The aftermath of the talk in the orchard

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Summary

This is just an one-shot about Scarlett and Ashley's thoughts in the aftermath of their conversation in the orchard after Ashley came back from the war. It's written from Ashley and Scarlett's POVs.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

The aftermath of the talk in the orchard

"Ashley, you don't need to leave Tara," Scarlett said quietly. "I will never let all of you starve only because I have thrown myself at you. I promise that it will never happen again." She felt a lump forming in her throat. "You are right that I am just very tired."

Scarlett turned on her heel and walked away toward the house, across the rough winter fields. She squared back her small, thin shoulders and twisted her hair into a thick knot upon her neck. She was depressed and devastated, but her posture was still gorgeous and eye-catching despite starvation, work in the fields, and the load of numerous burdens on her shoulders. She was wrapped in defeat, fatigue, and heartbreak, but she still was proud and strong.

Ashley was stunned with her beauty, although she didn't wear pretty dresses, bonnets, and shoes she had in abundance before the war. It didn't matter what she wore – a luxurious, elegant dress, stressing her slimness and her tiny waist, or working dirty rags. She was beautiful in any clothing.
Scarlett proclaimed her undying love for him, and Ashley's heart was full of doubts and willingness to accept her proposal, to escape from the ruined South a new place where nobody knew him. Despite his nature of a true Southern gentleman, Ashley couldn't ignore that he was extremely stirred by Scarlett. There was an aura of magnetism and gratification around her, and she was always in his mind. Ashley couldn't get rid of his memories about Scarlett.

She was ready to give up everything in order to be with him and to live only for him. What could he do with his memories and thoughts about Scarlett and her beauty? How could he forget her cat-like, pale green eyes and her full rosy lips he wanted to kiss so much?

Boldly and unashamedly, Scarlett stood before him only several minutes ago, offering to run away. He knew that she was tired and vulnerable and that she gave a free reign to her emotions at the moment of exhaustion and despair, which had overwhelmed her. He tried to understand his own feelings for her, but there was no clarity in his mind. What did he feel for Scarlett who saved Melanie and Beau from death during the war, for a woman who saved all of them from death at Tara?

His heart pounded harder and harder, almost jumping out of his chest. He sighed heavily, with relief that she was gone and with disappointment that he no longer had her in his arms. He sighed again.

One part of his heart wished to accept Scarlett's mad proposal, whereas the other one warned him to push her away and to stay in distance from her. He was a married man and had responsibilities. He had to stay with his wife and his son. Rationality and honor overweighed passionate madness, and he pushed Scarlett away, saying that he intended to take his family and to leave Tara.

Ashley had to stay with Melanie and his small son because he adhered to the Southern code of honor and had his obligations to his family. His wife loved him and never suspected that her husband could have wished to kiss another woman and leave her.

Most importantly, Ashley wanted to be with Melanie as he couldn't live without her. She was in his blood. They were made from the same clothes, and she could seize his meaning at once. She was his kindred spirit. They were so much alike, and he had always known and valued their similarity.

Melanie was the gentlest and the best of his dreams. He often compared her with heroines from his favorite books, thinking that he was like a main male hero from the same novel. They both were the two people who resigned to dream of unreal world that had been ruined by the war.

"Scarlett is too real for me. I have always feared harsh, unpredictable reality," Ashley thought.

Ashley truly admired Scarlett's qualities he had never possessed. She was a stubborn, headstrong, clever woman, whereas he always was gentle and soft, respectful and sensitive. She had courage and passion for living, energy and vivacity. She was a fighter and a survivor, who could have risen from ashes through difficulties to the shining stars, which he could have never done. She accepted reality in its true sense and effectively adapted to all conditions. She could do that easily, much better than any other women and even men. There were no women like Scarlett. She was unique.

Unlike Scarlett, Ashley couldn't accept harsh reality and live with it. He had a weak and codependent personality. He knew that he was too weak man for Scarlett. He knew that if he had married Scarlett instead of Melanie, he would have never felt as a man, being dependent on her like a small child.

Before the war, Ashley admired Scarlett's strength, but at that time he could never imagine how
much stronger and headstrong she was than he. Now, after everything they had gone through, Ashley witnessed Scarlett's strength every minute, hour, and day. Now he knew that it would have been very difficult for him to have Scarlett as his wife. His gentleman's pride wouldn't let him completely depend on his wife, showing the world that he couldn't have supported his own family.

Scarlett and Ashley were so different. She didn't understand Ashley's mind, his passion for poetry and books, and his nostalgia for the old South. She looked at life from another angle. She went ahead and ahead, overcoming all the hardships and troubles on her path. She didn't speculate even a minute about the sense of her life and her future. Yet, despite all her strength, Scarlett often acted like an offended child who unwrapped the present and found an empty box.

Ashley smiled at his thoughts about Scarlett. Indeed, she was completely different from him. She would never understand his world, unlike Melanie who was his kindred spirit. Most likely, he could have never lived in harmony with Scarlett if he had married her. Even now, before Scarlett's proposed to escape from Tara to Mexico, she hadn't listened to his talk about the war and his fears that he would never find his place in the new world.

"I cannot go back to the old life and the old dreams. Scarlet doesn't realize that there is no place for me in this new world," Ashley contemplated, looking westward, across the fields. "She doesn't see that this new life for me is worse than a war and a prison. It is even worse than death."

Ashley sighed and took the axe in his rough hands. He continued splitting into rails the logs hauled from the swamp. He wanted to concentrate on his major task – the replacement of the fences burned by the Yankees, but he still couldn't forget Scarlett's pleading eyes and the taste of her lips as he kissed her and she kissed him back.

Ashley wanted her as a woman as she was beautiful, feminine, and passionate. Her gorgeous body was a dream of every man, and he wasn't an exception. He wasn't immune to her seductive allure. For Ashley, Scarlett was like a temptress, a sweet forbidden fruit, which he couldn't have her.

Ashley lowered his eyes and looked at the axe, then at the pile of logs on the ground.

He still couldn't stop thinking about Scarlett. She was a spring for him, reminding him of the old South and their last picnic at Twelve Oaks so long ago. Today he kissed her because he lusted for her and because this kiss let him feel a sort of warmth and vividness, which he no longer had in his own body. She breathed the spring in his heart and soul. The kiss let him feel ease, carelessness, and indolence of the pre-war time instead of the bitter years of hardships and fears. Then, as he remembered that his old world had been ruined, he broke the kiss and pushed her away.

Ashley loved Melanie, his soulmate and an ideal wife for a life-long marriage. He knew that he didn't love Scarlett – he wanted her only physically and lusted for her against his own will, adoring her beauty and the qualities he didn't have.

Ashley wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. He worked very slowly, and he was bored that he had to repair the fence. He looked at his palms and let an ugly laugh to come from his throat: his hands were not accustomed to hard, rough work that had always been done by the slaves in the old South. Looking at the fence and the endless work ahead, Ashley sighed over and over again as a tide of despair overcame him.

Ashley didn't even think of how Scarlett would find money to pay taxes for Tara. He was too afraid of what would happen to all of them. He was scared of the new life, and the fear paralyzed him. He didn't want to live in the present, and his crystal, grey eyes turned remote from Tara, the
Clayton County, and the defeated South; his train of thought traveled back to the time of his youth, world of shadows and absence of hardships.

"The South will never be the same again. What will we all do? What will happen to us when the civilization was ruined and the other one is coming? The reality is too cruel," Ashley mused.

While Ashley Wilkes was absorbed in his musings the old South, Scarlett made her way through the fields to the main house. She glanced at the ramshackle house and the uncultivated fields, and her heart sank in her throat. She swallowed hard, trying to strangle heartache and anguish. It was the pain of disappointment and humiliation, which was caused by the man whom she loved.

Scarlett's heart swelled with rage. She was angry at Ashley that he was so helpless. She didn't expect that when she came to him for help and action, he would just talk about the things she didn't care about. She didn't give a damn about his poetry and dreams. All what she needed was an advice where to get the funds to pay huge taxes.

She wanted to find help her and instinctively turned to Ashley who couldn't take away her burdens. She tried to justify his helplessness, thanking that Ashley just needed more time to adapt to the new life. Yet, she felt that she missed something important in the matter. Why did he talk about civilizations and the old South? How could he think of these stupid things when she needed help? How could Ashley reject Scarlett's heart when she gave him all her love on a silver tray?

Hot anger surged through her, venom dissolving in her bloodstream. She was humiliated as he rejected her because of foolish honor and Melanie, a plain and stupid creature. She hated his constant care for honor and Melanie. She thought that she was the most beautiful and charming lady in the Old South, the belle of three Countries. How did Ashley dare to ignore and reject her? She didn't understand it, and she was furious. She could not accept his rejection.

As time passed, her anger was supplanted by the thoughts about Tara. Tara was her home and refuge. It was everything that she had now. It was all she loved. It was her childhood: her mother and father, Mammy, her sisters, and all the good that was left behind. No, she couldn't lose Tara. But where will she get money? Of course, Ashley with his stupid talk couldn't help her.

Scarlett came to the white house and opened the front door that creaked so loud that she screamed. She wanted to scream, scream, and scream. She didn't care at whom and how it would look.

"Mammy, why is this door creaking?" Scarlett cried out. "Do something! Right now!"

Scarlett rushed to the study room on the first floor. She approached the table and opened one of the chests of drawers, where she had hidden two bottle of brandy, the only ones left at Tara. She opened the bottle and took a large gulp. Feeling the warm liquid running down her throat and filling her stomach, she swallowed, tears oozing in her eyes. She sighed and gulped more brandy.

She walked to the wooden table, took a glass, pouring out more brandy. She smiled dolefully and emptied the glass in one gulp, choking with burning liquid and spilling it down her neck and bosom. She poured out and tossed one more glass to her throat. The glow of the brandy crept over her, giving her a false sensation of strength and security.

Scarlett sank in the nearby chair and put her head in her hands. She was a little drunk as the amount of brandy she had consumed was enough to quickly hit her morbidly thin, attenuated body.

Suddenly, she felt a warm hand on her back, gently stroking her, as though consoling her. She raised her head and saw Mammy. Mammy hugged her about her shoulders, and she clung to the old woman's chest, letting hot tears freely stream down her pale face. Mammy was always with
her, but she still couldn't release her from her burden.

Soon Scarlett was crying at the top of her lungs. Her tears were tears of humiliation and rejection, desperation to find money to pay taxes. She was crying because the carefree years of her early youth had been in the past. She was so tired of all her burdens she alone had to bear.

There was no relief after her recent chat with Ashley. On the contrary, she felt even worse and more desperate. Odd enough, she didn't feel a shadow of excitement from talking to Ashley.

"My lamb, what happened?" Mammy asked in a silken voice.

"Oh, Mammy!" Scarlett cried out. "Oh, Mammy!"

"How can I help you, my lamb?"

"I am so tired," Scarlett murmured. "I am tired of working like a slave."

Mammy fumbled at her chin, trying to turn her face upward. "Miss Scarlett, I know how hard you are working at Tara. Miss Ellen would be proud of you."

Mammy hugged her more tightly. As she swept her eyes over the room, her eyes fixed at the desk. She grumbled something unclear as she saw a half empty bottle of brandy. Her heart filled with pain as she saw how vulnerable and lonely Scarlett was at that moment. She knew that it was not a suitable time to reproach Scarlett, although she didn't approve of her lamb's drinking habit.

Scarlett swallowed her sobs. "The Yankees want to take Tara from us. I don't have money to pay these damned taxes."

"What do you mean, Miss Scarlett?"

"Will told me that the Yankees had raised taxes on Tara. We have to pay three hundred dollars very soon," Scarlett informed, raising her watery eyes at Mammy.

"Three hundred dollars! Dear God! It is so much money."

"I cannot lose Tara. It is my home." Scarlett clenched her jaw.

There was such a note of wild determination and hatred in her voice that Mammy was taken aback. Never before had she seen Scarlett's eyes so full of venom and bitterness.

"My lamb, what do you plan to do?"

Scarlett scoffed. "You should ask Ashley." She pulled away from Mammy and took the bottle in her hands, making another gulp.

"How can Mister Ashley help us?" Mammy asked in bewilderment.

Scarlett laughed. "Perhaps, he can."

"Miss Scarlett, don't drink!"

"I came to Ashley. I wanted to ask him how find money, but he didn't help me."

Mammy shook her head in confusion. "Mister Ashley doesn't have money."

Scarlett felt that she needed to talk to somebody. She was at the point where her burdens turned unbearable. She was in complete despair. "I want to escape, Mammy! I want to escape!"
"Hush, my lamb, hush." Mammy hugged Scarlett and pressed her head to her chest. "Miss Scarlett, listen to me. Sometimes answers flow without words, through touch. You must rest now."

"I am so tired. I am so tired," Scarlett complained. "I cannot be here anymore! I am not a slave!"

Mammy shrugged. "Do you want to run away? Do you want to leave us?"

"Ashley humiliated me! I hate him! I hate him!" she exclaimed, a touch of contempt in her tone.

"Miss Scarlett, please let me help you to go upstairs. We should go to your bedroom."

"Mammy, I drank brandy only because I wanted relief. There are so many things I have to do now." Biting down on her sudden retort, Scarlett trailed off and regarded Mammy's glaring displeasure. A small frown marred her forehead. "Mammy, I needed a drink. Maybe I will need another one."

The old woman looked sadly at Scarlett. "My poor lamb!"

"Mammy, I am not drunk. I don't need to go upstairs."

"Miss Scarlett, I understand."

"I am so glad that you do." Scarlett managed a vague smile. "At least somebody understands me."

Mammy ran her hand down her mistress's raven hair. "Miss Ellen would disapprove if she knew that you were drinking brandy."

"Mammy, my mother is dead. I loved her very much, but now I am the head of the household. And I decide what to do," Scarlett snapped, fatigue creeping into her voice. She felt dizzy and nauseous, an affect of brandy she drank. "How could Ashley leave me alone now?"

"What did he do wrong? Tell me, my lamb."

A tremor went through Scarlett's shoulders. "I hate Ashley!" Her voice quivered to a halt.

"I am a tomb. I will never tell anybody your secrets. I will always help you."

Scarlett blinked. "I asked Ashley where we can find money to pay taxes, but he said that we, the Southerners, thought that we were Gods. He was talking about the old life. He told me something about life in shadows, civilizations." She laughed. "Oh, Mammy! He is such a fool! I don't care about civilizations and shadows! I care what will happen to us and Tara!"

"Mister Ashley is very different from you. The Wilkes family almost lives in the library."

Scarlett averted her gaze. "Ashley behaves foolishly. He... he humiliated me! And I hate him! His shadows won't give me money."

"Miss Scarlett, Mister Ashley is not a fool. You are different and don't understand each other. Don't judge him. Maybe now you will stop chasing after him..." Mammy stopped abruptly, putting her large hand on her mouth.

"I am not chasing after this fool! He humiliated me, and you know that I hate to be humiliated."

Mammy clapped her hands in horror. "Miss Scarlett, speak quieter. Miss Melly is downstairs."
"Mammy, I don't care where Melanie is! She and Ashley are such a terrible burden for. Ashley and his family live on my money. Yet, he still dares to humiliate me!"

Indeed, Ashley, Melanie, and Beau were a burden for her. They were additional mouths when they hardly had enough food for their own usage. There was almost no practical use from their staying at Tara. But she loved Ashley and, thus, helped Melanie and Beau.

But did Ashley love her as much as Scarlett thought she had loved him? If he loved her, then why didn't he agree to run away with her? Why didn't he help her to find an answer where to get funds for the payment of taxes? Why were Ashley and his family such a huge burden for her? Her cynical, calculating mind didn't discover any practical use in Ashley's love for her.

As she stood so close to him in the orchard, Scarlett didn't think of what she was saying. The words were simply flowing from her mouth – she spoke and spoke. She was too tired to think about the consequences of her requests and confessions to Ashley. She said what the first came to her mind, and she didn't care whether it wounded Ashley's pride and his ridiculous sense of honor.

Scarlett was heartbroken and emotionally devastated. He failed to help her and even to console her, and she was disappointed. She was humiliated, her ego was wounded. Ashley rejected her, the magnificent Scarlett O'Hara, who used to be the belle of three counties and was loved by many gentlemen. Ashley rejected her after she had saved Melanie and Beau's lives during the war and had sacrificed so much not to let them starve. Where were Ashley's gratitude and respect?

"Miss Scarlet, Miss Melanie loves you so much. Don't say such terrible things about her."

Scarlett pursed her lips. "Ashley asked me to take care of Melanie during the war, and I did that. I helped her give birth to Beau. Yes, I did that, not this stupid and groaning Prissy who pretended to have midwife's skills and failed when I needed her."

"I know."

"Ashley came here after the war, under our roof. We accepted him," Scarlett continued.

"Miss Scarlett, you are very strong. No other lady can do what you did."

Scarlett sneered. Her face still was red, but her tears almost dried. "But when I needed an advice from Ashley, he spoke about stupid things! He is a fool! He only humiliated me."

"How did he humiliate you, my lamb?"

"Mammy… he… It doesn't matter…" Scarlett cut herself off sharply. She stepped forward and scooped Mammy into her arms. "I will be fine soon – I promise. I am sorry for my hysteria."

"My lamb, I know how strong you are." Mammy smiled kindly.

After Mammy had left, Scarlett rose to her feet and went outside the house.

It was almost dark. She stood on the front steps and swept her eyes over the rough winter fields. The weather was cold, and in the night a killing frost overcame Georgia. Rutted red roads were frozen, and cold winds blew through the emptiness and darkness.

Scarlett's heart collapsed in her chest as her mind drifted to the happy past. She recalled that she had once been a spoiled, selfish, easy-going Southern belle. She had everything in abundance, was full of youth, hopes and joy, and she had her love for Ashley, thinking that he had also loved her. Now there was only a sprawling white house on the plantation, and her life was filled with hard work, starvation, despair, and horrors of the war.
In contrast to Ashley, Scarlett didn't think of what had happened to Georgia and the Old South. She couldn't as the load on her small-boned, lean shoulders was too heavy to carry. Little by little, layer by layer, burdens overloaded her. She lost count of the months that had passed since the siege of Atlanta and the beginning of the war.

"Why is Ashley only a burden for me? If he loves me, he has to help me, not to use me and waste my time talking about shadows. Doesn't he understand that we can lose Tara and be thrown into the streets?" Scarlett thought.

For a long time, Scarlett lived with the only hope that Ashley's return from the war would bring back the meaning and the clarity into her life. Presently, that hope was gone. Ashley didn't live up to her expectations and failed her trust and love. She felt as though he had betrayed her and their love. Ashley's rejection hit Scarlett stronger than starvation and her recurring nightmares about hunger. His rejection frightened her. She felt that she had lost the possibility to be happy with his betrayal.

Scarlett didn't comprehend why Ashley had fiercely repudiated her proposal to flee together. She couldn't understand how much honor meant for him. She couldn't see that he was afraid of reality. She couldn't acknowledge that he was a weaker creature than she. She didn't care to think how Ashley's mind worked. She was utterly different: she clearly saw only facts – he rejected and betrayed her, he was a burden with no practical use.

"Where can I find money? What should I do now to save all of us?" she speculated. "Why do I feel only disappointment and anger after Ashley's rejection?"

Tiredness overcame her, and she thought that it was a good idea to go back to the house and drink more brandy. She had nothing to lose, excluding Tara. She was sick and tired.

Suddenly, Scarlett stopped rooted and gazed upwards, into the dark sky. A male name emerged in her memory – Rhett Butler.

"Rhett," Scarlett murmured. "Of course! Rhett Butler has much money. I should find him. He won't talk about shadows and civilizations, like Ashley." A smile illuminated the contours of her face. "Will said that Rhett had been seen in Atlanta with pockets full of money. He is prospering." Her smile grew wider. "I must find him! I must!"

Oddly enough, Scarlett felt relief wash over her as she remembered about Rhett. Memories about Rhett sent shivers up and down her spine. Her heart skipped a beat and then began pounding harder and harder. She was convinced that Rhett would help her; he could help and he would, she said to herself. A feeling of composure and placidity enveloped her for the first time in many months at the thought about Rhett.

Her mind was unusually bright. She even fantasized that she had heard a well-modulated voice, sonorous and overlaid with the flat slow drawl of the Charlestonian. It was Rhett Butler's voice. Her face flushed as she realized that she wanted to meet this arrogant, mocking, infuriating devil again. She blinked in confusion and amusement. Never before had she been imagined that Rhett's voice could ring in her ears. What was happening to her? Was she going mad?

She will think about Rhett tomorrow. Today she was too tired. She glanced across the fields and the road, then turned around and marched into the house.
This is an one-shot about Scarlett and Ashley's thoughts in the aftermath of their conversation in the orchard at Tara. It is written from Ashley and Scarlett's points of view.

Undoubtedly, I don't own GWTW. All the characters are owned by MM and her estate.

Hope you will enjoy the story.

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