased. It was not at all a bad face, and it was boyishly young. The boat slipped from the lock and went on down the canal, between green banks. The negro on the towpath was singing and his rich voice floated across—

"For everywhere I went ter pray,
I met all hell right on my way."

The country gentlemen were laughing again, wrapped in the blue and fragrant smoke. The captain of the packet-boat came up the companionway and passed from group to group like a benevolent patriarch. Down below, supper was cooking; one smelled the coffee. The sun was slipping lower, in the green bottoms the frogs were choiring. Standing in the prow of the boat a negro winded the long packet-boat horn. It echoed and echoed from the purple hills.

The dark little girl was still staring at the dwindling lock. The black-and-white figure, striped like a zebra, was there yet, though it had come down out of the sky and had now

only the green of the country about and behind it. It grew smaller and smaller until it was no larger than a black-and-white woodpecker—it was gone.

She appealed again to Miss Serena. "Aunt Serena, what do you suppose he did?"

Miss Serena, who prided herself upon her patience, put down her book for the tenth time. "Of whom are you speaking, Hagar?"

"That man back there—the convict."

"I didn't notice him. But if he is a convict, he probably did something very wicked."

Hagar sighed. "I don't think *anybody* ought to be made to dress like that. It—it smudged my soul just to look at it."

"Convicts," said Miss Serena, "are not usually people of fine feelings. And you ought to take warning by him never to do anything wicked."

A silence while the trees and the flowering blackberry bushes went by; then, "Aunt Serena—"

"Yes?"

"The woman over there with the baby—she says her husband got hurt in an accident—and she's got to get to him—and she hasn't got any money. The stout man gave her something, and I *think* the captain wouldn't let her pay. Can't I—wouldn't you—can't I—give her just a little?"

"The trouble is," said Miss Serena, "that you never know whether or not those people are telling the truth. And we aren't rich, as you know, Hagar. But if you want to, you can go ask your grandfather if he will give you something to give."

The dark little girl undoubled her white-stockinged legs, got up, smoothed down her blue gingham dress, and went forward until the tobacco-smoke wrapped her in a fragrant fog. Out of it came, genially, the Colonel's voice, rich as old madeira, shot like shot silk with curious electric tensions and strains and agreements, a voice at once mellifluous and capable of revealments demanding other adjectives, a voice that was the Colonel's and spoke the Colonel from head to heel. It went with his beauty, intact yet at fifty-eight, with the greying amber of his hair, mustache, and imperial; with his eyes, not large but finely shaped and coloured; with his slightly aquiline nose; with the height and easy swing of his body that was neither too spare nor too full. It went with him from head to foot, and, though it was certainly not a loud voice nor a too-much-used one, it quite usually dominated whatever group for the moment enclosed the Colonel. He was speaking now in a kind of energetic, golden drawl. "So he came up to me and said, 'Dash it, Ashendyne! if gentlemen can't be allowed in this degenerate age to rule their own households and arrange their own duels—'" He became aware of the child standing by him, and put out a well-formed, nervous hand. "Yes, Gipsy? What is it you want now?"

Hagar explained sedately.

"Her husband hurt and can't get to him to nurse him?" said the Colonel. "Well, well! That's pretty bad! I suppose we must take up a collection. Pass the hat, Gipsy!"

Hagar went to each of the country gentlemen, not with the suggested hat, but with her small palm held out, cupped. One by one they dropped into it quarter or dime,

and each, as his coin tinkled down, had for the collector of bounty a drawling, caressing, humorous word. She thanked each gentleman as his bit of silver touched her hand and thanked with a sedate little manner of perfection. Manners at Gilead Balm were notoriously of a perfection.

Hagar took the money to the woman with the baby and gave it to her shyly, with a red spot in each cheek. She was careful to explain, when the woman began to stammer thanks, that it was from her grandfather and the other gentlemen and that they were anxious to help. She was a very honest little girl, with an honest wish to place credit where it belonged.

Back beside Miss Serena she sat and studied the moving green banks. The sun was almost down; there were wonderful golden clouds above the mountains. Willow and sycamore, on the river side of the canal, fell away. Across an emerald, marshy strip, you saw the bright, larger stream, mirror for the bright sky, and across it in turn you saw limestone cliffs topped with shaggy woods, and you heard the sound of picks against rock and saw another band of convicts, white and black, making the railroad. The packet-boat horn was blown again,—long, musical, somewhat mournfully echoing. The negro on the towpath, riding sideways on his mule, was singing still.

"Aunt Serena—"

"Yes, Hagar."

"Why is it that women don't have any money?"

Miss Serena closed her book. She glanced at the fields and the sky-line. "We shall be at Gilead Balm in ten minutes.

—You ask too many questions, Hagar! It is a very bad habit to be always interrogating. It is quite distinctly unladylike."

CHAPTER II
GILEAD BALM

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At the Gilead Balm landing waited Captain Bob with a negro man to carry up to the house the Colonel's portmanteau and Miss Serena's small leather trunk. The packet-boat came in sight, white and slow as a deliberate swan, drew reflectively down the shining reach of water, and sidled to the landing. The Colonel shook hands with all the country gentlemen and bowed to the ladies, and the country gentlemen bowed to Miss Serena, who in turn bent her head and smiled, and the captain said good-bye, and the Colonel gave the attendant darky a quarter, and the woman with the baby came to that side of the boat and held for a moment the hand of the dark little girl, and then the gangplank was placed and the three Ashendynes passed over to the Colonel's land. The horn blew again, long, melodious; the negro on the towpath said, "Get up!" to the mule. Amid a waving of hands and a chorus of slow, agreeable voices the packet-boat glided from the landing and proceeded down the pink water between the willows and sycamores.

Captain Bob, with his hound Luna at his heels, greeted the returning members of the family: "Well, Serena, did you have a pleasant visit? Hey, Gipsy, you've grown a week! Well, Colonel?"

The Colonel shook hands with his brother. "Very pleasant time, Bob! Good old-time people, too good for this damned new-fangled world! But—" he breathed deep. "I am glad to

get home. I am always glad to get home. Well? Everything all right?"

"Right as a trivet! The Bishop's here, and Mrs. LeGrand. Came on the stage yesterday."

"That's good news," said the Colonel. "The Bishop's always welcome, and Mrs. LeGrand is most welcome."

The four began to walk toward the house, half a mile away, just visible among great trees. The dark little girl walked beside the hound, but the hound kept her nose in Captain Bob's palm. She was fond of Hagar, but Captain Bob was her god. As for Captain Bob himself, he walked like a curious, unfinished, somewhat flawed and shortened suggestion of his brother. He was shorter than the Colonel and broader; hair, nose, eyes, mouth were nothing like so fine; carriage and port were quite different; he lacked the *cachet*, he lacked the *grand air*. For all that, the fact that they were brothers was evident enough. Captain Bob loved dogs and hunting, and read the county newspaper and the sporting almanac. He was not complex. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred he acted from instinct and habit, and the puzzling hundredth time he beat about for tradition and precedent. He was good-natured and spendthrift, with brains enough for not too distant purposes. Emotionally, he was strongest in family affection. "Missed you all!" he now observed cheerfully. "Gilead Balm's been like a graveyard."

"How is mother?" asked Miss Serena. She was picking her way delicately through the green lane, between the evening primroses, the grey-green delaine held just right. "She wrote me that she burned her hand trying the strawberry preserves."

"It's all right now. Never saw Old Miss looking better!"

The dark little girl turned her dark eyes on Captain Bob. "How is my mother?"

"Maria? Well, I should say that she was all right, too. I haven't heard her complain."

"Gad! I wish she would complain," ejaculated the Colonel. "Then one could tell her there was nothing to complain about. I hate these women who go through life with a smile on their lips and an indictment in their eyes—when there's only the usual up and down of living to indict. I had rather they would whine—though I hate them to whine, too. But women are all cowards. No woman knows how to take the world."

The dark little girl, who had been walking between the Colonel and Captain Bob, began to tremble. "Whoever else's a coward, my mother's not—"

"I don't think, father, you ought—"

Captain Bob was stronger yet. He was fond of Gipsy, and he thought that sometimes the family bore too hardly on Maria. Now and then he did a small bit of cloudy thinking, and when he did it he always brought forth the result with a certain curious clearing of the throat and nodding of the head, as though the birth of an idea was attended with considerable physical strain. "No, Colonel," now he said, "you oughtn't! Damn it, where'd we be but for women anyhow? As for Maria—I think you're too hard on Maria. The chief trouble with Maria is that she isn't herself an Ashendyne. Of course, she can't help that, but I think it is a pity. Always did think that men ought to marry at least fifth or sixth cousins. Bring women in without blood and

traditions of people they've got to live with—of course, there's trouble adapting. Seen it a score of times. Maria's just like the rest when they're not cousins. Ought somehow to be cousins."

"Bob, you are a perfect fool," remarked the Colonel.

He walked on, between the primroses, his hands behind him, tall and easy in his black, wide-skirted coat and his soft black hat. The earth was in shadow, but the sky glowed carnation. Against it stood out the long, low red-brick house of Gilead Balm. At either gable end rose pyramidal cedars, high and dark against the vivid sky. In the lane there was the smell of dewy grass, and on either hand, back from the vine-draped rail fences, rolled the violet fields. Somewhere in the distance sounded the tinkling of cow bells. The ardent sky began to pale; the swallows were circling above the chimneys of Gilead Balm, and now the silver Venus came out clear.

The little girl named Hagar lagged a little going up the low hill on which the house stood. She was growing fast, and all journeys were exciting, and she was taking iron because she wasn't very strong, and she had had a week of change and had been thinking hard and was tired. She wanted to see her mother, and indeed she wanted to see all at Gilead Balm, for, unlike her mother, she loved Gilead Balm, but going up the hill she lagged a little. Partly it was to look at the star and to listen to the distant bells. She was not aware that she observed that which we call Nature with a deep passion and curiosity, that beauty was the breath of her nostrils, and that she hungered and thirsted after the righteousness of knowledge. She only came slowly, after

many years, into that much knowledge of herself. To-day she was but an undeveloped child, her mind a nebula just beginning to spiral. In conversation she would have applied the word "pretty" indiscriminately to the flushed sky, the star, the wheeling swallows, the yellow primroses. But within, already, the primroses struck one note, and the wheeling swallows another, and the sky another, and the star another, and, combined, they made a chord that was like no other chord. Already her moments were distinguished, and each time she saw Gilead Balm she saw, and dimly knew that she saw, a different Gilead Balm.

She climbed the hill a little stumblingly, a dark, thin child with braided, dusky hair. She was so tired that things went into a kind of mist—the house and the packet-boat and the lock and the convict and the piping frogs and the cat-tails in a marsh and the word "evolution."... And then, up on the low hilltop, Dilsey and Plutus lit the lamps, and the house had a row of topaz eyes;—and here was the cedar at the little gate, and the smell of box—box smell was always of a very especial character, dark in hue, cool in temperature, and quite unfathomably old. The four passed through the house gate and went up the winding path between the box and the old, old blush roses—and here was the old house dog Roger fawning on the Colonel—and the topaz eyes were growing bigger, bigger....

"I am glad to get home," said Miss Serena, in front. "It's curious how, every time you go from home, something happens to cure you of a roving disposition."

Captain Bob laughed. "Never knew you had a roving disposition, Serena! Luna here, now,—Luna's got a roving

disposition—haven't you, old girl?"

"Luna," replied Miss Serena with some asperity, "Luna makes no effort to alter her disposition. I do. Everybody's got tendencies and notions that it is their bounden duty to suppress. If they don't, it leads to all kind of changes and upheavals.—And that is what I criticize in Maria. She makes no effort, either. It's most unfortunate."

The Colonel, in front of them all, moved on with a fine serenity. He had taken off his hat, and in the yet warm glow the grey-amber of his hair seemed fairly luminous. As he walked he looked appreciatively up at the evening star. He read poetry with a fine, discriminating, masculine taste, and now, with a gesture toward the star, he repeated a line of Byron. Maria and her idiosyncrasies troubled him only when they stood actually athwart his path; certainly he had never brooded upon them, nor turned them over in his hand and looked at them. She was his son's wife—more, he was inclined to think, the pity! She was, therefore, Ashendyne, and she was housed at Gilead Balm. He was inclined to be fond of the child Hagar. As for his son—the Colonel, in his cooler moments, supposed, damn it! that he and Medway were too much alike to get on together. At any rate, whatever the reason, they did not get on together. Gilead Balm had not seen the younger Ashendyne for some years. He was in Europe, whence he wrote, at very long intervals, an amiable traveller's letter. Neither had he and Maria gotten on well together.

The house grew large, filling all the foreground. The topaz eyes changed to a wide, soft, diffused light, pouring from windows and the open hall door. In it now appeared the

figures of the elder Mrs. Ashendyne, of the Bishop, and Mrs. LeGrand, coming out upon the porch to welcome the travellers.

Hagar took her grandmother's kiss and Mrs. LeGrand's kiss and the Bishop's kiss, and then, after a few moments of standing still in the hall while the agreeable, southern voices rose and fell, she stole away, went up the shallow, worn stairway, turned to the left, and opened the door of her mother's room. She opened it softly. "Uncle Plutus says you've got a headache."

Maria's voice came from the sofa in the window. "Yes, I have. Shut the door softly, and don't let us have any light. But I don't mind your sitting by me."

The couch was deep and heaped with pillows. Maria's slight, small form was drawn up in a corner, her head high, her hands twisted and locked about her knees. She wore a soft white wrapper, tied beneath her breast with a purple ribbon. She had beautiful hair. Thick and long and dusky, it was now loosened and spread until it made a covering for the pillows. Out from its waves looked her small face, still and exhausted. The headache, after having lasted all day, was going away now at twilight. She just turned her dark eyes upon her daughter. "I don't mind your lying down beside me," she said. "There's room. Only don't jar my head —" Hagar lay carefully down upon the couch, her head in the hollow of her mother's arm. "Did you have a good time?"

"Yes.... Pretty good."

"What did you do?"

"There was another little girl named Sylvie. We played in the hayloft, and we made willow baskets, and we cut paper

dolls out of a 'Godey's Lady's Book.' I named mine Lucy Ashton and Diana Vernon and Rebecca, and she didn't know any good names, so I named hers for her. We named them Rosalind and Cordelia and Vashti. Then there was a lady who played backgammon with me, and I read two books."

"What were they?"

"One was 'Gulliver's Travels.' I didn't like it altogether, though I liked some of it. The other was Shelley's 'Shorter Poems.' Oh"—Hagar rose to a sitting posture—"I liked that better than anything I've *ever* read—"

"You are young to be reading Shelley," said her mother. She spoke with her lips only, her young, pain-stilled face high upon the pillows. "What did you like best?"

Hagar pondered it. "I liked the 'Cloud,' and I liked the 'West Wind,' and I liked the 'Spirit of Night'—"

Some one tapped at the door, and then without waiting for an answer opened it. The elder Mrs. Ashendyne entered. Hagar slipped from the sofa and Maria changed her position, though very slightly. "Come in," she said, though Mrs. Ashendyne was already in.

"Old Miss," as the major part of Gilead Balm called her, Old Miss crossed the room with a stately tread and took the winged chair. She intended tarrying but a moment, but she was a woman who never stood to talk. She always sat down like a regent, and the standing was done by others. She was a large woman, tall rather than otherwise, of a distinct comeliness, and authoritative—oh, authoritative from her black lace cap on her still brown, smoothly parted hair, to her low-heeled list shoes, black against her white stockings!

Now she folded her hands upon her black stuff skirt and regarded Maria. "Are you better?"

"Yes, thank you."

"If you would take my advice," said Mrs. Ashendyne, "and put horseradish leaves steeped in hot water to your forehead and the back of your neck, you would find it a great relief."

"I had some lavender water," said Maria.

"The horseradish would have been far better. Are you coming to supper?"

"No, I think not. I do not care for anything. I am not hungry."

"I will have Phœbe fetch you a little thin chipped beef and a beaten biscuit and a cup of coffee. You must eat.—If you gave way less it would be better for you."

Maria looked at her with sombre eyes. At once the fingers slipped to other and deeper notes. "If I gave way less.... Well, yes, I do give way. I have never seen how not to. I suppose if I were cleverer and braver, I should see—"

"What I mean," said Old Miss with dignity, "is that the Lord, for his own good purposes,—and it is *sinful* to question his purposes,—regulated society as it is regulated, and placed women where they are placed. No one claims—certainly I don't claim—that women as women do not see a great deal of hardship. The Bible gives us to understand that it is their punishment. Then I say take your punishment with meekness. It is possible that by doing so you may help earn remission for all."

"There was always," said Maria, "something frightful to me in the old notion of whipping-boys for kings and princes.

How very bad to be the whipping-boy, and how infinitely worse to be the king or prince whose whipping-boy you were!"

A red came into Mrs. Ashendyne's face. "You are at times positively blasphemous!" she said. "I do not at all see of what, personally, you have to complain. If Medway is estranged from you, you have probably only yourself to thank—"

"I never wish," said Maria, "to see Medway again."

Medway's mother rose with stateliness from the winged chair. "When it comes to statements like that from a wife, it is time for old-fashioned people like myself to take our leave.—Phœbe shall bring you your supper. Hagar, you had better come with me."

"Leave Hagar here," said the other.

"The bell will ring in ten minutes. Come, child!"

"Stay where you are, Hagar. When the bell rings, she shall come."

The elder Mrs. Ashendyne's voice deepened. "It is hard for me to see the mind of my son's child perverted, filled with all manner of foolish queries and rebellions."

"Your son's child," answered Maria from among her pillows, "happens to be also my child. His family has just had her for a solid week. Now, pray let me have her for an hour." Her eyes, dark and large in her thin, young face, narrowed until the lashes met. "I am perfectly aware of how deplorable is the whole situation. If I were wiser and stronger and more heroic, I suppose I should break through it. I suppose I should go away with Hagar. I suppose I should learn to work. I suppose I should somehow keep us both. I

suppose I might live again. I suppose I might ... even ... get a divorce—"

Her mother-in-law towered. "The Bishop shall talk to you the first thing in the morning—"

CHAPTER III
THE DESCENT OF MAN

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A pool of June sunlight lay on the library floor. It made a veritable Pool of Siloam, with all around a brown, bank-like duskiness. The room was by no means book-lined, but there were four tall mahogany cases, one against each wall, well filled for the most part with mellow calf. Flanking each case hung Ashendyne portraits, in oval, very old gilt frames. Beneath three of these were fixed silhouettes of Revolutionary Ashendynes; beneath the others, war photographs, *cartes de visite*, a dozen in one frame. There was a mahogany escritoire and mahogany chairs and a mahogany table, and, before the fireplace, a fire-screen done in cross-stitch by a colonial Ashendyne. The curtains were down for the summer, and the dark, polished floor was bare. The room was large, and there presided a pleasant sense of unencumbered space and coolness.

In the parlour, across the hall, Miss Serena had been allowed full power. Here there was a crocheted macramé lambrequin across the mantel-shelf, and a plush table-scarf worked with chenille, and fine thread tidies for the chairs, and a green-and-white worsted "water-lily" mat for the lamp, and embroidery on the piano cover. Here were pelargoniums and azaleas painted on porcelain placques, and a painted screen—gladioli and calla lilies,—and autumn leaves mounted on the top of a small table, and a gilded milking stool, and gilded cat-tails in decalcomania jars. But

the Colonel had barred off the library. "Embroider petticoat-world to the top of your bent—but don't embroider books!"

The Colonel was not in the library. He had mounted his horse and ridden off down the river to see a brother-in-law about some piece of business. Ashendynes and Coltsworths fairly divided the county between them. Blood kin and marriage connections,—all counted to the seventeenth degree,—traditional old friendships, old acquaintances, clients, tenants, neighbours, the coloured people sometime their servants, folk generally, from Judge to blacksmith,—the two families and their allies ramified over several hundred square miles, and when you said "the county," what you saw were Ashendynes and Coltsworths. They lived in brick houses set among green acres and in frame houses facing village streets. None were in the least rich, a frightful, impoverishing war being no great time behind them, and many were poor—but one and all they had "quality."

The Colonel was gone down the river to Hawk Nest. Captain Bob was in the stable yard. Muffled, from the parlour, the doors being carefully closed, came the notes of "Silvery Waves." Miss Serena was practising. It was raspberry-jam time of year. In the brick kitchen out in the yard Old Miss spent the morning with her knitting, superintending operations. A great copper kettle sat on the stove. Between it and the window had been placed a barrel and here perched a half-grown negro boy, in his hands a pole with a paddle-like cross-piece at the further end. With this he slowly stirred, round and round, the bubbling, viscous mass in the copper kettle. Kitchen doors and windows were wide, and in came the hum of bees and the

fresh June air, and out floated delectable odours of raspberry jam. Old Miss sat in an ample low chair in the doorway, knitting white cotton socks for the Colonel.

The Bishop—who was a bishop from another state—was writing letters. Mrs. LeGrand had taken her novel out to the hammock beneath the cedars. Upstairs, in her own room, in a big four-poster bed, lay Maria, ill with a low fever. Dr. Bude came every other day, and he said that he hoped it was nothing much but that he couldn't tell yet: Mrs. Ashendyne must lie quiet and take the draught he left, and her room must be kept still and cool, and he would suggest that Phœbe, whom she seemed to like to have about her, should nurse her, and he would suggest, too, that there be no disturbing conversation, and that, indeed, she be left in the greatest quiet. It seemed nervous largely—"Yes, yes, that's true! We all ought to fight more than we do. But the nervous system isn't the imaginary thing people think! She isn't very strong, and—wrongly, of course—she dashes herself against conditions and environment like a bird against glass. I don't suppose," said Dr. Bude, "that it would be possible for her to travel?"

Maria lay in the four-poster bed, making images of the light and shadow in the room. Sometimes she asked for Hagar, and sometimes for hours she seemed to forget that Hagar existed. Old Miss, coming into the room at one of these times, and seeing her push the child from her with a frightened air and a stammering "I don't know you"—Old Miss, later in the day, took Hagar into her own room, set her in a chair beside her, taught her a new knitting-stitch, and explained that it would be kinder to remain out of her

mother's room, seeing that her presence there evidently troubled her mother.

"It troubles her sometimes," said Hagar, "but it doesn't trouble her most times. Most times she likes me there."

"I do not think you can judge of that," said her grandmother. "At any rate, I think it best that you should stay out of the room. You can, of course, go in to say good-morning and good-night.—Throw the thread over your finger like that. Mimy is making sugar-cakes this morning, and if you want to you can help her cut them out."

"Grandmother, please let me go *four* times a day—"

"No. I do not consider it best for either of you. You heard the doctor say that your mother must not be agitated, and you saw yourself, a while ago, that she did not seem to want you. I will tell Phœbe. Be a good, obedient child!—Bring me the bag yonder, and let's see if we can't find enough pink worsted for a doll's afghan."

That had been two days ago. Hagar went, morning and evening, to her mother's room, and sometimes Maria knew her and held her hands and played with her hair, and sometimes she did not seem to know her and ignored her or talked to her as a stranger. Her grandmother told her to pray for her mother's recovery. She did not need the telling; she loved her mother, and her petitions were frequent. Sometimes she got down on her knees to make them; sometimes she just made them walking around. "O God, save my mother. For Jesus' sake. Amen."—"O God, let my mother get well. For Jesus' sake. Amen."—She had finished the pink afghan, and she had done the dusting and errands her grandmother appointed her. This morning they had let

her arrange the flowers in the bowls and vases. She always liked to do that, and she had been happy for almost an hour—but then the feeling came back....

The bright pool on the library floor did not reach to the bookcases. They were all in the gold-dust powdered umber of the rest of the room. Hagar standing before one of them, first on a hassock, and then, for the upper shelves, on a chair, hunted something to read. "Ministering Children"—she had read it. "Stepping Heavenward"—she had read it. "Home Influence" and "Mother's Recompense"—she had read them. Mrs. Sherwood—she had read Mrs. Sherwood—many volumes of Mrs. Sherwood. In after life it was only by a violent effort that she dismissed, in favour of any other India, the spectre of Mrs. Sherwood's India. "Parent's Assistant and Moral Tales"—she knew Simple Susan and Rosamond and all of them by heart. "Rasselas"—she had read it. "Scottish Chiefs"—she had read it. The forms of Wallace and Helen and Murray and Edwin flitted through her mind—she half put out her hand to the book, then withdrew it. She wasn't at all happy, and she wanted novelty. Miss Mühlbach—"Prince Eugene and His Times"—"Napoleon and Marie Louise"—she had read those, too. "The Draytons and the Davenants"—she half thought she would read about Olive and Roger again, but at last she passed them by also. There wasn't anything on that shelf she wanted. She called it the blue and green and red shelf, because the books were bound in those colours. Miss Serena's name was in most of these volumes.

The shelf that she undertook next had another air. To Hagar each case had its own air, and each shelf its own air,

and each book its own air. "Blair's Rhetoric"—she had read some of that, but she didn't want it to-day. "Pilgrim's Progress"—she knew that by heart. "Burke's Speeches"—"Junius"—she had read "Junius," as she had read many another thing simply because it was there, and a book was a book. She had read it without much understanding, but she liked the language. Milton—she knew a great part of Milton, but to-day she didn't want poetry. Poetry was for when you were happy. Scott—on another day Scott might have sufficed, but to-day she wanted something new—so new and so interesting that it would make the hard, unhappy feeling go away. She stepped from the hassock upon the chair and began to study the titles of the books on almost the top shelf.... There was one in the corner, quite out of sight unless you were on a chair, right up here, face to face with the shelf. The book was even pushed back as though it had retired—or had been retired—behind its fellows so as to be out of danger, or, perhaps, out of the way of being dangerous. Hagar put in her slender, sun-browned hand and drew it forward until she could read the legend on the back—"The Descent of Man." She drew it quite forth, and bringing both hands into play opened it. "By Charles Darwin." She turned the leaves. There were woodcuts—cuts that exercised a fascination. She glanced at the first page: "He who wishes to decide whether man is the modified descendant of some preëxisting form—"

Hagar turned upon the chair and looked about her. The room was a desert for solitude and balmy quiet. Distantly, through the closed parlour doors, came Miss Serena's rendering of "Monastery Bells." She knew that her

grandfather was down the river, and that her grandmother was making raspberry jam. She knew that the Bishop was in his room, and that Mrs. LeGrand was out under the cedars. Uncle Bob did not count anyway—he rarely asked embarrassing questions. She may have hesitated one moment, but no more. She got down from the chair, put it back against the wall, closed the bookcase door, and taking the "Descent of Man" with her went over to the old, worn horsehair sofa and curled herself up at the end in a cool and slippery hollow. A gold-dust shaft, slipping through the window, lit her hair, the printed page, and the slim, long-fingered hand that clasped it.

Hagar knew quite well what she was doing. She was going to read a book which, if her course were known, she would be forbidden to read. It had happened before now that she had read books under the ban of Gilead Balm. But heretofore she had always been able to say that she had not known that they were so, had not known she was doing wrong. That could not be said in this case. Aunt Serena had distinctly told her that Charles Darwin was a wicked and irreligious man, and that no lady would read his books.... But then Aunt Serena had unsparingly condemned other books which Hagar's mind yet refused to condemn. She had condemned "The Scarlet Letter." When Gilead Balm discovered Hagar at the last page of that book, there had ensued a family discussion. Miss Serena said that she blushed when she thought of the things that Hagar was learning. The Colonel had not blushed, but he said that such books unsettled all received notions, and while he supported her he wasn't going to have Medway's child imbibing