

"Sir, I am not Rose Wilton."

"Not Rose Wilton!" The young man was on his feet in an instant. "If you are not Miss—or were not—Miss Wilton, where is she?"

"That I can not tell."

"Well, who, may I ask, are you?"

"My name was Annie Johnson. I have never claimed to be Rose Wilton, but my husband insists to this day that I am. I have never been able to explain the mystery; but to-day I think I have found the explanation," and she took from her handbag the two silver charms with their coiled ribbons. "This one," she said, holding up the one with the pink ribbon, was always about my neck when I was very small, and my mother told me that somewhere in the world I had a twin sister, looking exactly like me, with the same kind of a charm tied about her neck with a blue ribbon; and here," taking out the other one, "is the very one, I believe."

Eagerly Reece Rodgers caught at this one.

"And you think?" he queried.

"I think Rose Wilton is my twin sister. I have never told even Lute about this sister, because my mother never spoke of her but a few times, and I have hardly thought of her. It seems my father died at sea, and mother was sick and discouraged with the two of us to care for. How she came to give my sister away I don't know. Wasn't there something of this kind told Miss Wilton that made her run away?"

"Yes, Mrs. Gaylord, and may heaven reward you for coming here to-day. Rose Wilton was my promised wife, and the news of her flight nearly cost me my life. I was still weak when you came here a bride. You remember my speaking to you on the hotel porch? Well, I never doubted that you were Rose, you look exactly like her; and the fact that she could go away and marry another for the sake of the property has almost driven me mad."

"Would you have married her, rich or poor?" Mrs. Gaylord asked, watching him with a keen eye.

"I would," he answered, solemnly and emphatically.

She put her hand into the satchel and fingered the yellow document a moment in uncertainty, then pushed it deeper down and snapped the clasp with a sudden decision.

"May be you could find her."

She would not have liked to own it, but she was glad that Reece and Rose were engaged, for she had supposed that if her husband cared so much for his cousin she must have cared for him. Now she knew it could not be so. She was tenacious of her own right to the man whose name she bore, and besides, she knew now that she loved him and wanted him to love her for herself and not for the sake of the woman she resembled.

"I will advertise in every newspaper of any note in the state," mused Reece, "and spend every dollar I have before giving up the search. See the time I have lost, thinking you were she."

When Lute Gaylord came home he was completely astonished at the change in his wife. She reminded him of a butterfly just escaped from the chrysalis state.

"House cleaning has done you good; you seem changed, somehow," he said.

As they sat together after tea, she drew her chair close to him, and putting a hand in his, asked:

"Lute, do you love me the least bit as Annie, or only as the picture of Rose?"

"Why, my dear, what a question! You are Rose, and I am surer of it to-night than ever before."

"But if I could prove to you that I am not, would you care for me at all?" she persisted.

Looking into her beautiful face, he answered: "I can not imagine what you are aiming at, but I love you, whether you be Annie or Rose."

Then she told him what we already know, but not a word about the will.

It was Christmas morning at Castle Garden, a clear, cold Christmas morning, just eighteen years before the day on which Rose Wilton saw the woman she had called mother, die. A ship had just landed, and its load of emigrants swarmed up, jabbering in almost every known tongue, or moved in wretched silence. Children moaned and cried, and for the most part

their mothers were too discouraged or indifferent to notice them. A lady belonging to the Castle Garden mission moved about among them, apparently quite at home. Not so an elegantly attired and noticeably stylish woman who watched everything with a smile half sarcastic, half amused. Plainly she was there for her own amusement. Nothing else would have brought the fastidious and wealthy relict of the late Judge Wilton into Castle Garden on Christmas morning. Mrs. Markham, superintendent of the mission, was an old friend and classmate, and of her many friends not one did the fashionable widow care more for, albeit, the world called Mrs. Markham eccentric, because she chose to follow in the footsteps of Him "who went about doing good."

"See there," said Mrs. Markham, pointing to a drooping, girlish figure, holding a lovely babe on either arm. "I must speak to her if I can make her understand; she is Norse, I think." Some one claimed her attention just then and she turned away.

"Just for fun," as Mrs. Wilton afterward explained, she approached the young mother and spoke to her. The latter only shook her head, indicating that she did not understand. Then the widow held out her hands alluringly, and instantly one little stranger put out its dirty, dimpled hands.

"You darling!" she cried, ecstatically, a vision of a little one sleeping in Greenwood coming between her and this beautiful Norse infant. For the moment she forgot her own elegance, forgot the baby's squalor, the mother love in her soul carrying every other consideration before it. The pale young mother smiled a wan, forced smile, and turned away, ostensibly to look after her satchel. A portion of the living mass engulfed her and Mrs. Wilton saw her no more, and when Mrs. Markham found her she was patiently awaiting the mother's return; but she never came. Had the ground opened and swallowed her up she could not have disappeared more completely.

"A Christmas gift straight from heaven, Floy," Mrs. Markham said that evening, as the two friends sat discussing the strange occurrence and admiring the beautiful child—now doubly sweet in its clean garments.

"Its skin is like a rose petal," said one; "and her hair like fine spun gold," exclaimed the other.

"And then her eyes and cunning ways," added the widow.

About the little one's neck they found a faded blue ribbon, on which a curious silver charm was fastened. And so in time it came about that the dainty Norse maiden became the sunshine of the great old Wilton mansion, and possible heir to half a million.



"ONE LITTLE STRANGER PUT OUT ITS DIRTY, DIMPLED HANDS."

Lute Gaylord listened without interruption to what his wife had to tell. She watched his face closely to detect the emotion that swayed his soul. At first he looked nothing but surprise, and then an expression of relief, it seemed to her, took its place. When she was done and had exhibited the charms, her husband bent and kissed her fondly, saying:

"I am glad you are Annie."

Then he, too, began to plan how Rose might be found. Suddenly he exclaimed: "I believe I have a clue!"

"What is it?" she asked, eagerly.

He told her of the young music teacher at Mrs. Lane's. "You remember I insisted you were she? Well if there are two of you, I suppose that girl was Rose Wilton. That has been one of the things that has puzzled me most. I will see Rodgers immediately."

There was a long consultation between the two men, resulting in their early departure, accompanied by Annie, for San Francisco, the next day. Gaylord went alone to Mrs. Lane's and asked concerning the young music teacher.

The good woman fairly beamed. "I am so glad you came, the whole thing has been such a mystery to me. Yes, Miss Wilson, as she calls herself, came back to me after seeing the notice of your marriage to Rose Wilton. She said she did not understand; she knew she was the true Rose Wilton, but she considered it a merciful providence that had saved her from further persecution. She said she would rather beg than ever meet one of your family again. She has some other grief than the loss of mother and money, I think. Indeed, I am quite sure it is some disappointment in affairs of the heart, as my nephew has been trying to win her; but she tells him she has no heart to give. Can it be possible, Mr. Gaylord, that she loved you?"