

**STORIES BY
AMERICAN
AUTHORS. VOLUME I**

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Stories by American Authors. Volume I by Various

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VARIOUS

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VOLUME I

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Frederick M. Keith

Stories by
American Authors

VOLUME I

WHO WAS SHE

By BAYARD TAYLOR

THE DOCUMENTS IN THE CASE

By BRANDER MATTHEWS AND H. C. BUNNER

ONE OF THE THIRTY PIECES

By WILLIAM HENRY BISHOP

BALACCHI BROTHERS

By REBECCA HARDING DAVIS

AN OPERATION IN MONEY

By ALBERT WEBSTER

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1899

WHO WAS SHE?

BY BAYARD TAYLOR.

COME, now, there may as well be an end of this! Every time I meet your eyes squarely I detect the question just slipping out of them. If you had spoken it, or even boldly looked it; if you had shown in your motions the least sign of a fussy or fidgety concern on my account; if this were not the evening of my birthday, and you the only friend who remembered it; if confession were not good for the soul, though harder than sin to some people, of whom I am one,—well, if all reasons were not at this instant converged into a focus, and burning me rather violently in that region where the seat of emotion is supposed to lie, I should keep my trouble to myself.

Yes, I have fifty times had it on my mind to tell you the whole story. But who can be certain that his best friend will not smile—or, what is worse,

cherish a kind of charitable pity ever afterwards—when the external forms of a very serious kind of passion seem trivial, fantastic, foolish? And the worst of all is that the heroic part which I imagined I was playing proves to have been almost the reverse. The only comfort which I can find in my humiliation is that I am capable of feeling it. There isn't a bit of a paradox in this, as you will see; but I only mention it, now, to prepare you for, maybe, a little morbid sensitiveness of my moral nerves.

The documents are all in this portfolio, under my elbow. I had just read them again completely through, when you were announced. You may examine them as you like, afterwards: for the present, fill your glass, take another Cabafia, and keep silent until my "ghastly tale" has reached its most lamentable conclusion.

The beginning of it was at Wampsocket Springs three years ago last summer. I suppose most unmarried men who have reached, or passed, the age of thirty—and I was then thirty-three—experience a milder return of their adolescent warmth, a kind of fainter second spring, since the first has not fulfilled its promise. Of course, I wasn't clearly conscious of this at the time: who is? But I had had my youthful passion and my tragic disappointment, as you know: I had looked far enough into what Thackeray used to call the cryptic mysteries, to save me from the Scylla of dissipation, and yet preserved enough of natural nature to keep me out

of the Pharisaic Charybdis. My devotion to my legal studies had already brought me a mild distinction ; the paternal legacy was a good nest-egg for the incubation of wealth,—in short, I was a fair, respectable " party," desirable to the humbler mammas, and not to be despised by the haughty exclusives.

The fashionable hotel at the Springs holds three hundred, and it was packed. I had meant to lounge there for a fortnight and then finish my holidays at Long Branch ; but eighty, at least, out of the three hundred, were young and moved lightly in muslin. With my years and experience I felt so safe, that to walk, talk, or dance with them became simply a luxury, such as I had never—at least so freely—possessed before. My name and standing, known to some families, were agreeably exaggerated to the others, and I enjoyed that supreme satisfaction which a man always feels when he discovers or imagines that he is popular in society. There is a kind of premonitory apology implied in my saying this, I am aware. You must remember that I am culprit and culprit's counsel at the same time.

You have never been at Wampsocket ? Well, the hills sweep around in a crescent on the northern side and four or five radiating glens descending from them unite just above the village. The central one leading to a waterfall (called " Minnehehe" by the irreverent young people, because there is so little of it), is the fashionable drive and