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THE SEVERED SPECIMEN.

THE STRANGE STORY OF A STAMP.

By A. Massachusetts Ladd.



HAD been in Boston for the greater part of the day, and was returning home on the four o'clock train. It was nearly half-past four, and the train was approaching Sharon, having left Canton Junction but five minutes before.

The car in which I sat was nearly filled, and after studying the faces around me, mentally deciding that this one was a mechanic, that one a book-keeper, another one a stock-broker, yet another a coal-dealer and so on; after I had amused myself for half-an-hour in this manner, my material having given out, I took from an inner pocket my pocket album for duplicates. Had it not been for this very incident, trifling as it was, my story would never have been written. On this incident is based the strangest chain of circumstances in which a postage stamp ever played a leading part.

I was still looking at some of the specimens therein, wondering if any of those little bits of paper had any unusual history connected with them, when the train came to a halt at the popular summer resort of Sharon.

A number of passengers alighted and about an equal number got aboard, the majority of whom entered the car in which I was seated. Among the latter was a gentleman, apparently forty years of age, but whom I thought could not be much over thirty. Somewhat above medium height, built in proportion, full brown beard, dark eyes, which would attract attention anywhere,—all giving to his face an expression never to be forgotten by the beholder—undoubtedly a man who had had more than his share of trouble in this wide world of ours. I put him down as a traveller whose history would be interesting to hear.

Pausing beside the seat of which I occupied half, he asked in clear, steady tones, which I imagined had a sad ring to them, if the seat, indicating the unoccupied one beside me, was engaged, and, if not, if I had any objection to him sitting there. The last clause I thought somewhat strange, but did not quite understand it till some time later. For, surely, if the seat was not engaged, he could and had a perfect right to sit there, whether I objected or not. Few persons are retiring enough in disposition to ask that.

The stranger seated himself, and as I was about to return the duplicate album to my pocket he observed it and asked if he might look at it; also asking if I was a stamp collector. My answer was:

"Yes; are you?"

"Well, not exactly; I was, am not now, and yet I am in a certain way. I'm after a part of a certain stamp; it's all I want for my collection; I'd pay thousands for it."

What did the man mean? However, I asked: "You do and yet you don't? Sort of a 'now you see it and now you don't.'" By the way, basing my question on the affirmative clause of your statement, may I ask the number of stamps in your collection?"

"Yes; I have half a one."

"Half a one?" I ejaculated interrogatively, "I do not quite understand."

"It is a short, sad story, but if you wish I'll tell it to you?"

I assured him that I would be pleased to hear it, whereupon he began.

"You are, or rather will be when I have told you, the only living person to whom I ever imparted my story. But I feel that you are in some way to help me to find the missing part of my stamp and also my darling."

His darling! A woman in the case? Sure. They are always "in it."

"But we haven't told each other our names yet. Here is my card, and he handed me a neat paste-board, on which was inscribed:

"MAURICE STOCKTON,
The World."

"Do you represent the *World*, Mr. Stockton?"

"Oh, no; I'm no reporter. I have no home; I am a wanderer upon the face of the earth—no city claims me for a citizen. I've travelled the world over in the past seven years, and am at home in one part as well as in another; I've had no home since Marion went away; I have need of none." And his voice was sad indeed.

I then handed Mr. Stockton my card, inscribed thus:

"A. M. LADD,
Detective."

Looking at it he queried:

"You are a detective, then?"

"Yes."

"Then perhaps you can help me. So here is my story:

"Ten—no, eleven years ago I, then a young man of twenty, entered ——— College, in New York State. You have probably heard of it."

"Yes; I have been through it."

"Indeed, I'm glad to meet a graduate from there. What class were you in?"

"Oh, I went through as a sight-seeing pedestrian—not as a student."

"Oh," said my seat-mate, in a tone of regret, you joke. "Well I suppose it's all right."

"Well, this institution was on the co-education principle, and therefore young ladies were among the students."

"Among them was one—Marian Littlefield her name was—to whom I seemed attracted. The attraction was mutual. We became acquainted, we fell in love, and oh! we had it bad. Time passed swiftly, and we became engaged, and were to be married one month after graduation."