Business Before Pleasure

by wings128

Summary

Scarlett finds a man in her barn.

Notes

Written in response to this prompt from rhia_starsong in the secret character meme over at LJ.

Hrm, characters 8 and 15 survive the apocalypse, y/n? If not, why?

Weak as she was, the effort of dragging the Yankee blaggard from the front hall out here to the barn, had left her gasping like a landed fish and her belly clutching in on itself. With each pacing day, Scarlett’s hunger grew; clawing and scrabbling beneath her stays like the plague of reawakened dead that’d ravaged all of Clayton County.

John Wilkes, dead these past ten years, had led the charge up the gentle but no longer green slope to Tara’s door; his soldiers bearing the warped faces of her childhood friends killed in Sherman’s slaughter. She knew no notion ’sides witchcraft to explain away the terror of those last days, didn’t want to know. All that was important, all that matter’d was buryin’ this sorry excuse for a man, so if anyone came a’lookin’ for him…

Scarlett stopped, her muscles stretched and loose like pulled taffy, and leaned for just a moment against the door frame, green eyes dulled from fatigue and fright closing with the pleasure of
They flew open again, darting wide and wild, surveyed the dim interior of the poorly-stocked barn. The horse had been set to slaughter long since. Nothing should be in here; nothing alive, nothing good.

With her heart beating like a frightened bird against her ribs, Scarlett walked her fingers to where the shovel hung on the rusted hook, palm wrapping gratefully around cool iron that felt reassuring in her grasp. The door flung wide on a protest of neglected hinges, a dull thud of a worn shoe tossed free in the movement.

He was injured, she noticed first thing; red of a dove’s heart leached from his sheared brown locks, stained wet down his dark green tunic. The man, she hoped he was a man and not one of those…things; she would not think about that now - nor tomorrow either. She could do with a man, someone for the others to look to, someone to tell her what she should do, someone…

Scarlett stepped closer, brandished the cut of the shovel before her; her only defence against who, or what, he claimed to be. He breathed, was that a good sign? Dressed in the attire of a woodsman from her books, he appeared the injured hero. Perhaps if she nursed him, shared the last of the onion gruel, he would think kindly on her. Scarlett couldn’t help thinking on how she looked and bit her dry lips to redden them as she knocked his leg with the shovel; sharp and insistent.

He startled, slipping from his perch on the remains of their straw with a squawk that made Scarlett chuckle daintily. Perhaps, just perhaps.

The man, she could see he was definitely a man, alive with vibrant blood flushing beneath his golden skin, opened eyes sharp and cool as a winter’s day and looked up at her before taking in her weapon. Scarlett hadn’t been prepared for the spark of interest warming its way down inside her, curling deep in the place where she’d had no man since Charles, and even then. She squared her shoulders, tried to look threatening despite wearing only one slipper and the stragglers of her raven tresses falling in her eyes.

“Who are you?” Her voice wavered and dipped, sounded like a young belle fending off her first suitor. “How do you come by here?”

“Hansel.” Those eyes, the ones Scarlett could not turn from; lifted the corner of injured lips, carried amusement in a world where mirth had long since perished. “I was hunting a witch’s army of zombies.”

Scarlett did not fathom this man’s speech. He was not from anywhere she’d been, yet she needed him to stay. Perhaps he would catch one of those zombys and they could feast on something that offered restful sleep in gratitude for a full belly.

Hansel had risen to his feet while Scarlett was caught among her thoughts; he wavered but seemed well enough.

“You are in need of some assistance.” It was no inquiry, so he was not witless. She had no need of another dependent upon her weary shoulders.

“I am indeed, kind sir,” Scarlett bobbed a shadow of a curtsy and answered Hansel’s grin with a practised smile. “I’d be mightily obliged if you’d offer your services.”

Hansel reached for the shovel, hot breath teasing across her bare neck as his fingers brushed against hers.

“Business before pleasure, mistress.”
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