

When You Think

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An Unexplained Affair

Only Two Persons Understood It

By F. A. MITCHEL

Silas Barker was a bachelor farmer of thirty-five, in good health, prosperous and steadily growing rich. One who saw him and remarked upon his condition would not dream that there was anything in the world he wanted unless it was a wife.

There was a jog in Mr. Barker's farm that made it look something like a pie, with one piece cut out of it. This piece was owned by Miss Clementine Wilson, a maiden lady a year or two older or a year or two younger—the women of the locality all claimed that she was older—who lived alone, just as Silas did, and every one said what a sensible thing it would be for Silas to marry her and complete the circular outline of his farm.

One day Miss Wilson received a call from a real estate agent, who asked if she would care to sell her property, adding that if she did he thought he had a purchaser for it. Miss Wilson told him that she had never considered selling it, but she would think the matter over and if she came to a conclusion to part with it she would let him know. The agent left his card with his address on it and departed.

A few days later she wrote a note to Mr. Barker in which she told him that she had been approached with a view to the purchase of her property and since she supposed that if it changed hands it should be a part of his farm she thought it proper to notify him before taking any action in the matter. To this note she received a reply stating that he had as much land already as he had ready capital to work and did not care to purchase any more. However, he thanked her for notifying him.

Here the matter ended for the time being except that Miss Wilson wrote to the agent to ask what price would be offered for her property and received a reply that he could get for it what she considered about half its value. To the offer she made no reply.

Though Silas and Clementine had been neighbors for years, they had had nothing more than a speaking acquaintance. One day some time after Clementine had been approached with reference to the purchase of her property when coming from the postoffice she met Silas on the road. He stopped to reiterate his thanks for her notification and to explain why he wouldn't care to buy her farm. He would have to enlarge his buildings, buy new implements, and all that.

"By the by, Miss Wilson," he said, "I find it kind of lonesome evenings at home, and I've often thought I'd like to come down to your place and visit for awhile."

A light of mingled pride and pleasure came into the woman's eye at this expressed wish of one she had always considered her superior. She replied that she was always at home evenings and would be glad to see him any time he chose to drop in. He called the next week, and the day after the farmers' wives and daughters round about were passing the news that Silas Barker was going to marry Clementine Wilson and unite the two farms.

Nor was it long before appearances seemed to justify the report. Miss Wilson began to "spruce up." Instead of being the worst dressed woman in the county she became the best dressed. Watchers averred that Silas spent two evenings a week with her. On Sunday afternoons he drove her out in his new sidecar buggy with red wheels. Persons began to say that the day was set for the wedding when suddenly the affair was off.

No one dared ask Silas what had come between the two, and as for Clementine she wouldn't tell. But it leaked out that Clementine's farm had something to do with the matter. This was puzzling, because it was supposed that adding her farm to Barker's was an element of strength in the matter. Then an uncle of Clementine's who was her financial adviser let it all out.

"Si Barker," he said, "is the meanest man out of jail. What he was after was Clem's farm. He sent a real estate agent to buy it for a song. Clem wrote Barker about the offer, knowing that if the property passed out of her hands it ought to pass into Barker's. He said he didn't want it. The reason he did this was thinkin' if he bought it from her direct he'd have to pay a fair price for it. When the scheme failed he set in to court her. The matter went so far that the day was set for the wedding. Then Clem found that he wanted her to deed her farm to him

in consideration of a money payment of \$50 an acre when she could get a hundred for it by lettin' it be known that it was for sale. He said that since the property was to be united that was the legal way to do it. Clem saw his game and broke it all off."

While previous to this denouement Silas Barker had stood well in the community, after it he lost caste with his neighbors. Some who had suffered by certain underhanded schemes of his, while outwardly they treated him as before, inwardly knit their brows and drew down the corners of their mouths when they saw him coming. But this in no way interfered with his prosperity. Barker's credit was A1 at his bank. He was always ready to protect his crops in case of unfavorable weather and always got the best prices for his products.

"It's a mistake," said Deacon Hargreaves, "to say that honesty's the best policy in business. That might have been so once, but now it is different. But it's never different so far as conscience and comfort are concerned, and in that respect dishonesty doesn't pay either in the long run or the short run."

There was bitterness between the two so called lovers. And yet no one knew how much of love and how much of interest lay between them, though it was generally supposed that what there was of tender feeling was all on the side of the lady. And yet some who knew Barker best—or thought they did—declared that he was much "cut up" at the outcome of the affair. Most of the women condemned his action with indignation, but there were those who said that Clem Wilson was a fool to reject the only offer she had ever had or was ever likely to receive; that Barker was only providing for future emergencies in legally making the property one before the marriage. But the fact that the consideration was not \$1, the amount stipulated in formal documents, indicated that Barker never had such an intention, but did intend the courtship simply as a means of buying the Wilson farm for half its value.

While Barker never spoke of the matter between himself and Miss Wilson, he gave every indication of bitterness toward her. As to Clementine, she had lived before her engagement a patient, plodding life, and after her disappointment she resumed it. When the finer clothes she had put on during the courtship were worn out she did not replace them. If she met her ex-lover on the road she spoke to him as pleasantly as before her discovery of his game to secure her property.

At one time a rumor was started that the matter was about to be patched up between the two, but it could never be traced to any reliable foundation, and, since a statement was coupled with it that Barker was the one who wished the reconciliation, no one believed it from the first. At any rate, the rumor was never confirmed by any change in the treatment of the parties of each other.

One day the doctor was called in to see Barker and when he left the house told those who asked about his patient that he had typhoid fever. The doctor went every day to see the invalid and finally let it be known that Barker was a very sick man.

One thing was noticed during the illness that was much talked about. Clementine Wilson was seen standing at the door of the Barker farmhouse with a bowl of soup in her hands. Some one came to the door; Clementine said something; the person disappeared, and returned. Then Clementine went away with the soup.

It was surmised that an offering had been refused, and whatever sympathy had arisen for the sick man was blighted by his inhuman treatment of the woman he had been engaged to marry. Some of the women offered Miss Wilson their sympathy, at the same time animadverting upon her former lover's cruel act. But Clementine refused to listen to them.

One morning there was crape on the door of the Barker farmhouse. Tongues began to wag as to what would become of the property he had acquired, he having none but distant relatives. Every one thought of Miss Wilson and what had slipped through her fingers.

"She ought to have sold him her property for nothing," said some. "She'd have it all back now."

"She wouldn't any such thing," said another. "He never had any idea of marrying her."

"Wonder if she'll go to the funeral?"

"I should think she would. There oughtn't to be any hard feeling after death."

"I should think she wouldn't. What business has she at the funeral of a man that treated her as he did?"

And so the gossip went on. Clementine gave out the first bit of information she had to give. She would not attend the funeral because she did not wish to be remarked upon and because Mr. Barker's death ended the saddest affair of her life, and she did not think she had the fortitude to stand being present at his funeral.

So the funeral took place without any one being present who was or ever had

been nearly connected with the deceased. The next day a lawyer sent Clementine a notice that the will would be opened at a certain date, and she was invited to be present.

Whatever were her feelings at this information she kept them to herself. She went to the appointed place—the Barker farmhouse—and found there two or three distant connections of the deceased. The will was opened and read as follows:

I bequeath all my property, real and personal, to Clementine Wilson.

When it was known that the jilted woman had received some \$100,000 from the man who had jilted her the previous wagging of tongues compared with that which followed was like a tinkle of bells beside the din of battle.

What did it all mean? No one except Clementine Wilson knew, and she never told. But we do know that the human heart gives us some inscrutable mysteries; that side by side with the most contemptible meanness lies the deepest, the most enduring love. And usually those who feel deepest are most prone to hide their affairs and their feelings. No one can contemplate what is plainly indicated by Barker's action without making an inference that his nature and his habit of life cost him a happiness he ardently desired.

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