

**ONLY A LOVE-
STORY. IN THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649662463

Only a Love-Story. In Three Volumes. Vol. I by Iza Duffus Hardy

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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IZA DUFFUS HARDY

**ONLY A LOVE-
STORY. IN THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

ONLY A LOVE-STORY.

BY

IZA DUFFUS HARDY,

AUTHOR OF

“GLENCAIRN,” “NOT EASILY JEALOUS,”
“BETWEEN TWO FIRES,”
&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1877.

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251. d. 938

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BOOK I.

IN THE HAPPY MORNING OF LIFE AND OF MAY.

“The thrushes sang,
And shook my pulses and the elms's new leaves ;
At which I turned and held my finger up,
And bade him mark that, howsoever the world
Went ill, as he related, certainly
The thrushes still sang in it.

I was glad that day ;
The June was in me, with its multitudes
Of nightingales all singing in the dark,
And rosebuds reddening where the calyx split—
I felt so young, so strong, so sure of God !
So glad, I could not choose be very wise !”

E. B. BROWNING.

ONLY A LOVE-STORY.

CHAPTER I.

“SWEET IS ALL THE LAND ABOUT AND ALL THE
FLOWERS THAT BLOW.”

IT is early in the evening, and early in
“the merry month of May.” The
season may be Spring by the almanac,
but by the sun and sky and flowering trees
this day has been pure Summer.

The London street is warm and still;
even the much-abused London sky is blue
for once, as clear and stainless a blue as
Italy ever knows, though of less rich and
intense a tint than that which glorifies the
heaven of Italy, and seems to veil in radi-
ance its measureless depths.

It is the last half-hour of daylight, and no fleck of cloud floats in the faultless azure from horizon to horizon. But the inhabitants of Clarence Street have no horizon-line; two parallel rows of bricks and mortar compose all their view, and shut out all sights of Spring and Summer save the broad belt of beautiful blue heaven above. The square straight outlines of wall and window all the length of the long street are unbroken by the grace of a single curve; and from the dingy chimneys down to the pavements that are dusty white when there is sunshine, and muddy brown when there is rain, not a gleam of brightening colour, nor a leaf of refreshing green catches the eye, save in one or two places, where courageous and constant lovers of flowers have set forth pots of those frail beauties on their window-sills, to droop in the London dust, and die in the London smoke.

There is one more sign of the season

still—the itinerant flower-man, with his barrow, is abroad, carrying a breath of the country with him, looking up at each house as he passes to utter his sing-song shout of “All a-blowin’, and a-growin’.” He has had some custom already this evening; he transacts a little more business now at No. 21. The invalid lady in the front parlour, lying on her couch by the window, sends out the little maid-of-all-work to strike a bargain for a pot of hyacinths and an early geranium. The landlady in the back parlour is not so extravagant. There are no flowers blooming in her dingy back yard; she “doesn’t see what people want with flowers in London—they’ll only die!” Still she steps out of her parlour to look and sniff at the white geranium which slipshod, grimy-faced, and grimier-aproned little Polly (who sees trees and green grass once a year) is carrying with a broad smile of delight into Miss Howard’s room.

All the windows of the house are more

or less open ; all its various inmates are, in one way or another, enjoying the mild evening air. The elderly bachelor in the third-floor front, under-clerk in a lawyer's office, on hard work and small pay, is looking out of his window across the dusty street to the opposite chimney-pots, and smoking bad tobacco ; the young man in the third-floor back has laid down his pen, and is looking out of his window, across the back-yards, where clothes-lines swing and droop, and smoking a tolerably good cigar. The little dressmaker's girl in the second-floor back is carefully watering and tending a pink primula in a pot, one of her rare sallies of extravagance. A light breeze stirs the petals of the flower as it stands on the window-sill ; the girl gives a sigh of pleasure and of memory as she lays her face close down to the leaves. She was born in the country, and she will never, even if she lives to be an old woman, which is scarcely a probability, attain to