

SCARLETT

The Sequel to

MARGARET MITCHELL'S

GONE WITH THE WIND

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SCARLETT



*Lost in the
Dark*

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*T*his will be over soon, and then I

can go home to Tara.

Scarlett O'Hara Hamilton Kennedy Butler stood alone, a few steps away from the other mourners at Melanie Wilkes' burial. It was raining, and the black-clad men and women held black umbrellas over their heads. They leaned on one another, the women weeping, sharing shelter and grief.

Scarlett shared her umbrella with no one, nor her grief. The gusts of wind within the rain blew stinging cold wet rivulets under the umbrella, down her neck, but she was unaware of them. She felt nothing, she was numbed by loss. She would mourn later, when she could stand the pain. She held it away from her, all pain, all feeling, all thinking. Except for the words that repeated again and again in her mind, the words that promised healing from the pain to come and strength to survive until she was healed.

This will be over soon, and then I can go home to Tara.

“... ashes to ashes, dust to dust ...”

The minister's voice penetrated the shell of numbness, the words registered. No! Scarlett cried silently. Not Melly. That's not Melly's grave, it's too big, she's so tiny, her bones no bigger than a bird's. No! She can't be dead, she can't be.

Scarlett's head jerked to one side, denying the open grave, the

plain pine box being lowered into it. There were small half circles sunk into the soft wood, marks of the hammers that had driven in the nails to close the lid above Melanie's gentle, loving, heart-shaped face.

No! You can't, you mustn't do this, it's raining, you can't put her there where the rain will fall on her. She feels the cold so, she mustn't be left in the cold rain. I can't watch, I can't bear it, I won't believe she's gone. She loves me, she is my friend, my only true friend. Melly loves me, she wouldn't leave me now just when I need her most.

Scarlett looked at the people surrounding the grave, and hot anger surged through her. None of them care as much as I do, none of them have lost as much as I have. No one knows how much I love her. Melly knows, though, doesn't she? She knows, I've got to believe she knows.

They'll never believe it, though. Not Mrs. Merriwether, or the Meades or the Whitings or the Elsings. Look at them, bunched up around India Wilkes and Ashley, like a flock of wet crows in their mourning clothes. They're comforting Aunt Pittypat, all right, even though everybody knows she takes on and cries her eyes out over every little thing, down to a piece of toast that gets burnt. It wouldn't enter their heads that maybe I might be needing some comforting, that I was closer to Melanie than any of them. They act as if I wasn't even here. Nobody has paid any attention to me at all. Not even Ashley. He knew I was there those awful two days after Melly died, when he needed me to manage things. They all did, even India, bleating at me like a goat. "What shall we do about the funeral, Scarlett? About the food for the callers? About the coffin? The pallbearers? The cemetery plot? The inscription on the headstone? The notice in the paper?" Now they're leaning all over each other, weeping and wailing. Well, I won't give them the satisfaction of seeing me cry all by myself with nobody to lean on. I mustn't cry. Not here. Not yet. If I start, I might never be able to stop. When I get to Tara, I can cry.

Scarlett lifted her chin, her teeth clenched to stop their chattering from the cold, to hold back the choking in her throat. This will be over soon, and then I can go home to Tara.

The jagged pieces of Scarlett's shattered life were all around her there in Atlanta's Oakland Cemetery. A tall spire of granite, gray

stone streaked with gray rain, was somber memorial to the world that was gone forever, the carefree world of her youth before the War. It was the Confederate Memorial, symbol of the proud, heedless courage that had plunged the South with bright banners flying into destruction. It stood for so many lives lost, the friends of her childhood, the gallants who had begged for waltzes and kisses in the days when she had no problems greater than which wide-skirted ballgown to wear. It stood for her first husband, Charles Hamilton, Melanie's brother. It stood for the sons, brothers, husbands, fathers of all the rain-wet mourners on the small knoll where Melanie was being buried.

There were other graves, other markers. Frank Kennedy, Scarlett's second husband. And the small, terribly small, grave with the headstone that read *EUGENIE VICTORIA BUTLER*, and under it *BONNIE*. Her last child, and the most loved.

The living, as well as the dead, were all round her, but she stood apart. Half of Atlanta was there, it seemed. The crowd had overflowed the church and now it spread in a wide, uneven dark circle around the bitter slash of color in the gray rain, the open grave dug from Georgia's red clay for the body of Melanie Wilkes.

The front row of mourners held those who'd been closest to her. White and black, their faces all streaked with tears, except Scarlett's. The old coachman Uncle Peter stood with Dilcey and Cookie in a protective black triangle around Beau, Melanie's bewildered little boy.

The older generation of Atlanta were there, with the tragically few descendants that remained to them. The Meades, the Whitings, the Merriwethers, the Elsings, their daughters and sons-in-law, Hugh Elsing the only living son; Aunt Pittypat Hamilton and her brother, Uncle Henry Hamilton, their ages-old feud forgotten in mutual grief for their niece. Younger, but looking as old as the others, India Wilkes sheltered herself within the group and watched her brother, Ashley, from grief- and guilt-shadowed eyes. He stood alone, like Scarlett. He was bare-headed in the rain, unaware of the proffered shelter of umbrellas, unconscious of the cold wetness, unable to accept the finality of the minister's words or the narrow coffin being lowered into the muddy red grave.

Ashley. Tall and thin and colorless, his pale gilt hair now almost gray, his pale stricken face as empty as his staring, unseeing gray eyes. He stood erect, his stance a salute, the inheritance of his years

as a gray-uniformed officer. He stood motionless, without sensation or comprehension.

Ashley. He was the center and the symbol of Scarlett's ruined life. For love of him she'd ignored the happiness that had been hers for the taking. She'd turned her back on her husband, not seeing his love for her, not admitting her love for him, because wanting Ashley was always in the way. And now Rhett was gone, his only presence here a spray of warm golden autumn flowers among all the others. She'd betrayed her only friend, scorned Melanie's stubborn loyalty and love. And now Melanie was gone. And even Scarlett's love for Ashley was gone, for she'd realized—too late—that the habit of loving him had long since replaced love itself.

She did not love him, and she never would again. But now, when she didn't want him, Ashley was hers, her legacy from Melanie. She had promised Melly she'd take care of him and of Beau, their child.

Ashley was the cause of her life's destruction. And the only thing left to her from it.

Scarlett stood apart and alone. There was only cold gray space between her and the people she knew in Atlanta, space that once Melanie had filled, keeping her from isolation and ostracism. There was only the cold wet wind beneath the umbrella in the place where Rhett should have been to shelter her with his strong broad shoulders and his love.

She held her chin high, into the wind, accepting its assault without feeling it. All her senses were concentrated on the words that were her strength and her hope.

This will be over soon, and then I can go home to Tara.

"Look at her," whispered a black-veiled lady to the companion sharing her umbrella. "Hard as nails. I heard that the whole time she was handling the funeral arrangements, she didn't even shed a tear. All business, that's Scarlett. And no heart at all."

"You know what folks say," was the answering whisper. "She has heart aplenty for Ashley Wilkes. Do you think they really did—"

The people nearby hushed them, but they were thinking the same thing. Everyone was.

The awful hollow thud of earth on wood made Scarlett clench her fists. She wanted to clap her hands over her ears, to scream, to

shout—anything to shut out the terrible sound of the grave closing over Melanie. Her teeth closed painfully on her lip. She wouldn't scream, she wouldn't.

The cry that shattered the solemnity was Ashley's. "Melly . . . Mell—eee!" And again, "Mell—eee." It was the cry of a soul in torment, filled with loneliness and fear.

He stumbled towards the deep muddy pit like a man newly struck blind, his hands searching for the small, quiet creature who was all his strength. But there was nothing to hold, only the streaming silver streaks of cold rain.

Scarlett looked at Dr. Meade, India, Henry Hamilton. Why don't they do something? Why don't they stop him? He's got to be stopped!

"Mell—eee . . ."

For the love of God! He's going to break his neck, and they're all just standing there watching, gawping at him teetering on the edge of the grave.

"Ashley, stop!" she shouted. "Ashley!" She began to run, slipping and sliding on the wet grass. The umbrella she had thrown aside scudded across the ground, pushed by the wind until it was trapped in the mounds of flowers. She grabbed Ashley around the waist, tried to pull him away from the danger. He fought her.

"Ashley, don't!" Scarlett struggled against his strength. "Melly can't help you now." Her voice was harsh, to cut through Ashley's unhearing, demented grief.

He halted, and his arms dropped to his sides. He moaned softly, and then his whole body crumpled in Scarlett's supporting arms. Just when her grasp was breaking from the weight of him, Dr. Meade and India caught Ashley's limp arms to lift him erect.

"You can go now, Scarlett," said Dr. Meade. "There's no more damage left for you to do."

"But, I—" She looked at the faces around her, the eyes avid for more sensation. Then she turned and walked away through the rain. The crowd drew back as if a brush of her skirts might soil them.

They must not know that she cared, she wouldn't let them see that they could hurt her. Scarlett raised her chin defiantly, letting the rain pour down over her face and neck. Her back was straight, her shoulders square until she reached the gates of the cemetery and was out of sight. Then she grabbed one of the iron palings. She felt dizzy from exhaustion, unsteady on her feet.

Her coachman Elias ran to her, opening his umbrella to hold

above her bent head. Scarlett walked to her carriage, ignoring the hand held out to help her. Inside the plush-upholstered box, she sank into a corner and pulled up the woolen lap robe. She was chilled to the bone, horrified by what she had done. How could she have shamed Ashley like that in front of everybody, when only a few nights ago she had promised Melanie that she would take care of him, protect him as Melly had always done? But what else could she have done? Let him throw himself into the grave? She had to stop him.

The carriage jolted from side to side, its high wheels sinking into the deep ruts of clay mud. Scarlett nearly fell to the floor. Her elbow hit the window frame, and a sharp pain ran up and down her arm.

It was only physical pain, she could stand that. It was the other pain—the postponed, delayed, denied shadowy pain—that she couldn't bear. Not yet, not here, not when she was all alone. She had to get to Tara, she had to. Mammy was there. Mammy would put her brown arms around her, Mammy would hold her close, cradle her head on the breast where she'd sobbed out all her childhood hurts. She could cry in Mammy's arms, cry herself empty of pain; she could rest her head on Mammy's breast, rest her wounded heart on Mammy's love. Mammy would hold her and love her, would share her pain and help her bear it.

"Hurry, Elias," said Scarlett, "hurry."

"Help me out of these wet things, Pansy," Scarlett ordered her maid. "Hurry." Her face was ghostly pale, it made her green eyes look darker, brighter, more frightening. The young black girl was clumsy with nervousness. "Hurry, I said. If you make me miss my train, I'll take a strap to you."

She couldn't do it, Pansy knew she couldn't do it. The slavery days were over, Miss Scarlett didn't own her, she could quit any time she wanted to. But the desperate, feverish glint in Scarlett's green eyes made Pansy doubt her own knowledge. Scarlett looked capable of anything.

"Pack the black wool merino, it's going to be colder," said Scarlett. She stared at the open wardrobe. Black wool, black silk, black cotton, black twill, black velvet. She could go on mourning for the rest of her days. Mourning for Bonnie still, and now mourning for

Melanie. I should find something darker than black, something more mournful to wear to mourn for myself.

I won't think about that, not now. I'll go mad if I do. I'll think about it when I get to Tara. I can bear it there.

"Put on your things, Pansy. Elias is waiting. And don't you dare forget the crape armband. This is a house of mourning."

The streets that met at Five Points were a quagmire. Wagons and buggies and carriages were sunk in mud. Their drivers cursed the rain, the streets, their horses, the other drivers in their way. There was shouting and the sound of whips cracking, and the noise of people. There were always crowds of people at Five Points, people hurrying, arguing, complaining, laughing. Five Points was turbulent with life, with push, with energy. Five Points was the Atlanta Scarlett loved.

But not today. Today Five Points was in her way, Atlanta was holding her back. I've got to make that train, I'll die if I miss it, I've got to get to Mammy and Tara or I'll break down. "Elias," she yelled, "I don't care if you whip the horses to death, I don't care if you run over every single person on the street. You get to the depot." Her horses were the strongest, her coachman the most skillful, her carriage the best that money could buy. Nothing better get in her way, nothing.

She made the train with time to spare.

There was a loud burst of steam. Scarlett held her breath, listening for the first clunking revolution of the wheels that meant the train was moving. There it was. Then another. And another. And the rattling, shaking of the car. She was on her way at last.

Everything was going to be all right. She was going home to Tara. She pictured it, sunny and bright, the white house gleaming, glistening green leaves of cape jasmine bushes studded with perfect, waxen white blossoms.

Heavy dark rain sluiced down the window beside her when the train left the station, but no matter. At Tara there'd be a fire in the living room, crackling from pine cones thrown onto the logs, and the curtains would be drawn, shutting out the rain and the darkness and the world. She'd lay her head on Mammy's soft broad bosom and

tell her all the horrible things that had happened. Then she'd be able to think, to work everything out . . .

Hissing steam and squealing wheels jerked Scarlett's head upright.

Was this Jonesboro already? She must have dozed off, and no wonder, as tired as she was. She hadn't been able to sleep for two nights, even with the brandy to calm her nerves. No, the station was Rough and Ready. Still an hour to Jonesboro. At least the rain had stopped; there was even a patch of blue sky up ahead. Maybe the sun was shining at Tara. She imagined the entrance drive, the dark cedars that bordered it, then the wide green lawn and the beloved house on top of the low hill.

Scarlett sighed heavily. Her sister Suellen was the lady of the house at Tara now. Ha! Cry-baby of the house was more like it. All Suellen ever did was whine, it was all she'd ever done, ever since they were children. And she had her own children now, whiny little girls just like she used to be.

Scarlett's children were at Tara, too. Wade and Ella. She'd sent them with Prissy, their nursemaid, when she got the news that Melanie was dying. Probably she should have had them with her at Melanie's funeral. That gave all the old cats in Atlanta one more thing to gossip about, what an unnatural mother she was. Let them talk all they liked. She couldn't have gotten through those terrible days and nights after Melly's death if she'd had Wade and Ella to cope with too.

She wouldn't think about them, that's all. She was going home, to Tara and to Mammy, and she simply wouldn't let herself think about things that would upset her. Lord knows, I've got more than enough to upset me without dragging them in, too. And I'm so tired . . . Her head drooped and her eyes closed.

"Jonesboro, ma'am," said the conductor. Scarlett blinked, sat straight.

"Thank you." She looked around the car for Pansy and her valises. I'll skin that girl alive if she's wandered off to another car. Oh, if only a lady didn't have to have a companion every single time she put her foot outside her own house. I'd do so much better by myself. There she is. "Pansy. Get those valises off the rack. We're here."

Only five miles to Tara now. Soon I'll be home. Home!

Will Benteen, Suellen's husband, was waiting on the platform. It was a shock to see Will; the first few seconds were always a shock.

Scarlett genuinely loved and respected Will. If she could have had a brother, like she'd always wanted, she'd wish he could be just like Will. Except for the wooden pegleg, and of course not a Cracker. It was just there was no mistaking Will for a gentleman; he was unmistakably lower class. She forgot it when she was away from him, and she forgot it after she was with him for a minute, because he was such a good, kind man. Even Mammy thought a lot of Will, and Mammy was the hardest judge in the world when it came to who was a lady or a gentleman.

"Will!" He walked toward her, in his special swinging gait. She threw her arms around his neck and hugged him fiercely.

"Oh, Will, I'm so glad to see you that I'm practically crying for joy."

Will accepted her embrace without emotion. "I'm glad to see you, too, Scarlett. It's been a long time."

"Too long. It's shameful. Almost a year."

"More like two."

Scarlett was dumbfounded. Had it been that long? No wonder her life had come to such a sorry state. Tara had always given her new life, new strength when she needed it. How could she have gone so long without it?

Will gestured to Pansy and walked toward the wagon outside the station. "We'd better get moving if we're going to beat the dark," he said. "Hope you don't mind riding rough, Scarlett. As long as I was coming to town, I figured I might as well get some supplies." The wagon was piled high with sacks and parcels.

"I don't mind at all," said Scarlett truthfully. She was going home, and anything that would take her there was fine. "Climb up on those feed sacks, Pansy."

She was as silent as Will on the long drive to Tara, drinking in the remembered quiet of the countryside, refreshing herself with it. The air was new-washed, and the afternoon sun was warm on her shoulders. She'd been right to come home. Tara would give her the sanctuary she needed, and with Mammy she'd be able to find a way to repair her ruined world. She leaned forward as they turned onto the familiar drive, smiling in anticipation.

But when the house came in sight, she let out a cry of despair. "Will, what happened?" The front of Tara was covered by vines, ugly cords hung with dead leaves; four windows had sagging shutters, two had no shutters at all.

"Nothing happened except summer, Scarlett. I do the fixing

up for the house in winter when there's no crops to tend. I'll be starting on those shutters in a few more weeks. It's not October yet."

"Oh, Will, why on earth won't you let me give you some money? You could hire some help. Why, you can see the brick through the whitewash. It looks downright trashy."

Will's reply was patient. "There's no help to be had for love nor money. Those that wants work has plenty of it, and those that don't wouldn't do me no good. We make out all right, Big Sam and me. Your money ain't needed."

Scarlett bit her lip and swallowed the words she wanted to say. She had run up against Will's pride often before, and she knew that he was unbendable. He was right that the crops and the stock had to come first. Their demands couldn't be put off; a fresh coat of whitewash could. She could see the fields now, stretching out behind the house. They were weedless, newly harrowed, and there was a faint, rich smell of the manure tilled in to prepare them for the next planting. The red earth looked warm and fertile, and she relaxed. This was the heart of Tara, the soul.

"You're right," she said to Will.

The door to the house flew open, and the porch filled with people. Suellen stood in front, holding her youngest child in her arms above the swollen belly that strained the seams of her faded cotton dress. Her shawl had fallen down over one arm. Scarlett forced a gaiety she didn't feel. "Good Lord, Will, is Suellen having another baby? You're going to have to build on some more rooms."

Will chuckled. "We're still trying for a boy." He lifted a hand in greeting to his wife and three daughters.

Scarlett waved too, wishing she'd thought to buy some toys to bring the children. Oh, Lord, look at all of them. Suellen was scowling. Scarlett's eyes ran over the other faces, searching out the black ones . . . Prissy was there; Wade and Ella were hiding behind her skirts . . . and Big Sam's wife, Delilah, holding the spoon she must have been stirring with . . . There was—what was her name?—oh, yes, Lutie, the Tara children's mammy. But where was Mammy? Scarlett called out to her children. "Hello, darlings, Mother's here." Then she turned back to Will, put a hand on his arm.

"Where's Mammy, Will? She's not so old that she can't come to meet me." Fear pinched the words in Scarlett's throat.

"She's sick in bed, Scarlett."

Scarlett jumped down from the still-moving wagon, stumbled,

caught herself and ran to the house. "Where's Mammy?" she said to Suellen, deaf to the excited greetings of the children.

"A fine hello that is, Scarlett, but no worse than I'd expect from you. What did you think you were doing, sending Prissy and your children here without so much as a by your leave, when you know that I've got my hands full and then some?"

Scarlett raised her hand, ready to slap her sister. "Suellen, if you don't tell me where Mammy is, I'll scream."

Prissy pulled on Scarlett's sleeve. "I knows where Mammy is, Miss Scarlett, I knows. She's powerful sick, so we fixed up that little room next the kitchen for her, the one what used to be where all the hams was hung when there was a lot of hams. It's nice and warm there, next to the chimney. She was already there when I come, so I can't exactly say we fixed up the room altogether, but I brung in a chair so as there'd be a place to sit if she wanted to get up or if there was a visitor . . ."

Prissy was talking to air. Scarlett was at the door to Mammy's sickroom, holding on to the framework for support.

That . . . that . . . thing in the bed wasn't her Mammy. Mammy was a big woman, strong and fleshy, with warm brown skin. It had been hardly more than six months since Mammy left Atlanta, not long enough to have wasted away like this. It couldn't be. Scarlett couldn't bear it. This wasn't Mammy, she wouldn't believe it. This creature was gray and shrivelled, hardly making a rise under the faded patchwork quilts that covered it, twisted fingers moving weakly across the folds. Scarlett's skin crawled.

Then she heard Mammy's voice. Thin and halting, but Mammy's beloved, loving voice. "Now, Missy, ain't I done tole you and tole you not to set foot outside without you wears a bonnet and carries a sunshade . . . Tole you and tole you . . ."

"Mammy!" Scarlett fell to her knees beside the bed. "Mammy, it's Scarlett. Your Scarlett. Please don't be sick, Mammy, I can't bear it, not you." She put her head down on the bed beside the bony thin shoulders and wept stormily, like a child.

A weightless hand smoothed her bent head. "Don't cry, chile. Ain't nothing so bad that it can't be fixed."

"Everything," Scarlett wailed. "Everything's gone wrong, Mammy."

"Hush, now, it's only one cup. And you got another tea set anyhow, just as pretty. You kin still have your tea party just like Mammy promised you."