seven times Rhett and Scarlet were together, even when they weren’t

by sdqsdq

In ten minutes hidden on the sofa, privy to the words she imagined were private, Rhett Butler learned more about Scarlett O’Hara than anyone in her life had ever known. He knew her in that moment better than her mother knew her. It would have wounded Scarlett beyond imagining if she could have guessed that he was right.

He liked it, recognized her as one of his own kind even if she wouldn’t have dared to admit it, and he knew they would become better acquainted.

Scarlett, consumed with Ashley Wilkes, could not think past that evening.

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If Scarlett had noticed, or was capable of noticing such things, she would have seen that the sad and dreamy look in the eyes of Wilkes people only came about after one of their beloved had crossed the great divide. Ashley’s eyes were not born with a deep-down sorrow in them. There had been someone he had loved deeply and cleaved his soul unto and that person had gone to their great reward.

Rhett saw it and understood the pain in Ashley’s eyes.

Melanie saw it, and she understood the sadness, but she could never have understood the reason behind it.

Scarlett never saw it, nor understood it, nor would have realized it if she had.

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Scarlett saw herself, dressed in green velvet, sitting on a curbside stand and waiting for a two-bit hack. She saw herself as others saw her, low and fallen, draggled in the mud.

She thought, quickly and briefly, of what Ashley would think of her. She convinced herself that Ashley would be proud of her gumption. Then she put him out of her mind, for it made her uncomfortable.
Later, she thought perhaps her thoughts of Ashley had jinxed her plan with Rhett, but Rhett couldn’t have possibly known what Scarlett had been thinking. Or perhaps he would not have cared.

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Atlanta people thought Scarlett wore green, the colour of Yankee bills, to bring her more cash money backed by the Federal government and all the filthy lucre she could ever want.

Rhett knew she wore green, the colour of her eyes, because it was her Irish coming out, and she dressed herself in the land that she loved so fiercely. She wore Tara on her body even miles away. It had never left her mind for a moment.

Scarlett wore green because it brought out the creamy white of her skin and set off her curling dark hair, and it looked best with the heavy rubies she loved to adorn herself with. She wore green because she looked best in it and a beautiful woman always got what she wanted.

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Rhett would wait until everyone else was admiring the stained glass at the other end of the altar, and Scarlett had stayed to kneel at the altar to the Blessed Virgin and bend her head in prayer—then kiss the nape of her neck gently and breathe softly into the dark curls clustered there. Scarlett leapt up, swatting him away. “Rhett!”

“Oh, you can’t convince me that you’ve been praying, my dear. When was the last time you darkened the door of a church in Atlanta?” Rhett teased.

Scarlett would have blushed if Rhett was not telling the truth. She had been very aware (and satisfied with) how pretty and devout she looked on her knees.

Scarlett did not see the face of her mother in the statue Virgin. A cold chill of fear went through her at the thought that perhaps she no longer could.

The sweet syrupy New Orleans drawl of the guide returned them to the tour.

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Rhett was no stranger to appreciating beauty, and he admired the way Scarlett’s hair waterfalled across his chest and twirled it around his index finger. When he noticed her eyes were open and her mind was elsewhere, he asked: “My dear, I know you’re not praying. What brings on your agitation at this hour?”

“I’m thinking of how much more profit I can make next month when the days start to get longer.” She sighed heavily.

Rhett sighed, hardly perceptibly, though Scarlett didn’t notice. She had never noticed much, when it came to Rhett. Maybe she should have. Maybe she shouldn’t have.

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Ashley could never have understood her. Even if he had married her; even if he had wanted to. He could no more understand Scarlett than a house cat could understand the bird of paradise it had caught.

He had never suffered. Yes, he had been captured and sent to Rock Island, and he had been ill and he had gone without food; yes, he had spent days and nights without end in the mud and he
had watched his friends from childhood and his allies die before his eyes; yes, he, Ashley Wilkes from Twelve Oaks, who had never even spoken harshly to another person in his life, he had shot men and stabbed them and watched them suffer in agony and die, calling for their mothers.

It had never penetrated into his blessedly quiet psyche. He had understood the pain and he had grieved and mourned his losses, but somehow his soul had never twisted and burned in the flames as Scarlett’s had.

No one had ever come to him, demanding his leadership, desperate with hunger and illness and sobbing for food. He was ashamed of his own weakness, ashamed that Scarlett supported him and his wife and son. Shame was the deepest emotion that he felt with Scarlett.

From the first time Rhett saw Ashley, he knew that Ashley would never have any more spine than a jellyfish. He pitied Ashley as one pitied elderly relatives who already lived half in a dream world, but Rhett also had contempt for Ashley and could barely keep the sneer out of his voice around him.

Scarlett’s soul after the war had become like iron, while Rhett’s soul had never been anything but cold silver that reflected faults back at their owners; but Ashley’s soul had melted into a pool of useless gold.

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