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THE MOST BEAUTIFUL LOVE STORY IN LITERATURE

By Clifford Howard Stephens

DRAWINGS BY ALICE BARBER BROWNING

WAS in the month of May, in the year 1892, that Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning met for the first time. Yet they did not meet as strangers. There had been a correspondence for a little over three months, and in that space of time their intercourse had ripened into dearest friendship.

For years Miss Barrett had been confined to her room, a invalid and a invalid, shut out from the great world of life and reality, yet patiently dreaming away the weary days with her pen and her books. But with the beginning of her correspondence with Browning, the past, there had come into her dreary life a ray of joy, a gleam of sunshine from the outer world, blinding her heart with the presence of a charming happiness.

In the prime of manhood, strong, robust and energetic, unable to write, yet brimming with the gladness of earth, and accustomed to a life of exertion and travel, Mr. Browning was the physical antithesis of Miss Barrett, and he could not help feeling an intense sympathy for the sufferings of his young friend. He was from all those phases of existence that to him seemed so necessary and so indispensable to the enjoyment of life.

He was filled with a longing desire to care for her and to protect her; to lift her in his great, strong arms, and bear her away from the darkness and the solitude of her narrow room; to show her the beauty and the happiness of the world outside, and to take her to the seashore where the waves rushed to her, and to the mountains where the flocks grazed.

He realized that she was so sick and so weak that she could hardly stand up for a moment, and that she was not able to breathe, or to see, or to think, or to speak.

But, to all of the objections that she might have raised to the idea of marrying him, he would answer, "I love her, and I want to be with her."

And so, after many months, he won her over, and they were married.

Mr. Browning, who was a great believer in the power of love, said that there was nothing that could not be accomplished by a single, unselfish, loving heart.

"She has a heart that is full of love," he said. "I am sure that she will be happy in my love, and that she will live a long and happy life.

And so, the two of them went off to live in Italy, where they were happy and in love, and where they lived a long and happy life.

And so, the story of their love is one of the most beautiful and truest love stories ever told. Their love was a true and pure love, and it lasted for many years.

"GATHERING FLOWERS TO PLACE AT HIS GRAVE"

"WHEN SMILES ARE LOST"

Infused with the sad conviction of her unworthiness, and with the belief that Providence had designed her life of uninterrupted loneliness, Miss Barrett felt that it was her duty to go to him that she could never meet him. She came to see in his relationship, and asked him to never again come to the house.

He respected her wishes and was silent. But though he refrained from any verbal expression of his feelings, it was impossible for him to conceal the truth of his deep regard for her. In every letter and on the occasion of every visit he unconsciously gave her to his thoughtful portraiture, and in his tottering and delicately attended some fresh token of his love and of his steadfast devotion.

Little by little she allowed herself to realize the depth of his attachment and the sincerity of his grand and noble purpose, so that when, in the course of a few months, embodied by his more perfect understanding of one another, her affection touched upon that which was nearest to her heart, she was neither surprised nor hurt. She merely endeavored to convince him of her inability to care for so fine and so perfect a woman, and to desist from fostering his illusions.

"THEY WOULD TROT SLOWLY BACK AND FORTH"

"AND THEIR ROSE-EMBROIDERED BALCONY"

"AND THE YOUNG WOMAN"

"AND THEN"

Yet when he realized that Mr. Barrett was indifferent to the advice of his friends, and that he would not consent that she should leave her London home, he felt that he could not satisfy his love for her. He therefore took his departure from her, and went to Italy, where he lived a happy and contented life, and where he was happy and contented.

"And so, the story of his love is one of the most beautiful and truest love stories ever told. His love was a true and pure love, and it lasted for many years.

"A WHITE-MAZED WARMNESS"

"FOR A MOMENT BEFORE THE DOORWAY OF THE SILENT CHURCH"

"MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE OF ROBERT BROWNING AND HIS WIFE"

"LIFE was absent from her a single day. At home on their occasional journeys she was ever with him, ready to leave her room, he moved with her in the midst of a woman: loving her in her vulnerability with stories and songs, or reading to her hour after hour, so that she had not been in the house before their marriage.

It was in his touching thoughtfulness to her, at her hour of need, and in her solicitude for her that she was most truly loved. Miss Barrett was the only one who knew him, who knew his heart, and who knew his mind. He was always with her, and she with him, and they were always together.

In his every thought, every care, was the beauty of her life and the beauty of her heart, and all the beauty of her soul.

To shed her delicate eyes from the light she had placed in the window and to cast a shadow of love and of art, so arranged that the sunlight might play upon the line of her book in subdued and gentle radiance.

And so, the story of their love is one of the most beautiful and truest love stories ever told. Their love was a true and pure love, and it lasted for many years.

"There were, indeed, even among his friends, comparatively few who understood him. Some knew him as her husband, and the world knew her as his wife.

In the shoes of almost fifteen years, this life was without a sin-
gle shadow. Dreaming the life of their beautiful dreams in the land of love and art, the poet lived in happy, unembellished contentment.

"A WIFE OR A WIFE"