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Opening Extract from...

Gone with the Wind

Written by Margaret Mitchell

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To J.R.M.



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PART ONE

1

SCARLETT O'HARA was not beautiful, but men seldom realized it when caught by her charm as the Tarleton twins were. In her face were too sharply blended the delicate features of her mother, a Coast aristocrat of French descent, and the heavy ones of her florid Irish father. But it was an arresting face, pointed of chin, square of jaw. Her eyes were pale green without a touch of hazel, starred with bristly black lashes and slightly tilted at the ends. Above them, her thick black brows slanted upward, cutting a startling oblique line in her magnolia-white skin—that skin so prized by Southern women and so carefully guarded with bonnets, veils and mittens against hot Georgia suns.

Seated with Stuart and Brent Tarleton in the cool shade of the porch of Tara, her father's plantation, that bright April afternoon of 1861, she made a pretty picture. Her new green flowered-muslin dress spread its twelve yards of billowing material over her hoops and exactly matched the flat-heeled green morocco slippers her father had recently brought her from Atlanta. The dress set off to perfection the seventeen-inch waist, the smallest in three counties, and the tightly fitting basque showed breasts well matured for her sixteen years. But for all the modesty of her spreading skirts, the demureness of hair netted smoothly into a chignon and the quietness of small white hands folded in her lap, her true self was poorly concealed. The green eyes in the carefully sweet face were turbulent, wilful, lusty with life, distinctly at variance with her decorous demeanour. Her manners had been imposed upon her by her mother's gentle admonitions and the sterner discipline of her mammy; her eyes were her own.

On either side of her, the twins lounged easily in their chairs, squinting at the sunlight through tall mint-garnished glasses as they laughed and talked, their long legs, booted to the knee and thick with saddle muscles, crossed negligently. Nineteen years old, six feet two inches tall, long of bone and hard of muscle, with sunburned faces and deep auburn hair, their eyes merry and arrogant, their bodies clothed in identical blue coats and mustard-coloured breeches, they were as much alike as two bolls of cotton.

Outside, the late afternoon sun slanted down in the yard, throwing into gleaming brightness the dogwood trees that were solid masses of white blossoms against the background of new green. The twins' horses were hitched in the driveway, big animals, red as their masters' hair; and around the horses' legs quarrelled the pack of lean, nervous possum hounds that accompanied Stuart and Brent wherever they went. A little aloof, as became an aristocrat, lay a black-spotted carriage dog, muzzle on paws, patiently waiting for the boys to go home to supper.

Between the hounds and the horses and the twins there was a kinship deeper than that of their constant companionship. They were all healthy, thoughtless young animals, sleek, graceful, high-spirited, the boys as mettlesome as the horses they rode, mettlesome and dangerous but, withal, sweet-tempered to those who knew how to handle them.

Although born to the ease of plantation life, waited on hand and foot since infancy, the faces of the three on the porch were neither slack nor soft. They had the vigour and alertness of country people who have spent all their lives in the open and troubled their heads very little with dull things in books. Life in the north Georgia county of Clayton was still new and, according to the standards of Augusta, Savannah and Charleston, a little crude. The more sedate and older sections of the South looked down their noses at the up-country Georgians, but here in north Georgia, a lack of the niceties of classical education carried no shame, provided a man was smart in the things that mattered. And raising good cotton, riding well, shooting straight, dancing lightly, squiring the ladies with elegance and carrying one's liquor like a gentleman were the things that mattered.

In these accomplishments the twins excelled, and they were equally outstanding in their notorious inability to learn anything contained between the covers of books. Their family had more money, more horses, more slaves than anyone else in the County, but the boys had less grammar than most of their poor Cracker neighbours.

It was for this precise reason that Stuart and Brent were idling on the porch of Tara this April afternoon. They had just been expelled from the University of Georgia, the fourth university that had thrown them out in two years; and their older brothers, Tom and Boyd, had come home with them, because they refused to remain at an institution where the twins were not welcome. Stuart and Brent considered their latest expulsion a fine joke, and Scarlett, who had not

willingly opened a book since leaving the Fayetteville Female Academy the year before, thought it just as amusing as they did.

'I know you two don't care about being expelled, or Tom either,' she said. 'But what about Boyd? He's kind of set on getting an education, and you two have pulled him out of the University of Virginia and Alabama and South Carolina and now Georgia. He'll never get finished at this rate.'

'Oh, he can read law in Judge Parmalee's office over in Fayetteville,' answered Brent carelessly. 'Besides, it don't matter much. We'd have had to come home before the term was out anyway.'

'Why?'

'The war, goose! The war's going to start any day, and you don't suppose any of us would stay in college with a war going on, do you?'

'You know there isn't going to be any war,' said Scarlett, bored. 'It's all just talk. Why, Ashley Wilkes and his father told Pa just last week that our commissioners in Washington would come to—to— an—amicable agreement with Mr. Lincoln about the Confederacy. And anyway, the Yankees are too scared of us to fight. There won't be any war, and I'm tired of hearing about it.'

'Not going to be any war!' cried the twins indignantly, as though they had been defrauded.

'Why, honey, of course there's going to be a war,' said Stuart. 'The Yankees may be scared of us, but after the way General Beauregard shelled them out of Fort Sumter day before yesterday, they'll have to fight or stand branded as cowards before the whole world. Why, the Confederacy——'

Scarlett made a mouth of bored impatience.

'If you say "war" just once more, I'll go in the house and shut the door. I've never gotten so tired of any one word in my life as "war", unless it's "secession". Pa talks war morning, noon and night, and all the gentlemen who come to see him shout about Fort Sumter and States' Rights and Abe Lincoln till I get so bored I could scream! And that's all the boys talk about, too, that and their old Troop. There hasn't been any fun at any party this spring because the boys can't talk about anything else. I'm mighty glad Georgia waited till after Christmas before it seceded or it would have ruined the Christmas parties, too. If you say "war" again, I'll go in the house.'

She meant what she said, for she could never long endure any conversation of which she was not the chief subject. But she smiled

when she spoke, consciously deepening her dimple and fluttering her bristly black lashes as swiftly as butterflies' wings. The boys were enchanted, as she had intended them to be, and they hastened to apologize for boring her. They thought none the less of her for her lack of interest. Indeed, they thought more. War was men's business, not ladies', and they took her attitude as evidence of her femininity.

Having manoeuvred them away from the boring subject of war, she went back with interest to their immediate situation.

'What did your mother say about you two being expelled again?'

The boys looked uncomfortable, recalling their mother's conduct three months ago when they had come home, by request, from the University of Virginia.

'Well,' said Stuart, 'she hasn't had a chance to say anything yet. Tom and us left home early this morning before she got up, and Tom's laying out over at the Fontaines' while we came over here.'

'Didn't she say anything when you got home last night?'

'We were in luck last night. Just before we got home that new stallion Ma got in Kentucky last month was brought in, and the place was in a stew. The big brute—he's a grand horse, Scarlett; you must tell your pa to come over and see him right away—he'd already bitten a hunk out of his groom on the way down here and he'd trampled two of Ma's darkies who met the train at Jonesboro. And just before we got home, he'd about kicked the stable down and half-killed Strawberry, Ma's old stallion. When we got home, Ma was out in the stable with a sackful of sugar smoothing him down and doing it mighty well, too. The darkies were hanging from the rafters, pop-eyed, they were so scared, but Ma was talking to the horse like he was folks and he was eating out of her hand. There ain't nobody like Ma with a horse. And when she saw us she said: "In Heaven's name, what are you four doing home again? You're worse than the plagues of Egypt!" And then the horse began snorting and rearing and she said: "Get out of here! Can't you see he's nervous, the big darling? I'll tend to you four in the morning!" So we went to bed, and this morning we got away before she could catch us and left Boyd to handle her.'

'Do you suppose she'll hit Boyd?' Scarlett, like the rest of the County, could never get used to the way small Mrs. Tarleton bullied her grown sons and laid her riding-crop on their backs if the occasion seemed to warrant it.

Beatrice Tarleton was a busy woman, having on her hands not

only a large cotton plantation, a hundred negroes and eight children, but the largest horse-breeding farm in the state as well. She was hot-tempered and easily plagued by the frequent scrapes of her four sons, and while no one was permitted to whip a horse or a slave, she felt that a lick now and then didn't do the boys any harm.

'Of course she won't hit Boyd. She never did beat Boyd much because he's the oldest and besides he's the runt of the litter,' said Stuart, proud of his six feet two. 'That's why we left him at home to explain things to her. God'lmighty, Ma ought to stop licking us! We're nineteen and Tom's twenty-one, and she acts like we're six years old.'

'Will your mother ride the new horse to the Wilkes barbecue to-morrow?'

'She wants to, but Pa says he's too dangerous. And, anyway, the girls won't let her. They said they were going to have her go to one party at least like a lady, riding in the carriage.'

'I hope it doesn't rain to-morrow,' said Scarlett. 'It's rained nearly every day for a week. There's nothing worse than a barbecue turned into an indoor picnic.'

'Oh, it'll be clear to-morrow and hot as June,' said Stuart. 'Look at that sunset. I never saw one redder. You can always tell weather by sunsets.'

They looked out across the endless acres of Gerald O'Hara's newly ploughed cotton fields toward the red horizon. Now that the sun was setting in a welter of crimson behind the hills across the Flint River, the warmth of the April day was ebbing into a faint but balmy chill.

Spring had come early that year, with warm quick rains and sudden frothing of pink peach blossoms and dogwood dappling with white stars the dark river swamp and far-off hills. Already the ploughing was nearly finished, and the bloody glory of the sunset coloured the fresh-cut furrows of red Georgia clay to even redder hues. The moist hungry earth, waiting upturned for the cotton seeds, showed pinkish on the sandy tops of furrows, vermilion and scarlet and maroon where shadows lay along the sides of the trenches. The whitewashed brick plantation house seemed an island set in a wild red sea, a sea of spiralling, curving, crescent billows petrified suddenly at the moment when the pink-tipped waves were breaking into surf. For here were no long, straight furrows, such as could be seen in the yellow clay fields of the flat middle Georgia country or in the lush black earth of the coastal plantations. The rolling foothill country

of north Georgia was ploughed in a million curves to keep the rich earth from washing down into the river bottoms.

It was a savagely red land, blood-coloured after rains, brick-dust in droughts, the best cotton land in the world. It was a pleasant land of white houses, peaceful ploughed fields and sluggish yellow rivers, but a land of contrasts, of brightest sun-glare and densest shade. The plantation clearings and miles of cotton fields smiled up to a warm sun, placid, complacent. At their edges rose the virgin forests, dark and cool even in the hottest noons, mysterious, a little sinister, the sighing pines seeming to wait with an age-old patience, to threaten with soft sighs: 'Be careful! Be careful! We had you once. We can take you back again.'

To the ears of the three on the porch came the sounds of hooves, the jingling of harness chains and the shrill careless laughter of negro voices, as the field hands and mules came in from the fields. From within the house floated the soft voice of Scarlett's mother, Ellen O'Hara, as she called to the little black girl who carried her basket of keys. The high-pitched childish voice answered 'Yas'm,' and there were sounds of footsteps going out the back way toward the smoke-house where Ellen would ration out the food to the home-coming hands. There was the click of china and the rattle of silver as Pork, the valet-butler of Tara, laid the table for supper.

At these last sounds, the twins realized it was time they were starting home. But they were loath to face their mother and they lingered on the porch of Tara, momentarily expecting Scarlett to give them an invitation to supper.

'Look, Scarlett. About tomorrow,' said Brent. 'Just because we've been away and didn't know about the barbecue and the ball, that's no reason why we shouldn't get plenty of dances to-morrow night. You haven't promised them all, have you?'

'Well, I have! How did I know you all would be home? I couldn't risk being a wallflower just waiting on you two.'

'You a wallflower!' The boys laughed uproariously.

'Look, honey. You've got to give me the first waltz and Stu the last one and you've got to eat supper with us. We'll sit on the stair landing like we did at the last ball and get Mammy Jincy to come tell our fortunes again.'

'I don't like Mammy Jincy's fortunes. You know she said I was going to marry a gentleman with jet-black hair and a long black moustache, and I don't like black-haired gentlemen.'

'You like 'em red-headed, don't you, honey?' grinned Brent. 'Now, come on, promise us all the waltzes and the supper.'

'If you'll promise, we'll tell you a secret,' said Stuart.

'What?' cried Scarlett, alert as a child at the word.

'Is it what we heard yesterday in Atlanta, Stu? If it is, you know we promised not to tell.'

'Well, Miss Pitty told us.'

'Miss Who?'

'You know, Ashley Wilkes' cousin who lives in Atlanta, Miss Pitty-pat Hamilton—Charles and Melanie Hamilton's aunt.'

'I do, and a sillier old lady I never met in all my life.'

'Well, when we were in Atlanta yesterday, waiting for the home train, her carriage went by the depot and she stopped and talked to us, and she told us there was going to be an engagement announced to-morrow night at the Wilkes ball.'

'Oh, I know about that,' said Scarlett in disappointment. 'That silly nephew of hers, Charlie Hamilton, and Honey Wilkes. Everybody's known for years that they'd get married some time, even if he did seem kind of lukewarm about it.'

'Do you think he's silly?' questioned Brent. 'Last Christmas you sure let him buzz round you plenty.'

'I couldn't help him buzzing,' Scarlett shrugged negligently. 'I think he's an awful sissy.'

'Besides, it isn't his engagement that's going to be announced,' said Stuart triumphantly. 'It's Ashley's to Charlie's sister, Miss Melanie!'

Scarlett's face did not change but her lips went white—like a person who has received a stunning blow without warning and who, in the first moments of shock, does not realize what has happened. So still was her face as she stared at Stuart that he, never analytic, took it for granted that she was merely surprised and very interested.

'Miss Pitty told us they hadn't intended announcing it till next year, because Miss Melly hasn't been very well; but with all the war talk going around, everybody in both families thought it would be better to get married real soon. So it's to be announced to-morrow night at the supper intermission. Now, Scarlett, we've told you the secret, so you've got to promise to eat supper with us.'

'Of course I will,' Scarlett said automatically.

'And all the waltzes?'

'All.'

‘You’re sweet! I’ll bet the other boys will be hopping mad.’

‘Let ‘em be mad,’ said Brent. ‘We two can handle ‘em. Look, Scarlett. Sit with us at the barbecue in the morning.’

‘What?’

Stuart repeated his request.

‘Of course.’

The twins looked at each other jubilantly but with some surprise. Although they considered themselves Scarlett’s favoured suitors, they had never before gained tokens of this favour so easily. Usually she made them beg and plead, while she put them off, refusing to give a Yes or No answer, laughing if they sulked, growing cool if they became angry. And here she had practically promised them the whole of to-morrow—seats by her at the barbecue, all the waltzes (and they’d see to it that the dances were all waltzes!) and the supper intermission. That was worth getting expelled from the university.

Filled with new enthusiasm by their success, they lingered on, talking about the barbecue and the ball and Ashley Wilkes and Melanie Hamilton, interrupting each other, making jokes and laughing at them, hinting broadly for invitations to supper. Some time had passed before they realized that Scarlett was having very little to say. The atmosphere had somehow changed. Just how, the twins did not know, but the fine glow had gone out of the afternoon. Scarlett seemed to be paying little attention to what they said, although she made the correct answers. Sensing something they could not understand, baffled and annoyed by it, the twins struggled along for a while, and then rose reluctantly, looking at their watches.

The sun was low across the new-ploughed fields and the tall woods across the river were looming blackly in silhouette. Chimney swallows were darting swiftly across the yard, and chickens, ducks and turkeys were waddling and strutting and straggling in from the fields.

Stuart bellowed: ‘Jeems!’ And after an interval a tall black boy of their own age ran breathlessly around the house and out toward the tethered horses. Jeems was their body-servant and, like the dogs, accompanied them everywhere. He had been their childhood playmate and had been given to the twins for their own on their tenth birthday. At the sight of him, the Tarleton hounds rose up out of the red dust and stood waiting expectantly for their masters. The boys bowed, shook hands and told Scarlett they’d be over at the Wilkes’ early in the morning, waiting for her. Then they were off down the

walk at a rush, mounted their horses and, followed by Jeems, went down the avenue of cedars at a gallop, waving their hats and yelling back to her.

When they had rounded the curve of the dusty road that hid them from Tara, Brent drew his horse to a stop under a clump of dogwood. Stuart halted, too, and the darky boy pulled up a few paces behind them. The horses, feeling slack reins, stretched down their necks to crop the tender spring grass, and the patient hounds lay down again in the soft red dust and looked up longingly at the chimney swallows circling in the gathering dusk. Brent's wide ingenuous face was puzzled and mildly indignant.

'Look,' he said. 'Don't it look to you like she would of asked us to stay for supper?'

'I thought she would,' said Stuart. 'I kept waiting for her to do it, but she didn't. What do you make of it?'

'I don't make anything of it. But it just looks to me like she might of. After all, it's our first day home and she hasn't seen us in quite a spell. And we had lots more things to tell her.'

'It looked to me like she was mighty glad to see us when we came.'

'I thought so, too.'

'And then, about a half-hour ago, she got kind of quiet, like she had a headache.'

'I noticed that but I didn't pay it any mind then. What do you suppose ailed her?'

'I dunno. Do you suppose we said something that made her mad?'

They both thought for a minute.

'I can't think of anything. Besides, when Scarlett gets mad, everybody knows it. She don't hold herself in like some girls do.'

'Yes, that's what I like about her. She don't go around being cold and hateful when she's mad—she tells you about it. But it was something we did or said that made her shut up talking and look sort of sick. I could swear she was glad to see us when we came and was aiming to ask us to supper.'

'You don't suppose it's because we got expelled?'

'Hell, no! Don't be a fool. She laughed like everything when we told her about it. And besides Scarlett don't set any more store by book learning than we do.'

Brent turned in the saddle and called to the negro groom.

'Jeems!'

'Suh?'

'You heard what we were talking to Miss Scarlett about?'

'Nawsuh, Mist' Brent! Huccome you think Ah be spyin' on w'ite folks?'

'Spying, my God! You darkies know everything that goes on. Why, you liar, I saw you with my own eyes sidle round the corner of the porch and squat in the cape jessamine bush by the wall. Now, did you hear us say anything that might have made Miss Scarlett mad—or hurt her feelings?'

Thus appealed to, Jeems gave up further pretence of not having overheard the conversation and furrowed his black brow.

'Nawsuh, Ah din' notice y'all say anything ter mek her mad. Look ter me lak she sho glad ter see you an' sho had missed you, an' she cheep along happy as a bird, tell 'bout de time y'all got ter talkin' 'bout Mist' Ashley an' Miss Melly Hamilton gittin' mah'ied. Den she quiet down lak a bird w'en de hawk fly ober.'

The twins looked at each other and nodded, but without comprehension.

'Jeems is right. But I don't see why,' said Stuart. 'My Lord! Ashley don't mean anything to her, 'cept a friend. She's not crazy about him. It's us she's crazy about.'

Brent nodded an agreement.

'But do you suppose,' he said, 'that maybe Ashley hadn't told her he was going to announce it to-morrow night and she was mad at him for not telling her, an old friend, before he told everybody else? Girls set a big store on knowing such things first.'

'Well, maybe. But what if he hadn't told her it was to-morrow? It was supposed to be a secret and a surprise, and a man's got a right to keep his own engagement quiet, hasn't he? We wouldn't have known it if Miss Melly's aunt hadn't let it out. But Scarlett must have known he was going to marry Miss Melly some time. Why, we've known it for years. The Wilkes and Hamiltons always marry their own cousins. Everybody knew he'd probably marry her some day, just like Honey Wilkes is going to marry Miss Melly's brother, Charles.'

'Well, I give it up. But I'm sorry she didn't ask us to supper. I swear I don't want to go home and listen to Ma take on about us being expelled. It isn't as if this was the first time.'

'Maybe Boyd will have smoothed her down by now. You know