After the War

by Aurora20

Summary

A take on what might have been if Rhett went to Tara after the war ended.
Chapter 1

“Scarlett, there’s another one.” Suellen announced, scowling as a new man walked up Tara’s driveway.

Scarlett rolled her eyes, not looking up from the laundry. Since the war had ended there had been an endless stream of men flooding the plantation. Some stayed an evening, others a few days and still more longer. Most of them ill or weak and not willing or able to help. She would have gladly sent them on their way but Melly wouldn’t hear of it.

“How go tell Mammy there’s another,” she yelled to the boy who was carrying sticks to the house for fire.

As the sound of steps became louder Scarlett looked up and her heart skipped a beat. The man walking up the drive looked different than the other men. He was not dragging himself up the drive but walking rather gracefully in strides and the closer he got Scarlett could faintly hear that he was singing.

It was in hearing the voice and the song that Scarlett eyes flashed with recognition.

“Rhett,” she gasped breathlessly.

Since he had left her the day of the siege, Rhett constantly found his way in to her thought. She hated him for leaving her but that was not always what she remembered when she thought of him. Often she thought of his strong arms holding her when he came and the fact he’d brought a horse or that he’d come at all. Reality hit Scarlett strongly, she was the head of the house now and she knew all too well that people were not helpful. And then there was the other thought that crossed her mind, most frequently at night, of him kissing her. Never before had she been kissed like that, her body reacted to his touch in a way that was foreign to her. It was that kiss most of all that had distanced Ashley from her mind. Although she never went a day without thinking of Rhett she found that she could easily go a day without thinking of Ashley, especially when things got particularly bad. Scarlett was not yet conscious of the fact but she wanted Rhett and wished for him often. She wanted him there because she knew he would be a help, part of her knew Ashley would not be any help to her; therefore, never wished for him.

“Glorious weather is it not Mrs. Hamilton?” Rhett called cheerfully.

Torn Scarlett did not know what to do, part of her desperately wanted to run and hug him, let him hold her and tell her all would be fine. Yet the other part of her - the part that even war had not yet erased - was stubborn and angry. She might not always think of it but she did not forget that he had left her and she did not forgive him. The war had also not erased her desire to be the belle of the county and it would never do for her to appear that she had missed him.

“What are you doing here Capitan Butler? How is it that you weren’t shot and killed?”

“I ask myself that very thing everyday. Now come, admit that you are glad to see me - alive and well.” Rhett teased the familiar glint in his eyes.

“Why should I be? I haven’t forgotten how you abandoned me when Sherman came.” Scarlett responded defiantly but with a hint of good-humor.

“You’re fine.” he said stepping so close that there was no space left between them. “And I will say you look quite fine Scarlett.”
Suddenly, self-conscious Scarlett stepped back and patted down her hair. She looked a mess and she knew it. Her dress was old and torn, her boots even worse off, her hair frazzled, and as she pulled down her hands she saw how dried and blistered they were.

“Shut up.” Scarlett snapped. “You have some nerve coming to my house and insulting me. I-”

“I assure you Scarlett that was no insult. You look-”

“Uncle Rhett!” Wade cried racing up to them.

“Well, if it isn’t Wade Hamilton. My goodness aren’t you a big boy.” Rhett greeted embracing him. “How old are you now?”

“Five,” Wade said holding up his hand.

“An old man.”

“Why Capitan Bulter, what a surprise.” Melly greeted joining the group, Beau on her hip.

“Mrs. Wilkes,” Rhett replied in all seriousness. “How good it is to see you. And is this the fine boy I met upon our last meeting?”

“This is Beau.” Melly said proudly. “I must thank you for everything you did for me and my boy. Mr. Wilkes and I are eternally grateful.”

“Your husband has returned?”

“Not yet but I know he is alive and will come as soon as he can.” Melly said smiling a sad small smile.

“I’m sure he will.”

At that the bell from the house began to chime.

“What’s that?” Rhett asked.

“Figures,” Scarlett snorted. “You manage right on time to eat up some of our food.”

“Supper,” Rhett said grinning his sly grin.

“Don’t get any ideas. There are a houseful of people here and I don’t care how hungry you are you aren’t getting extra food.”
When supper ended Scarlett and Rhett found themselves alone in the study.

“What are you doing here Rhett?” Scarlett asked, sitting down on the couch and preparing for business.

“You instructed me to join you,” Rhett reminded with a slight twinkle in his eyes as he leaned against Gerald’s desk.

“Don’t play games, I’m too tired.”

“I came to see you.”

“What for? I’m sure there are plenty of other places and people you could occupy your time with.”

“True. But the war changed me Scarlett,” Rhett said in a tone of seriousness she could only remember him using a couple of times with her before. “Out there on the battlefield I looked death in the eye everyday. I saw young boys being killed, dying right in front of me. I was confronted with the disturbing truth that the South is in my blood and I can’t escape it.”

“Don’t tell me you’ve gone noble?” Scarlett asked an uncontrollable mocking in her voice.

“Not quite. But I do want to do a couple things. And one of them is help you.”

“Me! Why?”

“Well, my dear I can’t bear to see a county belle as yourself slaving away as a field hand.” Rhett said, his jest returning. “That will be one victory I will not let the Yankee’s have.”

“Oh Rhett!” Scarlett cried her eyes growing as she stood and walked closer to Rhett. “Do you mean it?”

“Yes, of course. I’m at your service.”

“What?” Scarlett asked, her joy deflating like a pricked balloon.

“Whatver you need I’ll help. Fixing things around the house, that man Will mentioned a fence, business in town, whatever. I’m not great but if you can do it, I know I should manage.”

“What?” Scarlett repeated stunned by Rhett’s announcement. “What about money?”

“I have very little of that at the moment. I have enough that I can help get some clothes or necessary food for the winter, maybe a horse - I haven’t seen one here-”

“What about all your money?” Scarlett asked shattered by the disappointing news.

“I know this will devastate you my dear Scarlett but all my money is in a Swiss account that I can not get ahold of at this time. If I did the government would take it from me or at least try; therefore, I shall be of little monetary value to you or myself for that matter.”

Scarlett’s mouth hung wide open and she fell back onto the couch. She had hoped that Rhett would save her and that her financial problems would be solved but know she could see that that would not be the case. Nevertheless Scarlett was not completely destroyed. Rhett said he would
stay. He would help, he could help carry her burden and that brought great comfort to her.

“Is this your mother?” Rhett asked looking at a portrait on a wall.

“Yes.” Scarlett replied coming out of her thoughts.

“You look like your father.”

Scarlett would have yelled at him but she could tell that he was not teasing and she did not feel she could take offense - she did love her father.

“Where is your mother? Your father mentioned her being gone? Is she at a neighbors?”

“She’s dead.” Scarlett said coldly. “Father doesn’t remember that - at least not all the time.”

“I’m so sorry Scarlett.” Rhett said sincerely.

“I didn’t get to say good bye. She was dead when we arrived. My father has not been the same. He’s no help. He was never really. My mother did it all and now I have to.” Scarlett informed him looking straight ahead in a daze. “I don’t know how. I’m trying but I can’t.”

“Don’t say that Scarlett. You can do anything. And look at how wonderful you’ve done so far. Not only are you caring for your family but Ashley Wilkes’ as well and soldiers whom you don’t know and have no relation.”

“I wouldn’t if I could help it.” she admitted. “I hate it too. And I hate that I hate it because Mother would have done it and gladly. But I’m not like her. I so want to be like her.”

“Come here Scarlett,” Rhett said pulling her to his chest.

In Rhett’s arms, feeling the beat of his heart and hearing the tender words he whispered in her hair, Scarlett broke. She hadn’t broken since she’d come home to Tara. She wouldn’t allow herself. But years of pain and suffering were finally released as she cried, holding Rhett closely.

“It’s alright Scarlett, everything is going to be alright. I’m here. I’ll help.” Rhett said soothingly.

“Oh Rhett, I’ve missed you so much.” Scarlett whispered in a voice so quiet that Rhett could not hear.

After awhile Scarlett pulled away and Rhett walked her over to the couch and sat down next to her.

“Tell me all your burdens Scarlett and we will figure this out.”
Chapter 3

It had been nearly a month since Rhett’s arrival and to Scarlett’s great relief he was a tremendous help. He charmed her sisters. He flirted with Suellen just enough so she felt pretty and young and complained a little less. He listened to Careen and tended to her as gently as he did with Melly. He got on well with Will and the two talked often, discussing what needed to be done, splitting up the work - Will showing Rhett how to do things when necessary. He had won over Mammy and the others as well. Talked with Gerald as if nothing had changed with him, made fun for him so at times it seemed as though Gerald was well. He of course was kind with Melanie. He played with the boys, especially Wade who became his shadow. Rhett’s affection for the boy rubbed off on Scarlett and led her to be less irritated by Wade. She was far from the mother Melly was but with less stress she was able to have more patience and even taught him lessons on occasion. Rhett also handled the soldiers that came to the house. Before he came Scarlett had to be the forceful one and some men would not listen to her because she was a woman. That was no longer a problem because Rhett handled anyone who made trouble and was able to get people to either help out or leave sooner.

Rhett also kept good on his promise to help with what money he had. Everyone in the house got shoes (but they were only worn when necessary) and clothes. Food was always available, although never much. And most importantly he helped with the taxes when she found herself short. He’d also won a horse on a trip to town in a poker game against a Yankee.

As helpful as Rhett was financially Scarlett actually believed his emotional support was more significant. They sat up together almost every night and talked. Usually about the house but sometimes about other things. Scarlett hated looking back but Rhett would tell fun stories about adventures he had or stories he knew. They didn’t quarrel often but when they did the entire house knew to be on alert.

Their biggest fight involved Suellen. Suellen said she was ill but Scarlett didn’t believe her and told her to work anyway. Rhett told Suellen she didn’t have to and to go rest upstairs. Furious that he undermined her authority, the two had a loud screaming match, ending with Scarlett kicking Rhett out. The whole household begged Scarlett to not do it which only further infuriated her. In the end she let him stay but refused to apologize.

They never fought about Ashley. He was mentioned but only by Melanie and the two never talked about him alone. They both realized this but neither said a word. Rhett did not know what to take of this and neither did Scarlett. Scarlett did not understand what happened with her feelings for Ashley but the only time she felt for him anymore was guilt over not feeling anything more. A part of her felt that she was betraying him by no longer loving him and the other part didn’t care period.

She particularly didn’t care when she was around Rhett. The lack of emotion she felt for Ashley was now completely taken by Rhett and it scared her. She depended on him more than she could admit and she wanted him more than she could even allow herself to think. As she criticized others for their laziness she found herself often distracted by Rhett, watching him as he worked. This was especially the case when he took off his shirt. She’d stand at the distance watching his bronze skin glisten in the sunlight and a warm sensation would overwhelm her. Such emotions frightened her to the point that she’d do her best to avoid him for the rest of the evening.

His behavior surprised her. She could tell he was serious when he said the war had changed him. He was still fun and joked and teased but he was different. He’d be serious at times, he worked (something she never associated with him), he was gentle. Most surprising was that he did not
touch her. Since their embrace when he first arrived he did not so much as brush against her and it
drove her mad because she wanted to feel his body on hers even as she did not understand why
she felt that way.
The New Year passed and they had had a small holiday celebration. Rhett and Will made sure the boys had a couple of toys: Rhett bought one and Will made one for each. Rhett also bought small treats for each person in the house. There were less guests by this time and Scarlett felt she could relax a little more.

The New Year, however, had not brought any change to Rhett or Scarlett’s relationship and it bothered her so greatly that she was forced to confront Rhett about it. She had to know why he did not want her. Was she no longer attractive? Did he not know she no longer cared for Ashley?

She decided to ask him during one of their late night chats. She made herself look as nicely as she could before dinner and tried to behave like her younger charming self throughout the evening.

“Would you like a drink?” Scarlett asked, once they were alone.

“I’ll be, is Miss. Scarlett O’Hara asking to wait on me?” Rhett asked with his catty grin.

“I’ll take that as a yes.” Scarlett said smiling sweetly and handing him the glass.

“What is it Scarlett?” Rhett asked setting down the drink. “You can’t trick me. What is it? Do you need more money?”

“Let’s not talk about money Rhett. We can think of that tomorrow.”

“What do you want to think of tonight?” Rhett asked skeptically. “Clearly you’re up to something.”

Too tired to play games, Scarlett conceded defeat and decided not beat around the bush.

“You use to try and kiss me.” Scarlett said with as much dignity as she could muster. “Now you don’t. Why?”

After a moment of silence Rhett burst out a loud, deep laugh.

“Stop that. You’ll wake up the house. I don’t know why I said anything. Do stop.” Scarlett pleaded red with mortification and anger.

“I’m sorry Scarlett.” Rhett said trying to compose himself and walking over to her. “That was quite unexpected.”

Scarlett stood tensely as he grabbed her arms and looked her in the eyes.

“But most assuredly welcomed.”

Inside of her head Scarlett could hear herself telling him to let her go but her heart was beating so fast and loudly that her mouth could not hear the words her head wanted her to say.

“I’ve wanted to touch you Scarlett but I know if I start I won’t stop and I have no where to escape to.” Rhett explained, no longer looking at her eyes but at the rest of her body.

To her surprise and Rhett’s Scarlett’s hands began to travel along his chest, massaging his muscles. Following her lead, Rhett lean down to kissed her passionately on the mouth before trailing his lips down her neck. At this Scarlett moaned with pleasure.
Never before had she been held or touch liked this and her body responded eagerly.

As Rhett’s lips burned against her skin, Scarlett ran her hands through his hair nibbling his ear. Wanting to feel more of him she unbuttoned Rhett’s shirt, pulled it off him and threw it to the floor. She pulled back from his kisses long enough to witness up close the chest she’d so long been admiring from afar.

Rhett reciprocated her actions unbuttoning her dress and lifting her out of it. He undid her corset and massaged her breasts, sucking gently on one as he played with the other. Rhett then lifted her up and set her on to the desk, pulling off her undergarments and throwing them on the floor.

A brief wave of self-consciousness and doubt swept over Scarlett as Rhett backed away. No man had ever seen her naked, not even Charles and there she laid on her father’s desk with a man not her husband. She was not given much time to think, however, because Rhett took his hands and ran them down her body stopping when he reached her legs. Slowly he pulled them apart, took his hand and felt her wetness. He moved his hand across her skin and massaged the outside, inciting a moan from Scarlett. Encouraged he continued the movement increasing his speed. Messaging her with his right took his left and massaged her breast. A thrill ripped through Scarlett that she never experience and her heart beat so loudly she was sure the whole house could hear. Desperate to be quiet she bite her bottom lip so hard she drew blood and had to move to biting a finger.

Convinced she could experience no more excitement, Rhett slid his fingers inside of her and rapidly moved them in and out, until Scarlett reached a climax.

After it was over Scarlett propped herself up to look at Rhett. She didn’t know what happened but could tell from the look on this face that it was what was suppose to have happened.

“You enjoy it?” Rhett asked grinning.

Scarlett remained silent but nodded her head slightly.

Slowly she sat up moved her hands to his pants. She had felt him when he moved her to the desk and wanted to know what it looked like. She undid his buttons and slide the pants down his.

Scarlett gasped as she saw what was in front of her. She had never seen Charles member but from her brief encounter she knew it was not this large.

Rhett chuckled at her shocked expression and moved her hand so she could feel. Scarlett ran her hand up and down Rhett’s long, thick stick and desperately wanted it inside of her. Recognizing her desire Rhett laid Scarlett back down on the table. Eager for the next step Scarlett spread her legs and watched Rhett to see what he would do next. Gently Rhett pushed himself into her, his large size caused Scarlett to wince but only for a moment. Next Rhett moved himself in and out slowly at first but them with more urgency as he knew he would not be able to contain himself much longer. Desperate to reach the point at the same time as Scarlett, Rhett slowed a bit and they both met their climax together.
Scarlett avoided Rhett after their encounter. She had enjoyed herself that night. So much so that she knew it was indecent. The whole matter was indecent and she knew it. She knew she no longer stood a chance at being a lady, although she was not too upset about it. Scarlett was angry at herself for letting herself go with Rhett and she was afraid. Afraid others knew what she did. She sensed the servants knew, particularly Dilcey although she never said a word. And she feared she might become pregnant.

That last fear particularly haunted her when she watched Rhett play with Wade or Beau. Scarlett did not realize it but Rhett spent more time with Wade after their night together; he played games with him and taught him lessons. Scarlett did not consider his changed behavior, she only thought of the possibility she could be having another child - another mouth to feed.

Rhett avoided Scarlett. He’d slept with many women before but it was different with Scarlett. He’d never loved another woman before, never made love to a woman before. He also never felt guilt over sleeping with a woman. The women he kept company with were far from ladies and something pulled at Rhett’s conscious over compromising Scarlett. He knew she was afraid of being pregnant and when he was honest with himself he had the same fear; therefore, he tried to redeem himself by playing with Wade. He hoped in the small religious part of him that he could bargain with God.

It was hard to avoid each other. There was so much that needed to be done, they had to talk. Scarlett felt that if she acted too oddly, people would become suspicious. So she tried to remain as normal as possible. She watched her body for any signs of change. She was desperate to confide in someone but she knew she couldn’t. Normally in these situations she would have talked with Rhett, but now that was out of the question. And through their trials together Scarlett had found a respect for Melanie and appreciation for her as a friend but knew Melly would die if she knew what Scarlett had done. And then there was Will. Scarlett had come close to talking with him but the thought of talking of intimacy with a man - even Will - was beyond her abilities.

“How are you feeling?” Rhett asked one day when he found Scarlett alone in the house.

“Fine,” Scarlett said tensing up. She knew what he was really asking and could barely breath. “I’m not- I’m not going to have a baby.”

A gust of air escaped Rhett’s lungs in relief.

“You’re sure.”

“Yes.” Scarlett said turning around and looking him in the eye. “I don’t want children - especially yours.”

“Rest assured my dear I want children no more than you do.” Rhett said in a mocking tone, glad to be freed from the shackles of guilt.

Scarlett looked at Rhett’s shirt that was mis-buttoned and instinctively went to fix it. As her hand brushed against his chest Scarlett caught her breath as the memories of their night together flooded her mind. Quickly she dropped his shirt and looked down.

“I’ve missed you.” Rhett admitted running his hands through her hair.

“Don’t touch me.” Scarlett protested weakly, turning her head.
“There are things we can do.” Rhett said between the kisses Scarlett willingly accepted.

“Oh, Rhett.” Scarlett moaned as his hands caressed her bodice. “Someone could come.”

“Everyone is out. Only Mammy is home and she is watching Beau and preparing lunch.” Rhett whisper moving his hand between her legs. “You’ve been working too hard. You need to relax.”

Scarlett could not deny the sense of peace and comfort she felt at Rhett’s touch so she gave in to temptation and found herself giving in more often after that. They did different things and all of them fun. Scarlett’s contempt for intimacy escaped her and she came to realize Rhett was right and sex was fun. It was an escape and stress reliever. It warmed her and made her feel good if only for that short amount of time. She found herself craving Rhett and his warmth and not just for sex but just to be held becuase his strong arms wrapped around her brought great comfort.
Chapter 6

"Oh Melly, I don't see why we had to go to Twelve Oaks. There is so much that needs to be done at the house and."

"You work so hard all the time I think it's good for you to have a break."

"Ha." Scarlett spat bitterly. "There is no time for a break Melanie Wilkes. Do you want food to eat or a house to sleep in?"

"Now Scarlett Darling," Melly soothed. "One day will not hurt. I'm sure of it. Come now, let's go in the house."

"Where is everyone?" Scarlett asked looking around the empty plantation. "It's four o'clock. The sun is still up. Why isn't everyone working? I swear. I'm sure Rhett told them I'm brutal and they deserved a break and let them lounge around and eat all day. That man!"

"Captain Butler is so kind Scarlett," Melly said as they approached the steps. "Come."

"Surprise!" a room full of people cried when Scarlett walked into the sitting room.

"What on earth?" Scarlett asked dazed.

"Happy Birthday Scarlett," Rhett said beaming with self-satisfaction.

He'd come up with the idea of giving Scarlett a party after their first night together and went to great lengths to make it special. He took the remainder of his money and played cards winning twice as much, allowing for him to buy special presents for Scarlett, food and decorations. He enlisted Melanie to invite families from the county and, for Suellen, arranged for Frank Kennedy to come as well.

"Happy Birthday Mother." Wade said with more confidence than he had before Rhett arrived and gave her a card.

"Thank you precious." Scarlett said bending down to examine the card and give the boy a hug. Less burdens had enabled her to spend time with her son and although she was not in love with the boy, she was fond of him and felt that she could one day love him like a mother should.

"What do you think?" Rhett asked making his way through the people.

"Did you do all this?" Scarlett asked raising an eyebrow.

"I did indeed. Only the best for you my dear."

"We can't afford this."

"Always money. Rest your head. You have all the money you should. And it won't be much longer till I have the money you so desperately seek. Now come get some food before all your starving friends eat it."

Scarlett looked at the room full of people and although she knew it was suppose to make her happy it really only saddened her. These families used to be the best in the South, dressed in the finest clothes and as happy as anyone but now they were in rags and although they smiled politely and laughed at times it was never with the joy and ease of the past.
Scarlett shook her head as if to shake the thoughts right out. Today was her birthday. She would enjoy it. She would try and forget the past and the Yankee's and all the horrible things she had suffered. Things would get better, they had to and looking over at a grinning Rhett she knew they would.

It was a cold winter day and Rhett and Scarlett went out behind the makeshift barn to relieve themselves. The cold weather was keeping everyone in the house and in foul moods. Only Melanie remained pleasant and that only irritated some in the house more. The house was also cold and no matter how close to the fire she sat or the blanket she had on her, Scarlett could not find the warmth Rhett could provide. So the two of them snuck out of the house to be alone.

No sooner had they finished enjoying each other did Prissy come running up to them.

"Miz Scarlett, Capin Butler, Mizter Wilkes don come home." the girl yelled running.

The color drained from both Rhett and Scarlett's face and the warmth they'd just found disappeared.

"Ashley's back." Scarlett whispered quietly.

"Isn't ya'll comin?"

"Come on Scarlett, the mistress of the house must greet the ever gallant Mr. Wilkes."

Dazed Scarlett followed Rhett to the house. When they entered there was a tizzy of excitement. Melanie rushing around trying to make Ashley comfortable, Ashley sitting by the fire Beau in his arms.

"Scarlett," he said once she entered.

The sound of her name being said by him once made her leap with joy and now she was empty. She didn't understand it. She wanted to be happy and yet she wasn't.
The weeks after Ashley's return were happy ones for all but Rhett and Scarlett. They were once again distant but neither acknowledged it. Rhett was jealous and resented Ashley's return. Scarlett was confused and desperately tried to find her love for him. Sitting by the fire at night Scarlett watched Ashley intensely and for once Rhett misinterpreted her actions and believed it was out of love that she watched him not lack of it.

Scarlett did not notice Rhett's distance but she did miss his presence. She longed for him a nights but could not bring herself to see him. She could not bear to betray Ashley in such a matter, but then to her mortification she learned that her betrayal would soon become known.

"What are you doing?" Scarlett demanded, storming into the study to find Rhett hunched over the couch.

"I'm gathering my belongings. As I haven't many it shan't take me long." Rhett replied without emotion.

"What are you talking about? Stop being ridiculous, Will needs your help in the field."

"I never intended to stay this long. Things have settled down. The farm is running well and now the venerable Mr. Wilkes has returned to take his place in the household."

"Ashley." Scarlett huffed, her temper flaring at Rhett's mocking words. "I should have known. You are a cad Rhett Butler."

Rhett smirked at her common insult. "All the more reason I shall take my leave. As I prefer not to make a scene I'll leave you with the horse and walk to town. Perhaps, when your mood has passed, you'll give my well wishes to Wade." Rhett offered discretely avoiding her gaze.

"I'll be glad to be rid of you but first we have business to settle." Scarlett shot back, clenching her jaw and rolling her fingers into a fist.

"The money is on the table." Rhett teased, satisfied with the double meaning of his remark.

"I don't care about money."

Those words from Scarlett's mouth caught Rhett's attention and he looked at her for the first time, all sense of humor instantly vanished.

"I'm-" Scarlett closed her mouth at the first words and fought to keep her dignity and raise her eyes from the ground. She had never said the words aloud and she hated the thought of voicing her shame. Knowing she could avoid it, Scarlett forced her eyes to Rhett and stared at him sternly, fire blazing behind her green eyes to mask her insecurity.

Rhett froze at the unspoken words. Caught off-guard he displayed a weakness he never allowed.

"Scarlett-" he said reaching out to her, an apology at the tip of his tongue.

"Don't." Scarlett ordered, taking a step back to further avoid his reach. "I know there are ways to deal with this. I may not know what they are but you do. I'll be only too glad to never see you again but not until we settle this matter."

Scarlett's voice shook slightly as she spoke, unable to fight the vision of herself abandoned with a
Rhett was too stunned to recognize Scarlett’s concern. Instead he stood shifting through the various emotions that flowed through him, surprised to realize the most prominent were pleasure and pride. Too distracted with his own thoughts he didn’t notice Scarlett staring at him impatiently.

"We'll get married."

Scarlett laughed aloud at the suggestion. "Why would I ever marry you?"

"Because you value nothing more than money and I have plenty. By the summer I will be able to retrieve my funds and you shall be a very rich woman."

The thought of piles of gold coins and crisp bills brought Scarlett momentary solace. She didn’t want to marry again but if she had to marry someone it might as well be Rhett. He wouldn’t ask much of her and she knew to expect little from him. It also provided a respectable solution to her problem. Scarlett was scared of few things but all medical procedures had risk and this more than others.

"You swear I can have all the money I want?"

"Every penny."

"Fine. I'll marry you."
The wedding was quick, but not wholly unexpected. Rhett had so charmed all in the household and county that they were glad to see he would stick around. Ashley was the only one shocked by the announcement. He wanted to talk to Scarlett about it but she wouldn't. She wouldn't talk to anyone about her marriage not even Rhett.

Rhett didn't talk to her either but he was always around. Since learning of her pregnancy Rhett was practically attached to Scarlett, although he tried to do so without drawing too much attention. Scarlett didn't want anyone to know about the pregnancy but Rhett couldn't imagine how it could be kept a secret too long. She was sick and she was hungry. Unable to help with the former Rhett sacrificed his food so no one would complain that Scarlett was being a hog.

He had never shared a room in his life but he enjoyed the quiet moments with Scarlett. Closed off from the rest of the household, the four walls became a sanctuary. Too tired from endless work to fight, it was a peaceful one. They rarely spoke but there were occasions when Scarlett let him hold her. They were first in the house to wake every day and they woke early enough that they could take their time getting ready. It was usually a silent endeavor but sometimes they talked.

"How do you feel Scarlett?"

"Dreadful," Scarlett said hatefully, tossing aside her work dress. "I've never been so sick in all my life and I'm tired of it. As if that weren't bad enough my clothes are too tight."

"I'll buy you some new ones. There is more money now and once the baby is born I'll go get-"

"Once the baby is born! Great balls of fire Rhett I thought you were going to leave in June."

"Well, in your condition -"

"I need money! I need you to go and get your money - our money." Scarlett clarified, determined to keep Rhett at his word.

"Fine," Rhett said biting his tongue. He knew better than to bring up finances with Scarlett. It always left her blinded to everything else, including his desire to see his child born. Rhett never considered having children but now that he was, he was fond of the idea of being a father. "I'll see what I can do. By now the government should have stabilized more. With hope, they won't steal my money when I go to get it."

Flashes of Yankees coming to Tara and taking all they owned ran through Scalett's mind.

"No. Get the money when it's safe." Scarlett said suddenly becoming light headed.

"Scarlett-" Rhett called, raising to grab her arm. "Please be careful."

"Be careful!" Scarlett cried indignant, her moment of fear quickly passed. "I can take care of myself very well thank you."

"I'm not so concerned about you, as for my child." Rhett snapped, annoyed by Scarlett's stubbornness.

"Your child? I don't see you carrying this baby. This is my child Rhett Butler."

"Well you could do better to take care of your child then Mrs. Butler. You're exhausting yourself
and you are going to hurt the baby, although I'm not entirely sure that's not your plan."
"You're a cad." Scarlett fumed. "How dare you suggest- Get out!"
Unwilling to extend the argument Rhett left Scarlett alone in the room.
It was nearly a week since their fight and neither made an attempt towards reconciliation. Rhett slept in the study for a couple days but returned to the bedroom once Scarlett scolded him for making a scene. Even then she felt like the study was too much of his room for her to do business there. Consequently, she sat in the diningroom running numbers when Ashley found her.

"Do you have a minute Scarlett?"

"For you? Always," she replied automatically, setting aside her papers. "The shears aren't giving you too much trouble I hope." Scarlett looked in the direction of the dilapidated barn and feared his answer. She'd given him the easiest job she could think of that might not appear insulting.

"Don't worry about me. Goodness, Scarlett after all you've done for me, my wife and son-"

"We're family." Scarlett interrupted, uninterested in another round of Wilke gratitude - Melanie thanked her often enough.

"Yes we are but - we've taken advantage of your kindness. Forced you to do things such as marry a man like Rhett Butler."

A wall of defense instinctively built up in Scarlett and she curiously fought to keep it down.

"Rhett is rich." she offered with a shrug. "He'll help us out of this mess. And he's good with his hands."

Ashley flinched at her words, an unwelcomed image forced its way in his mind.

Scarlett read her misinterpreted meaning on his face and pointed to the patched wall. "He can be handy." she clarified, although she couldn't deny both suggestions were true.

"He's more use to you than I am." Ashley bemoaned, hanging his head in despair. "I wasn't made for this life. Do you remember when we were children, the laughter and energy that filled these halls? The parties and -"

"Oh let's not talk of those things." Scarlett protested standing up. "I can't bear it. The old days are dead and gone. The ruined houses and grave markers are proof of that."

"You can't really forget all the good times can you? How perfect things were."

"Perfect?" Scarlett laughed. "What was so perfect that it ends like this?"

"You've changed Scarlett." Ashley observed sadly.

"We've all changed Ashley. We've had to."

"No. I haven't. Melanie hasn't. Neither have Suellen or Careen..." his voice trailed as he looked deeply into Scarlett's emerald eyes. "Maybe I'm wrong. You were always a fighter. Strong and independent - ready to take on any challenge. It's only your look that's changed - your desire."

"Oh Ashley," Scarlett sighed. She wanted to protest, to run to his arms and tell him he was wrong that she loved him and would always love him but she couldn't. The feelings that had so long
dictated her choices were gone. Standing alone with him she knew they would never come back. "Let's go outside. It's a nice day, we can pretend it's like before."

In reality neither one was mad at the other, they were only mad at themselves and too proud to admit it. Laying in bed Scarlett found herself willing to make a small concession. It did not escape her - or anyone else for the matter- that Rhett was fond of the baby. He liked to pretend he was discreet but his attentiveness did not go unnoticed. She'd often feel the burning of his eyes on her midsection from the distance. At night he controlled it less and she often woke with his arms around her, a position she seldom minded.

"Rhett?" Scarlett whispered quietly after she had been laying awake in bed for over an hour. "Rhett?"

"Yes?"

"Give me your hand."

Obediently, Rhett turned over and gave her his hand. Scarlett propped herself up and rested his hand on her stomach and as if by command the baby kicked. Surprised by the movement, Rhett shot up and looked at Scarlett.

"Is that the baby?"

"I should hope so." Scarlett replied sarcastically but in good humor.

"It's strong." Rhett said more to himself than to Scarlett, tracing his hands across her abdomen. He'd never felt a pregnant woman before and the experience was powerful. "You've gotten big."

"I know." Scarlett said with annoyance.

"I hadn't realized. Does it hurt?"

"Dreadfully. I hate not fitting in my -"

"The baby Scarlett. Not your ego." Rhett gently corrected, glancing up at her with mock disapproval.

"Oh." Scarlett replied mildly embarrassed. "No. Not yet. Once it's bigger it will hurt more. It's mostly just uncomfortable."

"What do you think it is?" Rhett asked continuing to caress her stomach.

"I don't really think about it I suppose." Scarlett admitted taken aback by the question. "Do you?"

"I don't think I have a preference. A boy would be nice but then I think of a girl and that wouldn't be bad either." Unexpectedly Rhett bent over and kissed her abdomen. "Hello in there. I'm your father."

"Rhett, stop." Scarlett said in weak protest but couldn't help but smile.

"And that's your mum. She can be crabby but don't take it personally, she's like that to everyone."

"Oh shut up," Scarlett said throwing a pillow at him.

Pleased to see Scarlett smile, Rhett propped himself up on his elbow to enjoy the rare moment of
marital bliss. "You look beautiful Scarlett, pregnancy agrees with you."

"You're mad. My skin is blotchy and my hair is falling out." Scarlett whined, running her hand through her hair and holding up stray pieces.

"I believe you used to know how to take a compliment." Rhett chided, clicking his tongue and returning his sights to their child. "I suppose we could discuss names. Do you have preferences?"

"I've never in all my life seen a man so interested in a baby as you are Rhett Butler. You like to pretend you're big and tough but I can see you now cooing over a bassinet. It's shameful."

"I have no shame for loving my child."

Scarlett flinched at Rhett's words but he was too distracted to notice. He never used those words love with her and now that he did she felt a twinge of jealousy.

"I'm tired and we have to get up early. Let's go to sleep."
"What's the matter?" Rhett asked urgently as he saw Will ride up to the road.

Rhett and Scarlett had had one of their legendary fights the night before and Rhett decided to spend the day in town. Will rarely went to town and never when Rhett was there so he knew something must be wrong.

"What's the matter?" Rhett asked again.

"Get your horse and let's go. Miss Scarlett's not doing well. The doctor is already on the way."

Without a moment to spare Rhett jumped on his horse and raced towards Tara. Throughout the ride he thought the worse. He envisioned Scarlett dead on the floor, their baby with her. He cursed himself for leaving that morning and he cursed himself more for fighting with her in the first place.

Rhett had tried to refrain from taking Scarlett's bait but her unsolicited outburst at Wade was too much. The argument replayed in his head and he remembered calling her a horrible mother - the thought felt like a stab in the chest.

"What happened?" Rhett asked Ashley when he reached the house.

"She fainted in the field." Ashley said not looking Rhett in the eye.

Rhett noticed the somber tone in Ashley's voice and didn't question any farther. He could tell what happened before he asked and refused to hear the news from Mr. Wilkes.

"Mrs. Wilkes," Rhett called urgently as Melanie came down the stairs.

"Captain Butler," Melanie said softly leading him into the study. "Scarlett's fine, weak but the doctor expect her to recover."

"The baby?" He pressed, desperately he tried to keep hope.

Sadly Melly shook her head and to her great shock Rhett collapsed on to a chair and tears streamed down his face. She had never seen a man cry and she never imagined a strong man like Captain Butler crying. Cautiously Melly walked over to him and patted his head.

"It's all my fault." Rhett said more to himself than her. "She never wanted a baby, not my babies and -"

"That's not true Captain all women want babies."

"Not Scarlett, not mine anyway. But then I should have made her be more careful. She overworked herself and -"

"That's Scarlett's nature. And this was an accident. It's no one's fault."

"I should have taken better care of her. I should have went for the money, then she wouldn't have had to worry. I just - I was selfish. I wanted to be here."

"That's not selfish. It's kind." Melly assured.

"She doesn't love me. She only married me because of the baby."
Shocked at the revelation, Melanie gasped slightly but continued to give the Captain comfort.

"Scarlett loves you. She loves you more than I think she even knows."
The baby had been born and was a boy. Neither parent could bring themselves to see him or name his so he was buried Baby Boy Butler. During her delusion Scarlett had called for Rhett but no one heard and so he did not come. He remained in the study, with only Melanie for company for days before returning to the real world. But even then he was not the same. Rhett went to see Scarlett when she felt better but neither had much to say. She was sure he blamed her and he blamed himself.

As the weeks passed Scarlett regained her strength and things went back to how they were. Rhett and Scarlett avoided each other and the rest of the house -except Melly - avoided them. With the exception of Ashley, the household felt bad for Rhett but his dark mood kept them away. Even Wade kept his distance. After the loss of his son it was hard for Rhett to play with the boy but forced himself to spend some time with the him. No one knew how to feel for Scarlett. She did not seem much affected and it was therefore much easier to sympathize with Rhett.

One bright spot in these dark days was Suellen's marriage to Frank. After years of waiting, the two were wed. Frank felt confident enough in his standing, Scarlett was more than willing to get Suellen out of the way and Suellen was more then ready to leave.

Without Ellen around Scarlett was forced to take on the role of informing Sue of her wifely duties. Scarlett dreaded this and wished anyone else would do it but she knew Melly couldn't and the only other person she could ask was Rhett and that was not an option. Therefore, the day before the wedding Scarlett told Suellen discreetly as possible what was expected of her. Even with her discretion Suellen was mortified and Scarlett highly amused, she imagined her younger sister would have quite an evening and was lucky to be marrying fussy old Frank who would probably be as exciting as Charles.

As the women were planning Suellen's wedding Rhett was planning to take his leave. The thought of losing Scarlett had been more than he could bear. The love he stifled was impossible to deny after her accident but they lost the only thing he felt could bring them together. The distance between them was greater than it had ever been and it ate at him and the sight of Ashley Wilkes was intolerable. While she was pregnant, Rhett had been able to set aside his jealousy of his wife's love. Although he didn't believe her condition would be an insurmountable obstacle, he felt it was at least an uncomfortable reminder to Wilkes. Now that was gone and nothing stood in their way. This nagging reminder led Rhett to keep his glass full throughout the wedding in an attempt to forget that his bride would be too happy to spend her evening with another man.

"I'm leaving Scarlett." Rhett announced entering their bedroom after the final guests were gone.

"Really? Where to?"

"To get the money you so desperately want." he replied his voice cold and distant as he watched her brush her hair at the vanity.

"When will you be back?" Scarlett asked nonchalantly looking at him for the first time through the mirror. "You're drunk."

"Maybe," he said walking closer to her, resting his hands firmly on her shoulders.

"Let me go," Scarlett ordered, unsuccessfully attempting to shrug him off.
"I will but after I get what I want. Do you know what that is?" Rhett whispered, the brandy on his breath stinging her ear. "You."

"Rhett it's late. I'm going to bed."

Scarlett forced her way out of his grasp and stood up but she didn't maintain her freedom long. Rhett quickly pulled her into his arms and enveloped her in to a passionate kiss.

"Rhett." Scarlett protested weakly but it was too late, Rhett had made up his mind. She could do nothing about it and didn't really want to either. The long day of wedding obligations and visiting left her exhausted but she missed the feeling of being in Rhett's arms. It wasn't the reunion she hoped for but perhaps it was a start.

To her disappointment Rhett left as promised and before she was even awake. After a passionate evening together she drifted off to sleep with the expectation that things had changed. Stirring in bed to find it to herself alone, Scarlett hated that he was gone and hated him for leaving.

The rest in the house were disappointed as well. No one took Rhett's absence worse than Wade, who began to return to his reclusive self. In an unusual act of maternity Scarlett found herself spending more time with the boy, helping teach his lessons and reading stories to him. He'd changed immensely in the time Rhett had been around and Scarlett found that Wade could be fun. The boy was also very smart which she attributed solely to herself.

Life at Tara felt empty without Suellen and Rhett and with the financial situation picking up Ashley felt that he and his family had to leave. Miss. Pittypat continually begged the girls to return and Ashley decided they should accept. That additional departure left Scarlett with the sense her purpose at Tara was gone. The plantation was making enough money to run itself. Once Rhett sent money she would renovate it but she did not want to be there. She missed Atlanta and city life. Consequently, she decided she'd join the Wilkes in Atlanta until Rhett returned.

Unable to leave Gerald and Careen alone Scarlett convinced her sister to accept Will's proposal of marriage. It took a great deal of work because Careen was still in love with Brent and felt she belonged in God's work but Scarlett told her sister that Will was God's gift to the O'Haras and that if she didn't marry him she would be rejecting God. With that compelling argument all of the O'Hara sisters were married.
Scarlett could not believe how much Atlanta had changed since her abrupt departure during the siege. She loved being able to talk and see different people and things, she enjoyed visiting old friends and seeing that they weren't quite as put out as the county folk and there was nothing for her to manage at Aunt Pittypat's house. She could sleep in, take long carriage rides and visit. It wasn't exactly like the old days but Scarlett didn't mind. She found she enjoyed change and Atlanta was exciting. Her favorite activity was looking for a house and her search through magazines convinced her that they should build one. Scarlett found a contractor and immediately started development. Scarlett didn't know how Rhett would react to her decision but she couldn't help but believe her public endeavor would bring him quickly to Atlanta. After a month of waiting she received a note in the mail.

Dear Scarlett,

I have wired to Henry Hamilton money and will continue to do so but I think it is best if we admit we've made a mistake and got a divorce. It was clearly never meant for us to be husband and wife and I think if we both leave now we can find some happiness.

Rhett

"That rotten cad!" Scarlett cried throwing the letter across the room. "Divorcing me! He can't and I won't let him."

It was at that moment that a wave of sickness enveloped Scarlett.

"Great balls of fire," she cried after she was done emptying her stomach in the wash bowl.

*I haven't been this sick since....

"....since the baby. I'm pregnant." She whispered gleefully to herself. "How do you like that Rhett Butler. I'm going to have your baby."

Scarlett moved her hands to her stomach and smiled. For the first time she was glad to be pregnant.

"I hope it's a girl," she decided in that moment. "I'd like a girl and Rhett is so silly about babies I'm sure he'll go crazy for her."

Scarlett sat back and thought of all the things she would buy for the baby. She would have to re-evaluate her house plan to include a nursery. She would also talk with a seamstress because she refused to wear awful outfits when she outgrew her current ones. All these thoughts reminded her of money and then of Rhett. Scarlett's immediate notion was to tell Rhett about the baby and make him beg her forgiveness. Her more devious side wanted to make him pay for leaving her and threatening divorce.

"I'm not going to tell him about you. You'll be Mommy's little secret. At least for a while." Scarlett decided happily resting her hand on her stomach. Rhett would hate missing out on this. She did not know how long she'd keep it from him but she certainly was in no rush to tell him about the baby.
Chapter 13

After weeks of keeping her secret to herself, Scarlett needed to tell someone. It almost scared her how happy she was about this baby. She often found herself thinking about it or rubbing her stomach. At night she dreamt about what she would do with her little girl and how nice things would be.

"Melanie can I tell you a secret?" Scarlett asked one afternoon when the two were alone.

Scarlett couldn't help but smile at her confident. Never in her life would she have thought she'd be entrusting information to Melanie Wilkes, let alone consider her a friend. Although Melanie annoyed her at times, she was not the fragile creature Scarlett once thought her to be. She was brave and strong and Scarlett had to admire that.

"Of course Dear what is it?" Melanie asked setting down her needle.

"I'm going to have a baby." Scarlett announced triumphantly.

"That's marvelous. Oh I'm so happy for you." Melly declared standing to give Scarlett a hug. "Have you sent word to Captain Butler. He will be so happy to hear of this."

"Ha," Scarlett said with disgust. "No. And I'm not and neither can you Melanie Wilkes. I'm not telling that man anything about this baby - at least not yet."

"Oh but Scarlett he'll be so thrilled." Melly urged, crushed by the realization that whatever strife the Butlers were experiencing had not passed. "He'd rush home if he knew. No train could bring him fast enough."

"Fiddle dee Melly, I didn't tell you so we could talk about Rhett. That man does not deserve to know about this child."

"Why?"

"I'll tell you. He's divorcing me." Scarlett defiantly replied, squaring her shoulders to resist shrinking at the shameful confession.

"What?" Melly gasped. "It must be a mistake- one of your fights."

Rhett and Scarlett fought unlike any two people Melanie had ever met or even read about. She had heard them threaten each other but knew they never meant it.

"It's no fight Melly. But Rhett won't divorce me. If he does he'll lose his rights to our baby. Which is precisely why I am going to punish him." Scarlett announced proudly, her eyebrow raised at the thought of her revenge.

"Oh Scarlett, don't do that. It will lead to no good. I'm sure the Captain isn't serious, he loves you so."

"He does not Melly. He only married me because -" Scarlett bit her tongue and felt her pride deflating.

"That's not true." Melly declared torn between staying out of her friends marriage and saving it. "When you were sick he was so worried about you. He blamed himself. He was convinced that it was his fault and that you did not want his baby."
"Not want his baby?" Scarlett repeated, surprised to learn Rhett's concerns. "Great balls of fire."

"And the way he looks at you and looks after you. Surely you can't believe he doesn't love you."

Speechless Scarlett stared at Melanie. Earlier she was thrilled with her plan to hurt Rhett and now she felt hurt herself.

The pain and confusion had not subsided at night and Scarlett found herself sitting in bed thinking about Rhett and the babies. Scarlett picked up the picture she had put of Rhett next to her bed and stared at it intently. Looking at his picture made her heart race and she did not understand why. It had been ages since Scarlett tried to figure out her feelings for Rhett and she decided she could not put it off any longer.

"I love him." She admitted quietly.

She didn't know how or when it happened but she had long since determined she didn't love Ashley and could only now admit that it was Rhett she loved. And she hated it. She hated him passionately for making her love him and she loved him more than that.

"Not want his baby?" Scarlett said thinking of what Melly had told her earlier. "He knows I don't want any babies. Except you little one, I want you." Scarlett said softly to her ever slight baby bump. "Why would I not want his babies. He's handsome and rich and charming. We'll make a beautiful baby."

Scarlett leaned her head against the bedpost and thought of her last pregnancy. Looking back she remembered how much Rhett wanted that child. He always watched her, asked her not to work, made sure she ate, played with her when she would let him. And after the baby was gone he was very quiet. Quieter than she'd ever seen him.

"He really wanted that baby. I don't know how he could blame himself. He did everything he could. He told me to be careful. I didn't listen. Maybe he was right maybe I pushed myself so that I would lose the baby."

Scarlett sat mortified by the unChristian thought and said a series of Hail Marys in an attempt at redemption.

"I'll be much more careful with you sweetheart. Mother won't let anything happen to you." Scarlett said protectively guarding her stomach. "I'll tell Rhett about you. It should make him happy."
Scarlett traveled to Charleston on the pretense of visiting her aunts but as expected once she reached town Mrs. Eleanor Butler insisted Scarlett stay with her. Scarlett was surprised when she reached the Butler home. To begin with it was very large, larger than Tara or any other home she had ever seen and two Rhett was not there. He was North.

"Rhett did not tell me you would be in town." Eleanor said taking a seat in a cushioned chair on the veranda.

"He didn't know. It was a last minute decision."

Scarlett found herself very nervous around Rhett's mother. Eleanor reminded her so much of Ellen and yet was very different. They were both ladies but Eleanor was more personable than her mother ever was. It was her first experience with a mother-in-law and she was leery given the experience of some of her female acquaintances; however, Eleanor's approachable demeanor left Scarlett hopeful for their relationship.

"Will you be staying long? I understand from Rhett that you have a little boy. Is he coming later?"

Scarlett cringed at the mention of Wade and the hint of disapproval she noted in Eleanor's tone. She never considered bringing Wade with her because she knew he would be a distraction. The boy would inevitably want to spend time with Rhett and she knew he would entertain him. They had too much to discuss to spend time playing with trains and reading children stories. For that reason she sent Wade to Tara. After weeks in the city, he could use time on the farm.

"He's spending time with my father and sister at Tara. Rhett can decide the length of our visit." Scarlett replied, hopeful that her concession to her husband would earn her some points.

"We'll have to convince him for an extra long visit. Are you hungry Scarlett?" Eleanor asked, as the butler set out a platter of finger sandwiches and other snacks.

Scarlett cringed at the sight of food. It was becoming evident to Scarlett that each of her pregnancies were becoming more difficult than the last (a fact that endeared her more to Wade). She wanted to demand the food be taken away but knew she could not. Instead she forced a smile and nodded.

"I must say I was surprised to learn my Rhett had married. I feared he would forever be alone. I am so glad he met such a fine young lady. I was friend of your mothers you know."

"I do." Scarlett said brightening at being referred to as a lady.

"Also, I am very sorry to hear of your loss both in your mother and your son. I know how hard it's been for Rhett."

Scarlett heart skipped a beat at the reference to both Ellen and the baby.

"Thank you. It was difficult." Scarlett said setting down her fork, standing and walking over to the mantle in the sunroom. "Is this Rhett?"

"Yes, when he was 3 years old. Such an adventurous boy. Always causing headaches but such a gentle soul."

Scarlett picked up the picture and smiled. Rhett was such a handsome boy that she decided a boy
who looked like Rhett would not be a terrible thing.
"Someone called for tea?" Rhett asked with his big grin, carrying a tray of silver in his hands as he entered the parlor. The room was filled with Eleanor's friends and he was thrilled by the public presentation.

"Oh, Rhett!" Eleanor cried delighted when she saw the lost family heirloom. "What a wonderful son I have."

"He's not that wonderful." Sally Brewton said with a cackled laugh. Rhett's oldest friend sat back in anticipation of the scene.

The news of Rhett's marriage was a surprise, his solitary return to Charleston not as much. He never mentioned his wife; therefore, Scarlett's unannounced arrival left Sally with mounting interest. She could gather little of Scarlett's intentions from their brief encounters. Although the woman was social, Scarlett was also smart - she talked a lot but said very little. It was a trait Sally admired and she guessed her friend admired it too.

"I'll have you yet, Sal." Rhett retorted with a playful wink.

"Dream on"

"Good day ladies," Rhett greeted, tipping his hat to the rest of the room and stopping dead when he saw Scarlett. "Mrs. Butler."

"Hello Rhett. Is that any way to greet your wife?" Scarlett asked not letting go of their eye contact. Mechanically Rhett bent down and kissed Scarlett.

"If you ladies would excuse me I'd like a moment with my wife."

Rhett took Scarlett's hand and gracefully led her out of the room. His delicacy lasted only to the staircase when he moved his hand to her arm and forcefully directed her to the bedroom.

"Stop, you're hurting me." Scarlett complained breaking out of his grasp.

"What are you doing here?"

"That's a fine greeting." Scarlett spat back, rubbing her arm to relieve pain.

She had spent half a week eagerly anticipating his return. Most of her days were spent imaging their reunion. She expected him to be surprised and flattered that she'd make the trip to see him. Instead his eyes flashed with a fury she'd never seen.

"Did you not read my note?"

"I got it."

"And?" Rhett prompted, he was in no mood for games.

"And nothing." Scarlett shot back defiantly. "You can't divorce me Rhett, you have no grounds."

"Rest assured my dear I can get a divorce."

"Why are you being so hateful?" Scarlett demanded unable to conceal her frustration.
Rhett looked at Scarlett's face and was confused to see hurt mixed with anger. It tempted him to be gentle but his pride wouldn't allow it. He'd loved her for too long without success. Yes they'd married but only because of circumstances and his money. It was a business transaction and he'd invested too much for no return. She didn't love him and he couldn't live with that. He was a selfish man and if he couldn't have all of her, he would have none.

"What do you want Scarlett? It can't be more money, can it?" Rhett guessed since Scarlett's life choices were always dictated by her love for Ashley Wilkes and her pocketbook. "I know all about that gaudy monstrosity you're building."

"This isn't about money."

"Then what is it?" Rhett couldn't resist wondering as he held his finger under her chin he lift up her face to meet his. "You didn't miss my company?"

Scarlett wanted to say yes. She longed to end the charade, fall into his arm and tell him everything but the devil Mammy always warned her about reared it's head. His insults and suspicion hurt. She did not deserve them and refused to give him the satisfaction of winning.

"After the way you left Tara. Certainly not. Scarlett snapped, turning away and crossing the room. "I wanted to get away and came to visit my aunts. I haven't seen them since before the war. Your mother heard of my visit and invited me to stay. I couldn't very well refuse her invitation."

The mention of Eleanor, steeled Rhett to Scarlett and he glared at her. "You can play all the girlish games you want in Atlanta but you will not involve my mother in your tricks."

"I would never hurt Eleanor. She's a fine lady and I'm her guest. I intend to stay until she tells me otherwise. Now if you'll excuse me I should get back to the tea."

"If you intend to stay I want you to see a dressmaker. Your frilly French fashion has no place in Charleston."
Chapter 16

Scarlett turned restlessly in bed. Rhett was gone again, although only for a couple days. He’d been at the house a little over a week but barely talked to her. He told his mother that he snored and that he’d take his own room. The separation was insulting as it undoubtedly gave Eleanor reason to be suspicious and it prevented them from sharing their intimate routines from Tara. Rhett also made sure they never had a moment alone during the day. Scarlett was so angry she wanted desperately to walked out of the house and never see him again but she didn't.

As awful as he was treating her, Scarlett still loved him and wanted to tell him about the baby. Her desire to share her secret was further prompted by her desire to rest. Not only was she sicker with this baby she was more worn out. Scarlett longed to rest but Eleanor always had a full itinerary and she could not bear to disappoint her. She also felt an uncomfortable need to compete with Rhett's younger sister Rosemary. While Scarlett generally felt a step above the other women in her life, the social circles of the Butlers left her feeling like a country bumpkin more than a Southern belle.

Too uncomfortable to sleep longer, Scarlett sat up in bed and rubbed her stomach.

"Look at how big you are. You're growing so fast you're taking all mommy's energy and I need that to get Daddy."

Scarlett hated how Rhett treated her. She hated it because she knew he would be nicer once she told him about the baby and that he would come back only for that reason. Originally she did not consider his reasons for being in their relationship, she was only concerned with having him. After two weeks in Charleston Scarlet realized that she truly loved Rhett and she wanted him to love her too. She did not want him to be with her because of the baby but increasingly found herself at a disadvantage.

Her attempts to play coy failed to attract his attention and in all her years she never learned another successful method. She had been forthright with Ashley, albeit when it was too late, and her profession of love was thrown in her face. Ashley was gentle and did his best to spare her humiliation. She knew Rhett would show her no kindness. Instead he’d laugh at her for being naive.

Feminine wiles would not entice Rhett Butler. Nor was she willing to risk humiliation. In lieu of both options Scarlett decided she would attempt to attract him with honey instead of vinegar. She would be nice but not too nice.
Once Rhett returned he was a bit more gracious to her but barely. Scarlett felt it was because he spent most of his time at the family plantation and not at the house. While pleasant moments after dinner were enjoyable, it was hardly enough stimulate his affection. Consequently, Scarlett decided to take one more move to get Rhett and asked Rosemary to accompany her to Dunmore Landing.

The entrance to the plantation was stunning. Dunmore Landings was vibrant and seemed to have escaped the war.

"It's beautiful."

"Rhett made sure everything was fixed up. You can hardly tell the Yankee's were here. Except for certain areas in the gardens but Rhett it working on that too." Rosemary explained, happily watching the workers repair her childhood home. "I'm sure Rhett will be surprised to see us."

"I'm sure he will." Scarlett agreed, carefully stepping out of the carriage once the horses stopped.

"Rhett!" Rosemary yelled at her brother from the distance.

"Rosemary what are you doing here?" Rhett asked with a broad smile on his face until he saw Scarlett. At the sight of his wife he shook his head and disbelief - if nothing else she was persistent. "Scarlett."

"Hello Rhett. This is a beautiful plantation."

"Thank you."

"I'm going to say hi to Pi," Rosemary announced, giving Rhett a quick kiss before running off.

"Who's Pi?"

"Her horse." Rhett replied, taking a deep breath before looking up at his wife. "Why are you here Scarlett?"

"Your mother and Rosemary speak of it often and describe its beauty with such vivid detail, I simply had to come see for myself."

"Here is it."

"Will it kill you to be nice to me? I've been very pleasant and for what? To be spat on?" Scarlett demanded, her blood boiling under the already hot Carolinian sun.

"I'm sorry but Scarlett," Rhett apologized, unexpectedly shamed by her criticism. "I simply don't understand why you're here."

Scarlett opened her mouth to speak but was taken over by a wave a lightheadedness.

"Scarlett!" Rhett called grabbing her before she fell.

"Are you alright Scarlett?" Rosemary asked as Scarlett regained consciousness on the sofa inside
the house.

"What?" Scarlett asked looking around to find herself in an unfamiliar setting. Horrified, she sat up and found both Rhett and his sister standing over her.

"You fainted." Rhett informed her holding out a glass of water. "Drink this."

"I did." Scarlett affirmed. She searched his face to see if he knew about the baby and could tell he did not.

"Should I call for the doctor?" Rosemary asked stepping aside to let Scarlett breath.

"No. I'm fine. Too much sun. The drive was longer than I thought."

"Let me get you something to eat. Bread might keep you grounded - or off the ground as the case may be."

"Are you sure you're alright?" Rhett asked once they were alone. "You never faint and you worked under a much hotter sun with nothing to eat at Tara."

"Why Rhett Butler I think that's the nicest thing you've said to me since I've come to Charleston."

"Are you alright?" Rhett repeated, ignoring her remark.

"I'm fine." Scarlett said, masking her disappointment at his rebuff.

*I'll tell him the truth when he's nicer* she thought to herself.
Chapter 18

Scarlett felt her plan working as the days passed. She tried to get to Dunmore Landing more often and managed to convince Rhett to take her sailing. She'd never been sailing before and was frightened by the prospect. She knew people got sick on the water and she was sick enough already. Luckily she was a natural and being on the ocean, she experienced an unfamiliar freedom. It was their first time truly alone together and Scarlett relished every moment. She'd even managed to persuade Rhett to tell her his blockade stories. It was the perfect afternoon and exactly what she had been waiting for.

When they returned to Charleston that evening Scarlett decided she would tell him the news after dinner. She'd waited long enough and could hardly conceal her condition any longer. Anxiously she prepared for supper and selected one of her Atlanta dresses for the occasion. Rhett might not care for them but she did and after he learned about the baby he wouldn't notice what she was wearing. Scarlett sat in front of the vanity and brushed her hair when she heard a knock on the door.

"Enter." Scarlett called, looking at the mirror to see her visitor and did her best to suppress her smile when Rhett entered. "Rhett, what a surprise."

"Mother was curious if you were joining us for dinner."

Scarlett glanced at the clock and gasped at the time. "I fell asleep after we got back. I didn't look at the clock. Can you go in the drawer and hand me a ribbon?"

Rhett obediently followed Scarlett's instruction and rifled through the pile to find one that complimented her ornate gown. In his search he was surprised to find a letter hidden at the bottom of the drawer. The penmanship unmistakable.

"It doesn't really matter what you pick. I'm sure your mother and Rosemary won't care nearly as much as I do-" Scarlett turned to find Rhett standing firmly in the room, a letter in his hand. "What are you doing?"

"It appears ribbons aren't the only thing you keep in this drawer." Rhett said tossing the unopened envelope aside and storming out the room.

"Rhett wait." Scarlett called chasing after him as he headed for the stairs. She'd come too far to let a meaningless letter from Ashley about construction of their home ruin her plans. "Let me explain-"

"I don't want an explanation, I want you to leave."

"I'm pregnant." Scarlett choked on the words but she knew it was the only way to get his attention.

As expected Rhett stopped. She expected his face to light up but it remained cold.

"And who may I ask who is the happy father?"

Scarlett experienced a great deal of pain in her life but nothing as hurtful as her husband's words. Her knees felt weak under the weight of his insult and her ears burned red at the realization the household could hear them.

"It's yours and you know its yours. I wish it were anyone's child but yours!"
Blinded by her own tears, Scarlett rushed to her room and shut door. Sliding to the floor, she curled her legs under her chin and bit her arm to prevent a complete collapse. She expected many things from Rhett Butler but never this. Fighting through her pain Scarlett felt a rush of anger towards Melanie. She ruined everything. She made her look a fool with Ashley and now she'd done the same with Rhett. He couldn't possibly love her, not after the way he treated her. And Scarlett hated him for it and Ashley and the entire world.

Slight movement from inside, distracted Scarlett from her wrath.

"It's alright sweetheart, I'm not angry at you." Scarlett assured, gently massaging her abdomen. "This whole thing has been a great disaster but you are a bright spot. We'll go home to Tara. Everything is always better at Tara."
Scarlett sat in the chair by the window and ignored the knock on the door. She’d spent hours sitting against it, too weak from endless sobbing to move. When she was able Scarlett turned down all lights but one dimly lit lamp and made herself comfortable in the plush chair. She considered going to bed but she knew she wouldn’t fall asleep and the plump pillows would only illicit more tears. Sitting firmly, she turned off all emotions and distracted herself with the view of a starlit sky.

“Scarlett, dear, are you awake,” Eleanor called as she gently opened the bedroom door. “I brought you supper.”

Scarlett jumped at the unexpected entry and instinctively patted her hair and dress. “I didn’t hear the door,” she lied, rising to her feet to help Eleanor with the tray.

“Stay where you are. I’m not so old I can’t carry a simple platter.” Eleanor set the try on the table in front of Scarlett and proceeded to light the lamps in the room. “I had cook make you a plate, try to eat a little.”

Scarlett wanted to reject the offer and stand firm in her anger with Rhett; however, the grumbling in her stomach left her with no alternative but to accept the meal. She could easily inhale the items on the plate but she forced herself to maintain a shred of dignity and eat with restraint.

“I want to apologize for my son’s behavior earlier. It was inappropriate and I told him so. You are my guest and I would like you to stay for as long as you want.”

“Thank you.” Scarlett meekly replied at the unexpected show of support.

Eleanor waited several minutes to allow her daughter-in-law time to eat before she continued. “I couldn’t help but overhear your conversation with Rhett.”

The mention of their public argument made Scarlett’s cheeks flushed in embarrassment. She never cared if her family witness her fights with Rhett but she had hoped to leave a better impression with his relatives.

“I understand how heated discussion can become. Sometimes you say things in the moment…”

Scarlett’s embarrassment quickly turned to ashened horror as she realized Eleanor believed she was lying about the pregnancy. Humiliated, she hardly knew how to react. Carefully searching her mother-in-law’s eyes to see if she came on her own accord or if Rhett sent her to do his bidding. The momentary consideration was quickly pushed aside. Rhett Butler would never send anyone to do his bidding - particularly his beloved mother. No, Eleanor’s interest was her own. Keeping a level head and opened mind, Scarlett recognized the fact the woman might simply be offering her an out - a way to gracefully confess.

“I assure you that everything I said tonight was truthful.”

Eleanor’s face brightened at the news. “I’m so glad. Heavens knows with my spirited children I hardly let myself hope for grandchildren. Do you know when it’s due?”

A wave of relief washed over Scarlett and she allowed herself the freedom to finish her meal with minor urgency. She’d endured too much disappointment to suffer any more.

“She’ll be a spring baby.”
“You think it’s a girl?”

Scarlett searched Eleanor’s face again and was surprised to see a display of sincerity. Smiling broadly, she nodded affirmatively. “After two boys, I think I know the difference.”

“I knew what both my children were before they were born. A mother knows.” Eleanor assured, placing her hand on Scarlett’s. “I’ll get started on pink blanket tomorrow. It may not be as useful in the warm weather but always nice to have around.”
Scarlett's trip to Tara was postponed in favor of Atlanta. Rhett apologized for his behavior and arranged the trip. Since the house was not complete and Rhett refused to stay with Aunt Pittypat, they rented rooms at the hotel and kept their own quarters. Scarlett sent for Wade from Tara and had him stay with Melanie. It was an arrangement all parties supported. Scarlett spent time there every day, Wade spent time with his cousin and Melanie enjoyed the feeling of a busy home.

When Scarlett wasn't at Melanie's or inspecting construction of the house, she spent her time resting at the hotel and that was exactly where Rhett found her.

"What's this?" Scarlett asked with mild interest as Rhett entered her room with a decorated box in his hand.

"Bon bons."

"Who are they for?"

"A connection of mine passed through town from New Orleans, he bought them for a lady friend further north but I convinced him to part with them. I thought you might enjoy them."

"I thought sugar wasn't good for the baby?" Scarlett challenged, spiteful of the endless attention he placed on the baby above herself.

"Perhaps not but I thought you might like them all the same."

"Is this a trick? I eat a box of chocolate and you tell everyone in town that I'm an unfit mother."

Rhett deserved the attack and stood there to take it. He knew he'd been cruel to Scarlett but it was an instinct of self-preservation that he long found necessary in their dealings. Their life in Atlanta was different than before. Scarlett was perfectly ordinary. She ran errands in town, visited friends, spent time with Wade and managed the plans for the house. Rhett seldom saw her near Ashley Wilkes but when he did he saw no interest in her eyes. In fact, he often felt she did not notice his presence. Scarlett's behavior confused and worried him. She was never a conventional woman. She was a passionate ball of energy that kept things interesting. The women he saw now was utterly without fire. Rhett asked Dr. Meade after Scarlett's health and was told she was fine. His inquiries to Mammy provided no further information. In his final attempt, he decided to illicit information from the source with chocolate as the bearing of goodwill. Her reaction to his treat was not wholly unwelcome because it at least drew a reaction.

"I never should have said that." Rhett apologized, recalling the day many months earlier when she lost their first child. "I was wrong and I admit it. I also won't divorce you- even if you're as big as Mammy. So you can eat as many sweets as you like."

Scarlett watched curiously as Rhett opened the box and held it out for inspection. She wanted to resist but the baby's cravings were overwhelming. Scarlett defiantly selected on chocolate and ate it whole. The rich flavor was orgasmic and she eagerly reached out for another. Her gluttonous action elicited a smile from her husband.

"That's the Scarlett I know."

"Oh shut up." Scarlett snapped with a full mouth, grabbing the box. "It's all your fault."

"Perhaps it is." Rhett conceded taking a seat next to her. "Now that you're sufficiently disarmed, I
"You informed me you wanted a divorce. Why would I think you'd respond to my letter?"

"A fair point but you waited quite a while before telling me. You wasted no time informing me of your displeasure last time."

"I'm not displeased." Scarlett mumbled, ignoring Rhett's gaze and searching for another chocolate.

"You're not?"

"I'm quite happy with our little girl. I thought -" Scarlett paused to considered her words. Swallowing the treat she forced her eyes up to face her husband. "I thought you might be too."

Rhett's chest tightened at her remark. Never in a million years did he expect Scarlett to say those words. Too stunned to speak, he didn't notice her get up and gather her things.

"I told Melly I'd come over for her knitting circle."

"I can drive you." Rhett offered. "The carriage is probably still out front. Lord knows they don't rush to a thing at this place."

"The weather is nice and it's not that far, I'll walk." Scarlett replied, struggling with herself briefly before taking another piece of candy.

"I can go with you."

"I don't need a caretaker Rhett. I'm perfectly capable of walking a few blocks."

"I didn't say you did I merely thought I'd accompany you to the Wilkes."

Scarlett scoffed at his remark and headed for the door. "This is all about your jealousy of Ashley. It'll please you to know he won't be there."

Rhett opened his mouth to protest but thought better of it. He'd been a fool but perhaps he wasn't past redemption. Rhett may have misjudged his wife in some areas but one thing he knew with certainty was that she always responded well to elaborate and pricey gifts.
"The house is lovely, Scarlett." Melanie commented as they continued their tour to the upstairs.

"This will be Wade's playroom. And the baby's once she's old enough. This is his bedroom and the nursery." Scarlett noted without much interest since the rooms they passed were incomplete."One of these will be Rhett's, I suppose." she continued, waving her hand in an effort to keep further discussion of her husband at bay.

"It's lovely Scarlett. I've never seen a finer home." Melanie assured, following her friend across the hall.

"This is my room. I made some last minute changes so it's not-" Scarlett stopped at the opened doors and gasped at the sight of a fully finished suite.

"Is this what you had in mind?" Rhett asked with a tempered grin. "I do believe it's extravagant enough to satisfy the Queen herself. Eugenie - not Victoria, who I believe would rather die…"

Scarlett huffed at his teasing but couldn't deny she was pleasantly surprised. Inspecting the room carefully, it took her until she returned to the door to notice Melanie left. Alone with her husband Scarlett turned slowly to face him.

"Why did you do this?"

"I want you to be happy." Rhett offered, his tone free of jest. When Scarlett remained quiet he continued. "The hotel is quite cramped, I thought it might be nice to have our room complete."

"Our room?" Scarlett repeated with a raised eyebrow. Making her way over to the bed, she stood and inspected it. "It is awfully large...too large for one person."

"Scarlett-" Rhett began, walking up beside her and standing so close they nearly touched. "I've been a fool and I'm sorry. I love you Scarlett."

Scarlett's breath caught at his words and the shock caused Rhett to stop.

"Are you alright?"

Quickly brushing away stray tears, Scarlett nodded.

"Are those tears of joy or sorrow?" Rhett wondered as he used his thumb to brush away a new wave.

"Oh Rhett," Scarlett cried turning and burying her face in his chest. "Do you mean it? Do you really love me?"

"You know I do. I've loved you since the moment you threw that vase at me in the library of Twelve Oaks."

Scarlett hated the reminder of the scene but the feeling of Rhett's chest rumbling with laughter was a fair consolation.

"I love you too." Scarlett confessed. "I don't know when it happened but it did."

Rhett raced his hands along his wife's arm to take in her words and presence. He'd given up hope
that their paths would ever avoid cross purposes but here they stood.

"You don't fool me Rhett Butler."

Scarlett's words drew Rhett from his thoughts and he looked at her with puzzled misunderstanding.

"This is all an elaborate ploy to feel the baby." Scarlett teased with her girlhood smile.

"I will confess, the thought did cross my mind." Rhett grinned, moving his hands to either side of her abdomen. "My mother tells me we're having a girl. Does she have a name?"

Scarlett grinned at Rhett's sincere interest in the baby but recoiled at the thought of sharing her idea for names.

"I can see she does." Rhett laughed with approval. "It's undoubtedly awful but I'll get used to it or call her something else entirely."

Pouting at Rhett's teasing, Scarlett kept her mouth shut.

"Don't be a poor sport - particularly since you've already won. You're not planning to name our daughter after the Queen are you?" Rhett inspected his wife's face and chuckled when he realized he'd guessed correctly. "Which one?"

"Both." Scarlett defiantly replied. "I think Eugenie Victoria is a lovely name."

"Genie Butler," Rhett replied, acclimating himself to the name. "Well, it could be worse."
Chapter 22

"Did you see me Mother? Did you see my jump?" Wade cried in excitement, racing over to Scarlett.

"I did precious," Scarlett replied sitting forward in her chair on the patio to greet him. "You are a wonderful horseman, just like Rhett."

Wade beamed at the compliment and looked proudly over at his step-father who was carefully making his way to the bassinet.

"Uncle Rhett said he'll take us to Kentucky when Bonnie's bigger and I can get my own horse."

"Eugenie." Scarlett gently reminded as she glanced disapprovingly at Rhett. "It sounds wonderful. Now go fetch Prissy and have her get you ready for supper. You can tell me all about horses then."

"Alright!" the boy cheerfully exclaimed rushing into the house.

"Oh why must you wake her when she's perfectly peaceful?" Scarlett scolded turning her attention to her dotting husband.

"I can't help it. I simply had to see these beautiful blue eyes." Rhett explained with a smile, gently brushing the baby's cheek to illicit a reaction.

"You're worse than the children. I'd remind you that you'll have to stay up with her tonight but I know you don't care." Scarlett said with an elaborate sigh, falling back into the chair and watching Rhett play with their daughter. "Did you mean it about Kentucky? Can we travel once she's older?"

"Certainly. We can go anywhere you'd like."

"Anywhere?"

"I imagine your fantasy involves a ship. Tired of your massive house already?" Rhett teased, drawing his attention from the baby to grin at Scarlett.

"It's not that. I like Atlanta but there's so much history here." Scarlett stopped to consider both the good times she'd had with Rhett during the war and the unhappy memories of Ashley. While her reputation had been repaired with the old guard and the Wilkes never interfered with the Butlers domestic bliss, Scarlett couldn't help but desire distance. "And I don't want to go to Europe - I mean not especially. I want to go on a boat for other reasons."

"Pray continue, Mrs. Butler." Rhett urged with sincere curiosity.

Their new found relationship never ceased to amaze him and he enjoyed discovering new things about his wife. Scarlett was as charming and entertaining as when he first met her but now she was his and he could relish the smallest details.

"Do you remember when you took me sailing in Charleston?"

"How could I forget?"

"I felt - well I'm not sure exactly…." Scarlett trailed as she considered her emotions and tried to
find the right words. "I felt free. Free from every burden and problem. I want to feel that again. For it to be you and me and nothing else. Well, Wade and...Bonnie." Scarlett conceded, brushing the baby's hair with her finger tips.

"Well it's settled. We'll make plans immediately and leave in the new year- she'll be old enough by then."

"You mean it Rhett?"

"Every word. The whole world can go to hell and I wouldn't care as long as I have you and the children." Rhett replied lifting Scarlet's chin and giving her a kiss. "Let's go inside and give Wade the good news, he'll be the envy of every boy in town."

"We all will. Everyone in Atlanta will be pea green with envy." Scarlett declared with girlish delight.

"Nothing makes you happier than flaunting your wealth in front of the destitute." Rhett laughed with approval.

"That's not true." Scarlett protested, genuinely hurt by his remark. "You make me happier."

"Even if I hadn't a penny to my name?"

Scarlett bit her bottom lip and considered his words. "You're equally handsome and charming?"

"More handsome and charming."

"In that case..."

"I'll be - you really do love me." Rhett chuckled in amazement. "How far we've come."

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