

**THE WILMOTS: A
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN
STORY; PP. 4-187**

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The Wilmots: A South Australian Story; pp. 4-187 by Effie Stanley

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BY

EFFIE STANLEY.



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251. e. 129.

"Shall we take a turn or two before joining your brother, Miss Wilmot?"

But with that quick apprehension which many of us have experienced at a time like this, she knew that something sad had befallen her brother.

"Is there—oh, Mr. Summers, excuse me, but is anything wrong? I cannot see Herbert anywhere, and I am sure he has not come upon the deck again. I have been watching for him, and that boy had such a scared look, though he did joke about the telegram."

"Miss Wilmot," was the answer, "I will not deceive you; there has been an accident, and I believe to your brother. Will you keep calm, while I go and see what it is? I promise to return and tell you the truth."

"I will come, too; I know I shall have more courage when I am by his side than here alone in suspense. Don't keep me away."

For all answer he drew her hand within his arm, and with a silent prayer in each heart they set off to see what had happened to him whom the one called brother, and the other gladly claimed as friend.

By this time Herbert had been raised, tenderly as might be, but with excruciating torture, and was now being borne to the saloon, where a couch had been carefully prepared by the stewardess. Herbert had at first fainted from the pain, but the torture of being moved seemed to arouse him, and to prevent his lapsing again into that unconsciousness which, under the circumstances, would seem to be a boon for a little while. Nellie came up to the sad procession, and as she gazed upon her brother, only lately so full of health and buoyant spirits, her heart sank within her, and her cheek became white as that of the stricken one. But she knew how important a thing self-command is, and if Horace had admired her for

other things during the few short months of the voyage, he was still more attracted by her now, as with pale cheek yet tearless eye she moved along with the mournful cortege.

But he knew where her strength lay, although he heard not the prayer, "Father, give me strength; oh, Father, spare my only brother."

Yes, it was her only brother, and in a great measure her nearest friend. Mr. Wilmot was an artist, and had obtained the honours and emoluments due to his skill and exquisitely cultivated taste. He had married while very young, and though his wife brought him no golden dowry, he knew the treasure he possessed in her cheerful spirit, and the graceful beauty which pleased his artistic eye, besides in the deep affection which shared his every joy and lightened every sorrow.

Herbert and Eleanor were twins, the only treasures ever given to the parental care and love of these two. And very tenderly were they loved and cared for, until a fever which raged through the town of Grassmere carried off a great number of its inhabitants, and amongst them Mrs. Wilmot, leaving her husband totally unconscious of his loss, as he, too, had succumbed to the dire disease, and seemed likely to add another to its victims.

But he rallied, and oh, what words can express his feelings, as, returning by slow degrees to reason and partial strength, he found his idolised wife gone—hid from his eyes without even an adieu. Truly refuge failed him, or rather he sought it not where it might have been found; for how can poor humanity in itself bear such a crushing load of sorrow? And as yet the artist, alive to all the beautiful harmonies of nature, with eye ever ready to delight in her varied colours, and ear attuned to her melodies, knew not that gentle voice which says to all such sufferers as he was, "When thou passest

through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee."

He regained his former strength, but the brightness of life had passed away. His children, dear as they were to him, too often only reminded him of his loss; and as for his art, he declared he could never more find pleasure in it, now that she who had cheered him on with her smile, and aided him with her gentle criticism, had left his studio to return to it no more.

He was feeling this in an unusually heavy degree one afternoon, when the servant announced "Mr. Peters." This was a college friend of Mr. Wilmot's, who had been settled in South Australia for the last few years, but had now returned to see his English friends, and had taken the first opportunity for renewing this acquaintance. The conversation, after touching upon various subjects, naturally turned to the land of Mr. Peters' adoption; but Mr. Wilmot gave little heed to his friend's description of its beauty, wealth, and the general advantages of its climate, though he was roused by the words, "It would be just the thing for you, old friend. Why not try it? Make up your mind to return with me."

"And what could I, a broken-down artist, with a little capital, it is true, but with no spirit left me, do out there?"

"Well, a little capital goes farther out there than it does here. You could take a sheep run, or there are mines."

"No, no! No speculation for me, sir; I have seen enough of that here. But if you think a sheep run would be a safe investment, I do think that's what I would like. But what can I do with the youngsters? They are too young to be of much use, and I don't care for them to have to knock about, if their father has to."

“Well, I am at the Grange, and my sister has made me promise to stay over Sunday; think it over, and let me know your plans, and if you decide upon going with me, and your run or whatever else you go in for takes more of the ready than you care to lay out at once, we can go partners, if you like. I should like you to see our side of the world, even if you do not care to settle down with us. Think it over.”

CHAPTER II.

Mr. Wilmot's Decision.

AND Mr. Wilmot did think it over, turning over and over again in his own mind all the "pros" and "cons" connected with the matter, and this was the conclusion he arrived at.

"I will go over with Peters and see this Elysium of his; if I do not like it I can but come back again, and at all events, I shall have had the voyage and seen the other side of the world. I will leave Nellie and Bertie to finish their training; sister will have an eye to them, and if I like Australia I can easily send for them. I will spare them, at least, all the roughing I can, and I do believe it will put new life in me, if anything can. I know I shall never be again what I was before my darling went away, but I'll try, at any rate, what a new country will do for me."

So in the course of the next day he sought his Australian friend and adviser at the Grange. This was a thorough English country house, noble in its proportions, and surrounded by well laid out and plentifully stocked gardens, orchards, and meadows; and Mr. Wilmot stopped for a few moments, as he had often done before, to admire the scene from a slight rise in the land a short distance from the grounds. He now saw that there were two or three figures moving about rather quickly in the flower garden, and as he drew nearer observed the gentleman

whom he had come to see whirling round and round, darting now down this path, then that, chased, as it appeared, by two little fairies dressed in blue frocks, with snowy pinafores tied at the shoulders with blue ribbon, streamers of which also floated from their flaxen hair. There was also a sturdy young gentleman of five or six summers, dressed in a knickerbocker suit, who was heartily enjoying the fun, and joining in it as far as he could without too much exertion.

"Oh, now I've got him, Ted," shouted one of the little girls from the other side of the garden.

"Hold him till I come, then," was the reply, as the little fat legs were put in motion. But e'en with the words upon his lips he saw "Uncle" dart off in the opposite direction, and concluded that Minnie was nearer than he, so she could catch him. At this point, Mr. Peters, making a dart towards the gate, came upon Mr. Wilmot, and to a standstill, laughingly saying, "Ah, Wilmot, you have caught me in a wild goose chase; these little objects make me quite a boy again," and he shook his head at Master Teddy, who with "Catch me, uncle," made sundry little pretences of starting, but waited until he was sure of a pursuer, lest he should put himself to unnecessary trouble.

But uncle was not to be coaxed this time, and, laying his hand upon the little curly wig by his side, he said, "You three go and see if the rabbits and guinea pigs have finished their breakfast, for I'm coming to see them soon, and then I mean to see if I can find a swing anywhere, if nurse allows such things.

Off darted the three, anxious to have their pets presentable for their uncle's inspection, who, turning to Mr. Wilmot, said, "Will you step inside, or do you prefer a turn or two?"