



Margaret Mitchell

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PART ONE

CHAPTER I

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. However, 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, willful, and lusty with life,

distinctly at variance with her decorous demeanor. 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-colored 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 quarreled 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, 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 vigor 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, and more slaves than anyone else in the County, but the boys had less grammar than most of their poor Cracker neighbors.

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 as 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 until 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 am mighty glad Georgia waited until 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 maneuvered 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, popeyed, 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 black people 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'llmighty, 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 tomorrow?"

"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 tomorrow," 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 tomorrow 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 plowed 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 plowing was nearly finished, and the bloody glory of the sunset colored the fresh-cut furrows of red Georgia clay to even redder hues. The moist hungry earth, waiting upturned for the cottonseeds, 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 spiraling, 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 plowed in a million curves to keep the rich earth from washing down into the river bottoms.

It was a savagely red land, blood-colored after rains, brick dust in droughts, the best cotton land in the world. It was a pleasant land of white houses, peaceful plowed 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 souging 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 black people voices, as the field hands and mules came in from the fields. From within the house

CONTENTS

PART ONE

CHAPTER I	3
CHAPTER II	27
CHAPTER III	49
CHAPTER IV	76
CHAPTER V	92
CHAPTER VI	115
CHAPTER VII	159

PART TWO

CHAPTER VIII	171
CHAPTER IX	196
CHAPTER X	241
CHAPTER XI	256
CHAPTER XII	265
CHAPTER XIII	289
CHAPTER XIV	309
CHAPTER XV	324
CHAPTER XVI	341

PART THREE

CHAPTER XVII	353
CHAPTER XVIII	381
CHAPTER XIX	400

CHAPTER XX	419
CHAPTER XXI	430
CHAPTER XXII	449
CHAPTER XXIII	457
CHAPTER XXIV	481
CHAPTER XXV	517
CHAPTER XXVI	535
CHAPTER XXVII	563
CHAPTER XXVIII	579
CHAPTER XXIX	599
CHAPTER XXX	616