

"Marian Littlefield! Where had I heard that name before? It certainly sounded familiar; it certainly connected somewhere with my memory. But where? I could not remember then."

"I was rich, and so was Marian. So it was not a money alliance. Neither knew of the other's financial status till sometime after we became acquainted. No, it was love. Oh, heaven, how I loved her, and I love her still!"

"She still lives, then?"

"I don't know; that's why I tell you my story; you are a detective; I want you to find her—or her grave."

"Well, about two months before graduation we had a week's vacation. I, by the way, boarded at a boarding house established for the express custom of the students. Marian boarded in a private family, as did most of the girls. The advantage and purpose of this is manifest," and my friend actually smiled, the first such emotion he had exhibited since entering the car.

"I was with her there one evening during the vacation; she did not seem like her usual self; I playfully chided her about it. Then she told me she had a presentment of an approaching evil, just what it was she could not tell, but that it would in some way interfere with our approaching happiness. I laughed at her fears and kissed her, but she refused to be comforted. But I have left out one very important fact in telling you my story. I forgot to tell you we had an additional bond of friendship, besides our mutual love. She was a stamp collector and had a fine collection. Now I can resume intelligibly."

"Opening her album, Marian turned to the page devoted to Costa Rica. Taking therefrom the two reales scarlet stamp of 1865, she tore it in halves, vertically giving it an uneven terminator and handed one part to me, saying, 'take it, Maurice; it was issued in the year I was born. Take it; keep it; cherish it; remember that whatever happens our lives are as those sundered parts—they belong to each other; they should be as one.' And Marian continued in that strange manner for some time. Now I really thought she had been affected by a bad dream, or something of that sort, and would be all right when I would see her on the morrow, and when I left an hour or so later I kissed her tears away and made light of her fears."

"But I didn't see her on the morrow, nor have I seen her since that memorable day when we parted by the myotis at the gate. Little did I think of the significance of that little blue flower, for, as you probably know, it is also known as the forget-me-not."

"I called for her the next day and was informed that she was not to be found, that she had disappeared during the preceding night, probably toward morning, as her bed showed evidences of having been slept in. Then I remembered her presentment. Had it come true? It seemed so. At about the middle of the afternoon I sent for one of the best known detectives in New York, having informed the local police of the affair, and they having made no progress in the case."

"It was well on toward dusk of the next day when I was startled by the newsboys' cries of 'Here's yer evenin' papers! all about the Littlefield poisonin' case!—only two cents.' I bought one in feverish haste, to find out what it all meant. And I did find out. There it was in glaring headlines:

'A FEMALE FIEND.'

"And it went on to tell how Marian Littlefield had returned from college, and, in some manner unknown, induced her father to draw all his money

from the bank, and also to convert into cash most of his personal property, whereupon she poisoned her parents and, with the money, fled with a young man of whom a description was given."

"This was the substance of it; I can't give it in detail. You can imagine my feelings at reading this. It was a great shock to the community as well as to myself. Of course I knew that there was a mistake somewhere. But would others think so, notwithstanding the high estimation in which Marian was held by all who knew her?"

"My detective arrived."

"He took up the case and traced the fugitive pair to a town thirty miles away, where he lost all trace of them, and, try as he could, failed to regain it."

"Well, to make a long and bitter story short, the case ran its sensational course in the newspapers, occupied the minds of the various police departments for awhile, and then gave place to newer sensations. It is the way of the world. But I kept several detectives on the case for years, but to no avail. It was the mystery of the times, and remains to-day unsolved."

"Do you consider it a conspiracy?" I asked.

"Yes; most emphatically. Marian has been spirited away somewhere and the scheme carried out by clever criminals,—that's my opinion."

"Perhaps."

"Perhaps! I know so! I knew Marian; you didn't or you wouldn't be so skeptical. She was true! Some plot separated us! You are a detective, help me find my lost darling and I'll be your slave. Find the missing part of the severed specimen and you'll find Marian. I see it all now; her presentment told her to do it, and she divided the stamp. Do you think a girl could do as she did and yet be unfaithful?"

"Hardly. But, say; I suppose you have the severed specimen with you?"

"I have it here," and he took from a small envelope in his memorandum book the mutilated piece. It was as he had said, part of the *dos reales* red Costa Rica, issued in 1865. His was the right-hand half.

Handing it back to him, he returned it carefully to its place in his book, bestowing upon it a wistful look as he did so.

He then showed me Marian's photograph, which he always carried with him. She was a beautiful girl—a handsome brunette.

We, after a little more conversation on the subject, which, however, will be of comparatively little interest to the reader, rolled into the Taunton depot.

Standing on the platform, evidently waiting for the train, was a man whom I knew. I thought of my strange seat-mate, and then I knew the mission of the man on the platform.

He was the superintendent of the State Lunatic Asylum at this place.

As my strange friend and I stepped upon the platform, the asylum-keeper touched Stockton on the arm, and told him that he was wanted. My friend look around as if to run, but evidently changed his mind and walked away with Mr. Keeper, admonishing me to remember my promise.

I told him I would, and then went to my home. As customary, when at home of an evening, I took up a daily and started to read, but, try as I would, I could not keep my mind on the words before me. The case of the stranger would rise before. Finally I threw down the paper in disgust, and gave myself up to cogitating on Mr. Stockton's strange case. The name Marian Littlefield kept ringing in my ears. Where had I heard it before?

"Ah, I have it!" I exclaimed; my memory came