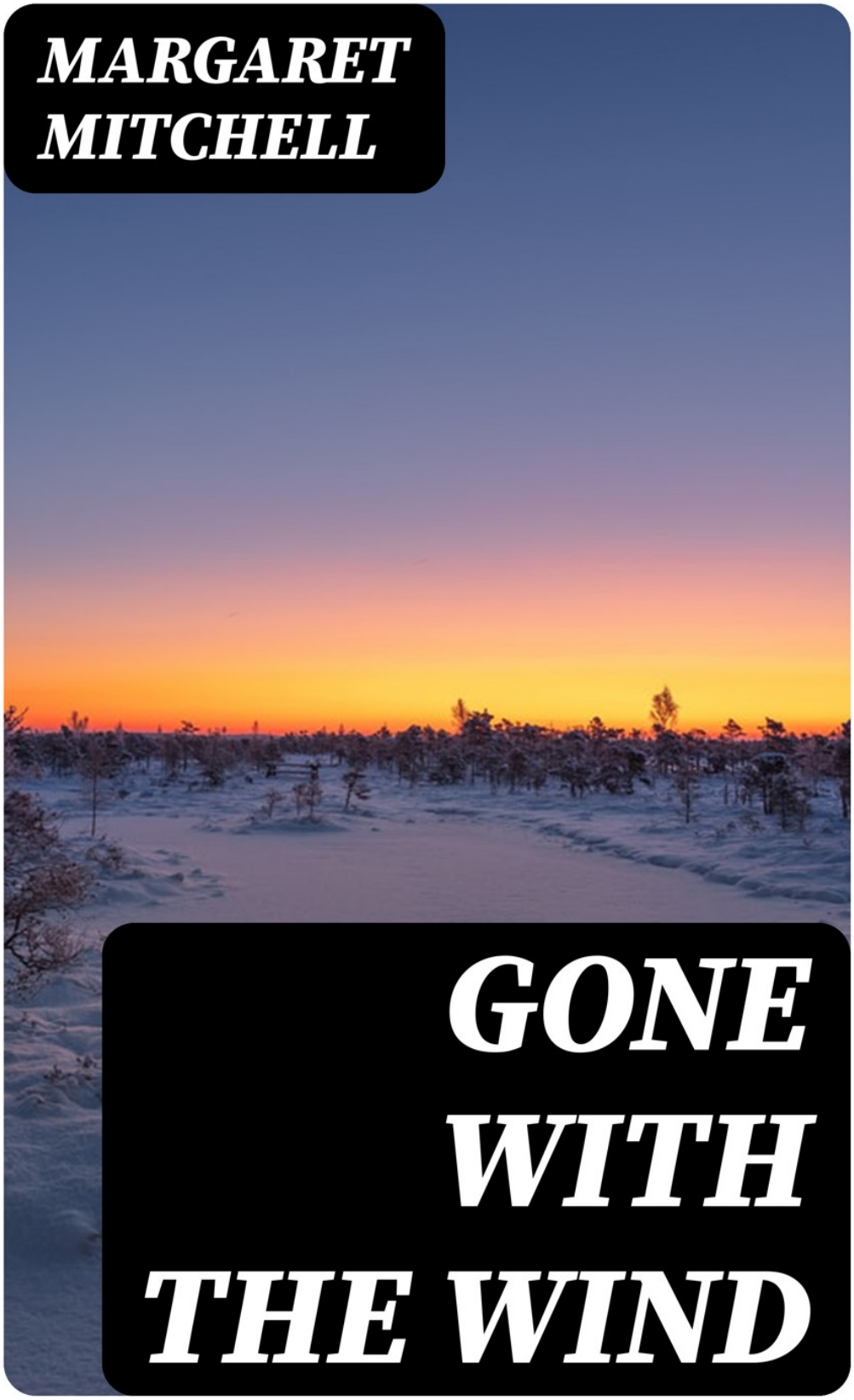
MARGARET
MITCHELL
GONE
WITH
THE WIND

Margaret Mitchell

Gone with the Wind

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PART ONE

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CHAPTER I

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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, willful, 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 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 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, more slaves than any one 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 soughing 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

smokehouse 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 tomorrow 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 mustache, 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 Pittypat 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 tomorrow 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 tomorrow 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 favored suitors, they had never before gained tokens of this favor 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 tomorrow — 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. This 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-plowed 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 Wilkeses' 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 pretense 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 tomorrow 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 tomorrow? 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 sometime. 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 what a slick talker that little varmint is. You know he always can smooth her down.”

“Yes, he can do it, but it takes Boyd time. He has to talk around in circles till Ma gets so confused that she gives up and tells him to save his voice for his law practice. But he ain’t had time to get good started yet. Why, I’ll bet you Ma is still so excited about the new horse that she’ll never even realize we’re home again till she sits down to supper tonight and sees Boyd. And before supper is over she’ll be going strong and breathing fire. And it’ll be ten o’clock before Boyd gets a chance to tell her that it wouldn’t have been honorable for any of us to stay in college after the way the

Chancellor talked to you and me. And it'll be midnight before he gets her turned around to where she's so mad at the Chancellor she'll be asking Boyd why he didn't shoot him. No, we can't go home till after midnight."

The twins looked at each other glumly. They were completely fearless of wild horses, shooting affrays and the indignation of their neighbors, but they had a wholesome fear of their red-haired mother's outspoken remarks and the riding crop that she did not scruple to lay across their breeches.

"Well, look," said Brent. "Let's go over to the Wilkes'. Ashley and the girls'll be glad to have us for supper."

Stuart looked a little discomforted.

"No, don't let's go there. They'll be in a stew getting ready for the barbecue tomorrow and besides — "

"Oh, I forgot about that," said Brent hastily. "No, don't let's go there."

They clucked to their horses and rode along in silence for a while, a flush of embarrassment on Stuart's brown cheeks. Until the previous summer, Stuart had courted India Wilkes with the approbation of both families and the entire County. The County felt that perhaps the cool and contained India Wilkes would have a quieting effect on him. They fervently hoped so, at any rate. And Stuart might have made the match, but Brent had not been satisfied. Brent liked India but he thought her mighty plain and tame, and he simply could not fall in love with her himself to keep Stuart company. That was the first time the twins' interests had ever diverged, and Brent was resentful of his brother's attentions to a girl who seemed to him not at all remarkable.

Then, last summer at a political speaking in a grove of oak trees at Jonesboro, they both suddenly became aware of Scarlett O'Hara. They had known her for years, and, since their childhood, she had been a favorite playmate, for she could ride horses and climb trees almost as well as they. But

now to their amazement she had become a grown-up young lady and quite the most charming one in all the world.

They noticed for the first time how her green eyes danced, how deep her dimples were when she laughed, how tiny her hands and feet and what a small waist she had. Their clever remarks sent her into merry peals of laughter and, inspired by the thought that she considered them a remarkable pair, they fairly outdid themselves.

It was a memorable day in the life of the twins. Thereafter, when they talked it over, they always wondered just why they had failed to notice Scarlett's charms before. They never arrived at the correct answer, which was that Scarlett on that day had decided to make them notice. She was constitutionally unable to endure any man being in love with any woman not herself, and the sight of India Wilkes and Stuart at the speaking had been too much for her predatory nature. Not content with Stuart alone, she had set her cap for Brent as well, and with a thoroughness that overwhelmed the two of them.

Now they were both in love with her, and India Wilkes and Letty Munroe, from Lovejoy, whom Brent had been half-heartedly courting, were far in the back of their minds. Just what the loser would do, should Scarlett accept either one of them, the twins did not ask. They would cross that bridge when they came to it. For the present they were quite satisfied to be in accord again about one girl, for they had no jealousies between them. It was a situation which interested the neighbors and annoyed their mother, who had no liking for Scarlett.

"It will serve you right if that sly piece does accept one of you," she said. "Or maybe she'll accept both of you, and then you'll have to move to Utah, if the Mormons'll have you — which I doubt. . . . All that bothers me is that some one of these days you're both going to get lickered up and jealous of each other about that two-faced, little, green-eyed

baggage, and you'll shoot each other. But that might not be a bad idea either."

Since the day of the speaking, Stuart had been uncomfortable in India's presence. Not that India ever reproached him or even indicated by look or gesture that she was aware of his abruptly changed allegiance. She was too much of a lady. But Stuart felt guilty and ill at ease with her. He knew he had made India love him and he knew that she still loved him and, deep in his heart, he had the feeling that he had not played the gentleman. He still liked her tremendously and respected her for her cool good breeding, her book learning and all the sterling qualities she possessed. But, damn it, she was just so pallid and uninteresting and always the same, beside Scarlett's bright and changeable charm. You always knew where you stood with India and you never had the slightest notion with Scarlett. That was enough to drive a man to distraction, but it had its charm.

"Well, let's go over to Cade Calvert's and have supper. Scarlett said Cathleen was home from Charleston. Maybe she'll have some news about Fort Sumter that we haven't heard."

"Not Cathleen. I'll lay you two to one she didn't even know the fort was out there in the harbor, much less that it was full of Yankees until we shelled them out. All she'll know about is the balls she went to and the beaux she collected."

"Well, it's fun to hear her gabble. And it'll be somewhere to hide out till Ma has gone to bed."

"Well, hell! I like Cathleen and she is fun and I'd like to hear about Caro Rhett and the rest of the Charleston folks; but I'm damned if I can stand sitting through another meal with that Yankee stepmother of hers."

"Don't be too hard on her, Stuart. She means well."

"I'm not being hard on her. I feel sorry for her, but I don't like people I've got to feel sorry for. And she fusses around so much, trying to do the right thing and make you feel at

home, that she always manages to say and do just exactly the wrong thing. She gives me the fidgets! And she thinks Southerners are wild barbarians. She even told Ma so. She's afraid of Southerners. Whenever we're there she always looks scared to death. She reminds me of a skinny hen perched on a chair, her eyes kind of bright and blank and scared, all ready to flap and squawk at the slightest move anybody makes."

"Well, you can't blame her. You did shoot Cade in the leg."

"Well, I was lickered up or I wouldn't have done it," said Stuart. "And Cade never had any hard feelings. Neither did Cathleen or Raiford or Mr. Calvert. It was just that Yankee stepmother who squalled and said I was a wild barbarian and decent people weren't safe around uncivilized Southerners."

"Well, you can't blame her. She's a Yankee and ain't got very good manners; and, after all, you did shoot him and he is her stepson."

"Well, hell! That's no excuse for insulting me! You are Ma's own blood son, but did she take on that time Tony Fontaine shot you in the leg? No, she just sent for old Doc Fontaine to dress it and asked the doctor what ailed Tony's aim. Said she guessed licker was spoiling his marksmanship. Remember how mad that made Tony?"

Both boys yelled with laughter.

"Ma's a card!" said Brent with loving approval. "You can always count on her to do the right thing and not embarrass you in front of folks."

"Yes, but she's mighty liable to talk embarrassing in front of Father and the girls when we get home tonight," said Stuart gloomily. "Look, Brent. I guess this means we don't go to Europe. You know Mother said if we got expelled from another college we couldn't have our Grand Tour."

"Well, hell! We don't care, do we? What is there to see in Europe? I'll bet those foreigners can't show us a thing we

haven’t got right here in Georgia. I’ll bet their horses aren’t as fast or their girls as pretty, and I know damn well they haven’t got any rye whisky that can touch Father’s.”

“Ashley Wilkes said they had an awful lot of scenery and music. Ashley liked Europe. He’s always talking about it.”

“Well — you know how the Wilkes are. They are kind of queer about music and books and scenery. Mother says it’s because their grandfather came from Virginia. She says Virginians set quite a store by such things.”

“They can have ’em. Give me a good horse to ride and some good licker to drink and a good girl to court and a bad girl to have fun with and anybody can have their Europe. . . . What do we care about missing the Tour? Suppose we were in Europe now, with the war coming on? We couldn’t get home soon enough. I’d heap rather go to a war than go to Europe.”

“So would I, any day. . . . Look, Brent! I know where we can go for supper. Let’s ride across the swamp to Able Wynder’s place and tell him we’re all four home again and ready for drill.”

“That’s an idea!” cried Brent with enthusiasm. “And we can hear all the news of the Troop and find out what color they finally decided on for the uniforms.”

“If it’s Zouave, I’m damned if I’ll go in the troop. I’d feel like a sissy in those baggy red pants. They look like ladies’ red flannel drawers to me.”

“Is y’all aimin’ ter go ter Mist’ Wynder’s? ’Cause ef you is, you ain’ gwine git much supper,” said Jeems. “Dey cook done died, an’ dey ain’ bought a new one. Dey got a fe’el han’ cookin’, an’ de niggers tells me she is de wustest cook in de state.”

“Good God! Why don’t they buy another cook?”

“Huccome po’ w’ite trash buy any niggers? Dey ain’ never owned mo’n fo’ at de mostes’.”

There was frank contempt in Jeems’ voice. His own social status was assured because the Tarletons owned a hundred

negroes and, like all slaves of large planters, he looked down on small farmers whose slaves were few.

"I'm going to beat your hide off for that," cried Stuart fiercely. "Don't you call Able Wynder 'po' white.' Sure he's poor, but he ain't trash; and I'm damned if I'll have any man, darky or white, throwing off on him. There ain't a better man in this County, or why else did the Troop elect him lieutenant?"

"Ah ain' never figgered dat out, mahseff," replied Jeems, undisturbed by his master's scowl. "Look ter me lak dey'd 'lect all de awficers frum rich gempmum, 'stead of swamp trash."

"He ain't trash! Do you mean to compare him with real white trash like the Slatterys? Able just ain't rich. He's a small farmer, not a big planter, and if the boys thought enough of him to elect him lieutenant, then it's not for any darky to talk impudent about him. The Troop knows what it's doing."

The troop of cavalry had been organized three months before, the very day that Georgia seceded from the Union, and since then the recruits had been whistling for war. The outfit was as yet unnamed, though not for want of suggestions. Everyone had his own idea on that subject and was loath to relinquish it, just as everyone had ideas about the color and cut of the uniforms. "Clayton Wild Cats," "Fire Eaters," "North Georgia Hussars," "Zouaves," "The Inland Rifles" (although the Troop was to be armed with pistols, sabers and bowie knives, and not with rifles), "The Clayton Grays," "The Blood and Thunderers," "The Rough and Readys," all had their adherents. Until matters were settled, everyone referred to the organization as the Troop and, despite the high-sounding name finally adopted, they were known to the end of their usefulness simply as "The Troop."

The officers were elected by the members, for no one in the County had had any military experience except a few veterans of the Mexican and Seminole wars and, besides,

the Troop would have scorned a veteran as a leader if they had not personally liked him and trusted him. Everyone liked the four Tarleton boys and the three Fontaines, but regretfully refused to elect them, because the Tarletons got lickered up too quickly and liked to skylark, and the Fontaines had such quick, murderous tempers. Ashley Wilkes was elected captain, because he was the best rider in the County and because his cool head was counted on to keep some semblance of order. Raiford Calvert was made first lieutenant, because everybody liked Raif, and Able Wynder, son of a swamp trapper, himself a small farmer, was elected second lieutenant.

Able was a shrewd, grave giant, illiterate, kind of heart, older than the other boys and with as good or better manners in the presence of ladies. There was little snobbery in the Troop. Too many of their fathers and grandfathers had come up to wealth from the small farmer class for that. Moreover, Able was the best shot in the Troop, a real sharpshooter who could pick out the eye of a squirrel at seventy-five yards, and, too, he knew all about living outdoors, building fires in the rain, tracking animals and finding water. The Troop bowed to real worth and moreover, because they liked him, they made him an officer. He bore the honor gravely and with no untoward conceit, as though it were only his due. But the planters' ladies and the planters' slaves could not overlook the fact that he was not born a gentleman, even if their men folks could.

In the beginning, the Troop had been recruited exclusively from the sons of planters, a gentleman's outfit, each man supplying his own horse, arms, equipment, uniform and body servant. But rich planters were few in the young county of Clayton, and, in order to muster a full-strength troop, it had been necessary to raise more recruits among the sons of small farmers, hunters in the backwoods, swamp trappers, Crackers and, in a very few cases, even poor whites, if they were above the average of their class.

These latter young men were as anxious to fight the Yankees, should war come, as were their richer neighbors; but the delicate question of money arose. Few small farmers owned horses. They carried on their farm operations with mules and they had no surplus of these, seldom more than four. The mules could not be spared to go off to war, even if they had been acceptable for the Troop, which they emphatically were not. As for the poor whites, they considered themselves well off if they owned one mule. The backwoods folks and the swamp dwellers owned neither horses nor mules. They lived entirely off the produce of their lands and the game in the swamp, conducting their business generally by the barter system and seldom seeing five dollars in cash a year, and horses and uniforms were out of their reach. But they were as fiercely proud in their poverty as the planters were in their wealth, and they would accept nothing that smacked of charity from their rich neighbors. So, to save the feelings of all and to bring the Troop up to full strength, Scarlett's father, John Wilkes, Buck Munroe, Jim Tarleton, Hugh Calvert, in fact every large planter in the County with the one exception of Angus MacIntosh, had contributed money to completely outfit the Troop, horse and man. The upshot of the matter was that every planter agreed to pay for equipping his own sons and a certain number of the others, but the manner of handling the arrangements was such that the less wealthy members of the outfit could accept horses and uniforms without offense to their honor.

The Troop met twice a week in Jonesboro to drill and to pray for the war to begin. Arrangements had not yet been completed for obtaining the full quota of horses, but those who had horses performed what they imagined to be cavalry maneuvers in the field behind the courthouse, kicked up a great deal of dust, yelled themselves hoarse and waved the Revolutionary-war swords that had been taken down from parlor walls. Those who, as yet, had no

horses sat on the curb in front of Bullard's store and watched their mounted comrades, chewed tobacco and told yarns. Or else engaged in shooting matches. There was no need to teach any of the men to shoot. Most Southerners were born with guns in their hands, and lives spent in hunting had made marksmen of them all.

From planters' homes and swamp cabins, a varied array of firearms came to each muster. There were long squirrel guns that had been new when first the Alleghenies were crossed, old muzzle-loaders that had claimed many an Indian when Georgia was new, horse pistols that had seen service in 1812, in the Seminole wars and in Mexico, silver-mounted dueling pistols, pocket derringers, double-barreled hunting pieces and handsome new rifles of English make with shining stocks of fine wood.

Drill always ended in the saloons of Jonesboro, and by nightfall so many fights had broken out that the officers were hard put to ward off casualties until the Yankees could inflict them. It was during one of these brawls that Stuart Tarleton had shot Cade Calvert and Tony Fontaine had shot Brent. The twins had been at home, freshly expelled from the University of Virginia, at the time the Troop was organized and they had joined enthusiastically; but after the shooting episode, two months ago, their mother had packed them off to the state university, with orders to stay there. They had sorely missed the excitement of the drills while away, and they counted education well lost if only they could ride and yell and shoot off rifles in the company of their friends.

"Well, let's cut across country to Able's," suggested Brent. "We can go through Mr. O'Hara's river bottom and the Fontaines' pasture and get there in no time."

"We ain' gwine git nothin' ter eat 'cept possum an' greens," argued Jeems.

"You ain't going to get anything," grinned Stuart. "Because you are going home and tell Ma that we won't be

home for supper.”

“No, Ah ain’!” cried Jeems in alarm. “No, Ah ain’! Ah doan git no mo’ fun outer havin’ Miss Beetriss lay me out dan y’all does. Fust place she’ll ast me huccome Ah let y’all git expelled agin. An’ nex’ thing, huccome Ah din’ bring y’all home ternight so she could lay you out. An’ den she’ll light on me lak a duck on a June bug, an’ fust thing Ah know Ah’ll be ter blame fer it all. Ef y’all doan tek me ter Mist’ Wynder’s, Ah’ll lay out in de woods all night an’ maybe de patterollers git me, ’cause Ah heap ruther de patterollers git me dan Miss Beetriss when she in a state.”

The twins looked at the determined black boy in perplexity and indignation.

“He’d be just fool enough to let the patterollers get him and that would give Ma something else to talk about for weeks. I swear, darkies are more trouble. Sometimes I think the Abolitionists have got the right idea.”

“Well, it wouldn’t be right to make Jeems face what we don’t want to face. We’ll have to take him. But, look, you impudent black fool, if you put on any airs in front of the Wynder darkies and hint that we all the time have fried chicken and ham, while they don’t have nothing but rabbit and possum, I’ll — I’ll tell Ma. And we won’t let you go to the war with us, either.”

“Airs? Me put on airs fo’ dem cheap niggers? Nawsuh, Ah got better manners. Ain’ Miss Beetriss taught me manners same as she taught y’all?”

“She didn’t do a very good job on any of the three of us,” said Stuart. “Come on, let’s get going.”

He backed his big red horse and then, putting spurs to his side, lifted him easily over the split-rail fence into the soft field of Gerald O’Hara’s plantation. Brent’s horse followed and then Jeems’, with Jeems clinging to pommel and mane. Jeems did not like to jump fences, but he had jumped higher ones than this in order to keep up with his masters.

As they picked their way across the red furrows and down the hill to the river bottom in the deepening dusk, Brent yelled to his brother:

“Look, Stu! Don’t it seem like to you that Scarlett *would* have asked us to supper?”

“I kept thinking she would,” yelled Stuart. “Why do you suppose . . .”