Forgiveness Is What Revenge Is All About

by lisachan

Summary

The morning after Ashley's dreadful surprise party, Rhett comes pay a visit to Melanie.

Notes

It embarrasses me a bit to post a story like this, in which Rhett and Melanie's relationship (which I love in the original book too) gets changed so much. However, clearly embarrassment wasn't enough to prevent me from writing it, and it's not enough now to stop me from posting. Also, I really enjoyed writing this story, and I'm both amazed and amused on how long it turned out to be, especially considered I started writing thinking I'd have nothing longer than two or thee pages by the time I was finished. Boy, did I not know what I was signing up for.

It’s too early in the morning for this to be considered a proper call, but – Rhett realizes as he walks into the hall and asks Dilcey to go tell Mrs. Wilkes he's here – he simply doesn’t care enough to be bothered by it. After all, he spent all night at Belle’s, he hasn’t even stopped at home to clean himself up a bit and change, he still smells like women, whiskey and cheap perfume, and if there was any remaining bit of propriety still intact in this charade that his marriage with Scarlett, he can see it clearly now, has always been, Scarlett herself managed to shatter it with her own pretty ruined hands yesterday, at Ashley’s mill.

Rhett was honestly hoping a night between Belle’s soft arms would be enough to get rid of his rage, if anything. Jealousy’s always been there, resentment too, contempt’s become a good friend
and a formidable ally over the years, but this blind rage, this fury that makes him act uncontrollably violent, this furor that makes him roar like an animal, that makes his eyes shine threateningly like those of a caged beast, that’s new to him, and he’s not sure he knows how to handle it.

It’s the first time in his life he isn’t sure of himself. It’s the first time in his life he’s scared of what he could be capable of doing if he only allowed himself.

Maybe that’s why he came to see Miss Melly, yes, that must be— no, it’s not it. He knows what is it that brought him here this morning, straight out of Belle’s house. He knows what it is, and it’s not a need for comfort, or for Miss Melly’s sweet hands over his head as she tries to soothe him.

No, it’s rage. It’s jealousy. It’s revenge.

When Melly joins him in the parlor, he can’t help but notice she dressed up in a hurry. Of course she’s, as always, the image of honesty, her clear eyes not showing at all how discomforting and upsetting must be, for a married woman like her, to receive a visit from such a man, and in such condition, at such hour of the day. It is discomforting, and upsetting, and unpleasant, and Rhett knows it because he knows women, and he knows women like Melly Wilkes, and he knows them quite well, though they all remain unfathomable mysteries to him, they’ve always been. Scarlett, oh, she’s so much easier to get, so much easier to understand, with her rages and her wild passions — her passion, that never ever burnt for Rhett, not really.

“Captain Butler,” Melly says, clearly embarrassed by having to appear in front of a man so soon, and alone, “You wanted to see me?”

“I did,” he nods coldly, trying to keep his distance. He wasn’t sure why he had come here in first place, but now that he’s looking at Melly’s serene face, now that he’s staring into her clear brown eyes, he knows.

He wants to destroy this. This happiness Melanie clings to with all the strength her tiny little weak fingers can gather. This abiding faith in the love of the people she calls family. This absolute trust she graces Scarlett with – for, Rhett knows it, there’s only one person in Melanie’s little world that never can do any wrong, and that person’s Scarlett, even more than her beloved husband. All this, all these lies Melanie believes to be true, all this deception she’s unknowingly built her pretty house upon, oh, to shatter all this, to see it crumble and fall in front of his eyes, like a tall building with unsteady foundations during an earthquake, ah, to be that earthquake, to be the one with the power to destroy somebody else’s pretty, happy illusion of a family, like he’s seen his own being torn apart by Scarlett’s green cruel eyes.

That’s what he wants. That’s what he wants and he doesn’t care that he does want it only because he’s drunk, and hurt, and his vision’s blurry and unclear. He wants it, and because he wants it, he shall have it.

“Where’s Mr. Wilkes, Miss Melly?” he asks, his voice dark and deep, sounding like a nightmare to his own ears, “Didn’t he think proper to come down and greet me with you? Does he not want to receive me?”

“Why— Captain,” Melanie instantly steps away, a hand on her heart, her eyes now showing clearly how troubled she is to see Rhett like this, “Ashley’s upstairs, he’s still sleeping. It’s pretty early to receive anybody, and I suppose yesterday’s party was a bit hard on him.”

“Was it, now?” Rhett asks with a sardonic smile on his lips, pacing the room. He doesn’t care how threatening he looks as he walks around Melly as if he was a predator trying to corner his prey, for that’s exactly what he is, and Melanie should know. She better know. “Wasn’t yesterday hard on
“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Captain,” Melly says, modestly looking away, her hands crossed over the front of her long, wide skirt. “I’m happy to see you, and I’ll never, never refuse to receive you, but I have to say I’m very uncomfortable with the way you’re acting, and— oh, Captain,” she looks up at him again and in a few seconds she’s by his side, holding his forearm between her small two hands, clinging to it as she would do with a saint had she have to ask for a miracle. “As a sister, I have to tell you. You can’t— You shouldn’t— I mean, listening to such idle gossip, clearly born out of hate and envy, it isn’t like you, Captain. It isn’t proper that you would—” she looks down, clearly embarrassed by having to speak like this but all the same unable to restrain herself, though at first Rhett can’t understand why, “That you would not even go back home, Captain! You’re dressed like you were dressing yesterday and Scarlett— You haven’t come home to Scarlett, Captain, you must never do that.”

That’s when Rhett gets it, finally. There’s worry in Melly’s eyes, and it isn’t for herself, for her reputation, for Ashley’s, or for Rhett’s. She only cares for Scarlett, she’s scolding him, now, because he had the guts to believe idle gossip and leave his wife alone for the night.

If only that was the truth, he thinks as a bitter smile curls his lips, if only he had never known about Scarlett’s true feelings for Ashley, he could be like Melly, now. He could believe it a lie, he could walk defiantly by Scarlett’s side and threaten to kill anybody who dared spread lies about his wife’s good name.

But he can’t. He knows too much to act like this and be true about it. It’d be nothing but a lie, a travesty— his marriage does it enough.

“You’re a pretty fool, Miss Melly,” he says, his voice sharp as a knife, cruel and careless, threatening enough to make Melanie step back abruptly, “Very pretty, but still a fool. And blind, on top of that. I have to say,” he adds, forcing a distant, careless expression on his tense and angry face, “I’ve always held your smartness in great consideration, and I honestly thought you way more observant than this. Because either you don’t see, Miss Melly, or you refuse to see.”

Melanie’s soft brown eyes darken, her delicate features sharpening as she stubbornly looks right into Rhett’s eyes. So brave, so strong, even in her weakness! There’s so much Rhett loves in Melanie, so much; he’s going to miss all that, once he shatters it forever. “Captain,” she says, her voice shaking despite all the effort she puts in trying to keep it steady, “I’m begging you to stop right here and now, forget all you’re trying to say and never speak of it again, or I’ll have to ask you to leave my house—”

“Ah,” Rhett interrupts her, his lips curling into an evil smirk, “So, finally, you do at least admit there is something to say.”

Melanie frowns, pressing a hand against her chest as if trying to tame the wild beat of her heart. “Captain, I’m begging you,” she says.

“Don’t bother,” Rhett shakes his head, “It would be utterly demeaning, especially considering it wouldn’t do you any good. For my mind’s set, Miss Melly,” he says, advancing towards her, taking a twisted pleasure in watching her step further back until her shoulders touch the wall, like a frightened mouse cornered by an hungry cat, “I insist: it’s time we talked about my wife and Mr. Wilkes.”

“No!” Melly instantly says, shaking her head and pressing herself against the wall, as if trying to disappear into it, “Captain, please—”

“Don’t, Miss Melly,” Rhett insists, his voice dark and low as he towers over her, “Don’t beg. It
doesn’t suit you. You’re such a fine lady.”

“Nevertheless, I’ll do it,” she lowers her head, her eyes quickly filling with bitter tears, “Captain, why would you be so mean?” she raises her face, her warm, soft, deep brown eyes finding his, “Why would you do this to me? Why would you talk?”

Rhett looks down sternly at her, and when he speaks again his voice is cold as ice. “Because, my dear Mrs. Wilkes, I will take great pleasure in it.”

Melly’s eyes widen in horror, her arms dropping in sign of desperate resignation. A single tear rolls down her pale cheek when she understands Rhett’s not going to stop. He’s going to say it. And she’ll have no other option but to believe it.

“My wife, Miss Melly, has been in love with your husband since she was nothing but a girl.”

Because she knows it’s true.

“And your husband has always loved her back with a passion, since the beginning.”

She always knew.

“The only reason he didn’t take her, the only reason he’s still with you—”

Always, always.

“—is honor, Melly. It’s to protect what’s left of the good name of his family.”

As if all that was left of her strength had been shed with the only tear that escaped her eyes, she suddenly finds herself unable to stand on her own feet anymore. She leans against the wall, sliding slowly down towards the floor, and the only reason she doesn’t fall down is that Rhett’s hands are quicker to close around her small, flat waist, holding her up.

“Captain,” she begs, her sweet voice broken by sobs, “I beg you, let go of me.”

“No, I won’t,” he says sternly, tightening the grip of his big, dark hands around her small, flat waist, “I don’t see why I should,” he adds, not knowing if it’s the liquor or his rage talking, now, “Your husband took something from me, it’s my right to took something from him as well.”

“No!” Melly weeps, pressing her small hands against Rhett’s broad chest, trying to get him off herself and, of course, failing miserably, “No, Captain Butler, please. He took nothing from you, and you don’t need to— please!”

“I already told you,” Rhett’s hard voice comes as definitive as it can possibly be, “Begging will help you none.”

The words make the air weigh heavily over Melanie’s small shoulders, but her eyes dry up, widening. She knows, now. Even if she refused to see up to a moment before, now she knows she’s been trapped. There’s nobody in that house that can save her, not Dilcey, not even Ashley.

Rhett bends over her, and she looks at him with eyes opened in sheer terror, watching him as if he was a mountain crumbling over her. His lips clash against her in nothing even resembling the kisses – those light, featherlike kisses – she’s used to. They’re hungry and violent and there’s no love in the way they move against her own, in the bites he covers her mouth with. There’s no love, nor respect, nor tenderness. Nothing but silent, deep rage and a bottomless hunger.

Rhett forces Melanie’s lips open, and when she feels his tongue searching for hers, and his strong
arms closing around her waist, cutting her breath, she feels like she’s going to faint, and she welcomes the possibility with joy. As drunk with rage and liquor as Captain Butler can be, she knows he’d never take an unconscious woman. He’d never, and also it’s not what he wants, for he wants her to know what’s happening, and that much even she, with all her naivety, could easily understand. He wouldn’t accept to take her while she was unconscious, even if he could get past his own peculiar sense of honor and take advantage of her state, he’d never do it, because it wouldn’t be what he wants.

What he wants is for her to be aware. For her to know. For her to feel broken and powerless under his fingertips.

So Melly closes her eyes and prays to faint. Let me faint, she prays to God, Please, let me faint, let me stop this before I—, but not even in her prayers she’s able to say that, to admit it to herself. Let me stop this before I start to understand it. Let me stop this before I start to find it right. Let me stop this before I start to want it. Let me stop this before I start to like it.

But she doesn’t.

Rhett kisses her forcefully, rough and disrespectful as much as he can, even more if he can, pushing himself past boundaries he never dared to ignore not even when he was enjoying the company of one of Belle’s girls, or Belle’s herself. He wraps Melanie up in a hug that holds no romance in itself, his hands running up and down her small back. He hears her whimper, feels her broken sobs tremble on his own lips, and he likes it. He likes to feel her so desperate and so weak between his arms – that’s something Scarlett’s never been, Scarlett could never be. As much as he could have her, he could never own her, and that’s something he could never accept.

His strong fingers tug roughly at the small hooks holding her suit closed on her back. Melanie feels some of them coming off, she hears the noises and with each and every one of those noises a wild shiver travels on her skin, giving her goosebumps. Then Rhett’s hands close around the laces of her corset and tug even harder, trying to break it open. Melanie yells in surprise and fear, and Rhett instantly closes her mouth with another kiss, muffling with his lips whatever other sound could come from hers.

He tries to undo the lace without seeing it, but when he understands it’s not coming off in any way he frees her lips and grabs her by her naked shoulders, turning her around with a deep growl. Melanie feels her head spin and everything gets confused. Rhett presses her against the wall, stripping her of her corset, baring her back. His lips close down on her uncovered skin, hot and wet and burning like fire, and she throws her head backwards with a desperate whimper, feeling her whole body growing heavier. She leans back on him and he keeps her up with his own strong body, his lips traveling up the white curve of her shoulder and neck, covering it in soft bites that leave red marks behind as they move forward.

She’s not asking him to stop anymore, she’s not begging him to let her go anymore. Each and every sound coming from her wet lips now is inarticulate, without meaning. She’s unable to form words in her mind, let alone speak them. Her shoulders are shaken by sobs, her chest swells with sighs and quick, broken breaths. Rhett dives her fingers in her hair, undoing her hairdo and tugging at her braids a bit to make her turn her face. The moment she does, his lips descend on hers once again, hungry as before, and he kisses her roughly, biting at her lips, sucking at her tongue.

Her eyes closed, Melanie completely lose knowledge of what she’s doing, and with whom. The soft whimpers escaping her lips start to turn into even softer moans, her small, pink tongue flicking between her swollen lips to moisten them right before her teeth sink into them in bites filled with confusion and anticipation. When Rhett’s hand reaches down, grabbing the hem of her skirt to lift it up, uncovering her bloomers, she moans again, her body instinctively pressing back against
Rhett, that answers to the sudden movement with another hungry growl.

His hands grow restless, close abruptly around her skirt and tug at it, almost ripping the fabric apart. She lets out a small yell that she herself hastens to silence by biting her own lips. She leans against the wall, closing her eyes, as he tugs at her pantalets, pulling them down, the delicate fabric easily tearing at the seams under his powerful grasp.

Melanie doesn’t want to think about what’s going to happen, because she finds the thought disturbingly comforting, and she’s not ready to accept that. India’s harsh voice as she described the scene she had witnessed at the mill starts to roam through her mind, filling it with upsetting images. Ashley’s arms closed around Scarlett’s waist, her small hands closed in fists around his shirt, their bodies so close, their gazes locked, their lips almost drawing breath from one another’s. To feel Rhett’s hand on herself, to feel his wet lips, his hot breath on her skin, feels strangely pleasant, not only because of his rough but expert touch, but because of something else. A guilty feeling of satisfaction. And it takes her a while to finally understand it’s vengeance.

She had never thought herself capable of such a feeling, and yet there it is. There it’s always been, hiding out deep into her soul, disguising itself, avoiding her knowledge. But there it is, and there it always was. Inside her. Only waiting for a reason to surface, or for something to pull it out of her like Rhett’s hands do now that they close around her narrow hips, squeezing them with rough fingers right before he moves closer, presses himself against her, inside her, making her feel impossibly full and ready to close her eyes and faint, this time not because she wants him to stop, but because he’d like for him to never do that.

It’s quicker than she thought it would be, but it blows her mind like nothing ever did before. Rhett’s hardness inside her is so cumbersome she almost feels torn apart by it every time he thrusts his hips forward, but with every push Melanie moans, and not because she’s in pain.

When her moans turn louder, he silences her with kisses once again, pulling her closer, drawing her into an hard, tight hold that almost cuts her breath. She can feel everything, every inch of Rhett’s manhood diving deeper inside her, every touch of his daring, shameless fingers, every caress of his hungry lips. And when it’s over, when pleasure blazes like wildfire inside her womb, when her legs grow weary and shake, threatening not to be able to hold her up anymore, Rhett’s arms don’t lose their grip around her waist. They hold her up, they hold her still, and when she closes her eyes and, finally, overwhelmed, faints, even in her deep sleep she keeps feeling them around herself, a vague and yet incredibly physical feeling, like that featherlike sensations dreams are made of.

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Dilcey has to tell her what happened next, when she finally wakes up. Melanie feels weak and even the slightest move causes her pain. She can barely lift an arm, she can barely find strength enough to keep her eyes opened, and there’s no way she can drag herself upstairs to the bedroom – how could she, anyway? Ashley’s sleeping there. In their bed. How can she ever face him again?, she asks herself confusedly, tears stinging her eyes, as she listens to Dilcey going on and on forever on how she found her lying down on the couch, with all her clothes messily adjusted upon her to cover her nakedness, and no sign of Captain Butler’s presence whatsoever around.

He must have gone away, Melly thinks, as Dilcey begs her to let her take her upstairs and she denies with small movements of her head, settling better on the couch. He must have gone away and left me like this, after everything he did to me.

Strangely enough, the thought doesn’t upset her half as much as it should.

The first thing she does when she feels lucid enough to talk is order Dilcey to run upstairs and
fetch her another dress, and new pantalets. Horrified but discreet as always, Dilcey complies, and
despite clearly disagreeing on her mistress on the whole matter she accepts to help her put her
underwear on, lace the corset and put on the other dress. “Burn these,” Melanie says, pointing a
trembling finger over the clothes she took off, “Burn them in the kitchen, and scatter the ashes.”

As troubled as she is by this decision, Dilcey obeys with nothing but a nod, her dark eyes running
from Melanie’s, as if she was unable to stand her gaze.

When she comes back, Melanie tells her that no one must ever know about Captain Butler’s visit.
It has to remain a secret. She doesn’t need to threaten Dilcey for her to know troubles would
follow if news spread out. And she knows she won’t talk.

Nobody tells Ashley, and Ashley never knows. He comes downstairs an hour after and, finding
her like this, he instantly starts to worry, as Melanie thought he would. He runs by her side, kneels
on the floor and takes her pale hand into his, kissing her palm with wholehearted devotion. She
graces him with a faint smile, looks into his eyes and understands that, even if there is a small part
of her that wants him to feel guilty, that wants to punish him for loving Scarlett, it’s a voice she
has to silence. It’d be pointless, anyway: her husband’s troubled eyes clearly show he’s punishing
himself more than enough for two.

She vaguely wonders if Captain Butler’s home, now. If he met Scarlett. If he found the same kind
of guilt in her eyes and if he, like her, decided there’s no point in punishing both of them anymore.

Then she closes her eyes and loses consciousness again.

* Everybody keeps waiting for her to regain her strength, but it just doesn’t happen. She doesn’t feel
sick, just extremely weak, as if all her blood had suddenly been sucked out of her. Her life doesn’t
seem to be in danger, and so Dr. Meade, after making sure she’s not pregnant again – “But I
swear, Dr. Meade, there’s no way on earth I could be pregnant,” how easily sugar-coated lies find
their way out of her lips –, decides she just needs to rest.

She stays in bed, Ashley’s always by her side when he’s not at the mill, and when he is Dilcey
never leaves her bedroom, except when she receives a visit from some other woman from the
neighborhood, worried for “her dear Melly’s health”. She tries to reassure everybody, telling them
it’s only a matter of time, that she feels better already, that she’s sure she’s going to be able to get
off the bed by the end of the week, but the end of the week passes and so does the end of the next,
and the next, and soon the month is over, and she’s still tucked in bed, unable to move a step out
of her room, only barely able to sit up to have a bite of something, or a cup of hot chicken broth.

She hasn’t heard a word for Captain Butler, and at this point she guesses she’s never going to.

And that’s of course exactly when he comes back.

It’s morning, outside Melanie’s room, but the only reason she knows this is because Ashley’s not
there. Light doesn’t enter her room, blocked at the window by heavy dark green curtains that keep
the room cool despite how hot the sunlight is.

Dilcey enters the room and tells her Captain Butler’s come to visit. From the embarrassment so
clear in her eyes, Melanie can guess she wasn’t expecting him to come, after all. She can’t even
lift her gaze from the floor, and she speaks quickly, in a barely audible whisper, as if saying the
words as fast and low as possible could somehow make the man waiting downstairs disappear.
With the same hasty and worried voice, she warns her mistress: it’d be improper to let Captain
Butler in her room, especially after what happened. There’s not knowing what that man could do,
if left alone with her again.

Dilcey begs her not to receive him, and when Melanie asks her to let him in she begs her to change her mind and send him off. But she doesn’t.

Rhett walks into the shadows of her room just a few moments after. He casts her a quick glance and then, as if unable to stand the image of her – lying down on her bed in her nightgown, surrounded by pillows and blankets, her long brown hair running down her shoulders in soft dark waves – he instantly looks down, eyes locking on the floor.

It’s been more or less a month since Melanie saw him last, and she’s relieved to see he looks definitely better. His clothes are clean and tidy, and he emanates a strong but pleasant smell that instantly fills the room the moment he walks in. She can’t see his eyes, but she knows he hasn’t been drinking, or at least, not as much as he had when they last met.

“Close the door, Captain,” she says softly, inviting him in. He looks up at her for a brief moment and bites at his bottom lip, then looks back down with a sigh and surrenders to comply.

She watches him silently as he walks towards the bed and then kneels beside it. When he looks up, he finds her smiling sweetly at him, and that’s when he gives up. He brings both hands over his face and lets out a broken sobs that make his broad shoulders shake, and Melanie backs off, a hand over her heart, her eyes wide as the moon.

“I’m sorry,” he says in between sobs, “Miss Melly— I’m so sorry.”

“Captain!” she hastens to say, reaching out to put a hand on his shoulder and squeeze it affectionately as much as her small hand lets her, “Please, don’t be like this! Oh, you’re going to make me cry if you don’t stop!”

“Please,” Rhett lowers his hands, looking up at her with eyes red from the tears, “Please, don’t cry. If you did, I couldn’t stand it. I’m so sorry—”

“I know you are, Captain,” she smiles even more sweetly, taking his hands into hers and squeezing them gently, “I’m glad you paid me a visit, but please, know that I wasn’t expecting any apology from you.”

“But you have to forgive me, Miss Melly,” Rhett looks at her, frowning lightly in surprise. And he looks even more surprised when, after she heard him speak, she bursts into a small laughter, closing her eyes and throwing her head backwards as she rests her shoulders against the pillow.

“Forgive you!” she repeats, laughing again. Then she smiles once more, brushing Rhett’s jaw with the back of her fingers. “How can I forgive you, Captain, if I’m just as guilty as you are? For, you see, you would be wrong if you thought that I regret anything that happened between us that morning. It’s done and over, now, and had I the chance to relive it again or avoid it, I would undoubtedly relive it.” Her smile falters a bit, her cheeks turning a darker shade of pink. “Now you see what an awful woman I am, for thinking such thoughts. So, please, don’t ask me for forgiveness. I have none to give.”

Rhett looks at her for a couple of moments, bewildered, silent as if he could gather no words to answer her with. Then he sighs, lets his lips curl into a soft, amused smile and tilts his head to reach for the back of her hands, which he caresses with a small kiss. “You are many things, Miss Melly, but awful definitely isn’t one of them,” he says. Then he looks up and smiles gently, his eyes studying her with the concern of a father. “Are you feeling ill?” he asks, “Is it my fault?”

“Oh, Captain,” Melly chuckles, waving her hand in mid-air, “Don’t be ridiculous, now. I’m
perfectly fine, just a bit weary. And it certainly isn’t your fault. I’ve clearly been wearing myself out, what with all the circles and the commissions and tending the house and to my guests! And you know I’ve always been weak.”

“Delicate,” Rhett corrects her with a fond smile, “You’re a delicate flower, Melly. I’m sorry, Miss —”

“It’s fine,” she hastens to smile, pressing her index finger against his lips, “I guess, all considered, you could call me like that. When we’re alone, I mean,” she adds quickly, looking down as her cheeks get flushed.

Rhett’s smile sweetens up, one of his hands moving to her face, following its elegant outline from her cheekbone to her chin. “Thank you,” he says, “It will be my honor. Now promise me,” he says, standing up, “Promise me you’ll be fine soon.”

“Oh, I will, Captain,” she nods, following his movements with her eyes, “Dr. Meade says I’ll be better in the blink of an eye. And I promise you I’ll be up from this bed by the end of the week.”

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By the end of the week, as promised, she’s up from the bed. And her first official call, the first guest she receives after almost a month of illness, is Captain Butler.

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