

**GRADIVA: A  
POMPEIIAN FANCY**

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Gradiva: A Pompeian Fancy by Wilhelm Jensen

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**WILHELM JENSEN**

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Kate Reilly

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# GRADIVA

## A POMPEIIAN FANCY

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## GRADIVA

ON a visit to one of the great antique collections of Rome, Norbert Hanold had discovered a bas-relief which was exceptionally attractive to him, so he was much pleased, after his return to Germany, to be able to get a splendid plaster-cast of it. This had now been hanging for some years on one of the walls of his work-room, all the other walls of which were lined with bookcases. Here it had the advantage of a position with the right light exposure, on a wall visited, though but briefly, by the evening sun. About one third life-size, the bas-relief represented a complete female figure in the act of walking; she was still young, but no longer in childhood and, on the other hand, apparently not a woman, but a Roman virgin about in her twentieth year. In no way did she remind one of the numerous extant bas-reliefs of a Venus, a Diana, or other Olympian goddess, and equally little of a Psyche or nymph. In her was embodied something humanly commonplace—not in a bad sense—to a degree a sense of present time, as if the artist, in-

stead of making a pencil sketch of her on a sheet of paper, as is done in our day, had fixed her in a clay model quickly, from life, as she passed on the street, a tall, slight figure, whose soft, wavy hair a folded kerchief almost completely bound; her rather slender face was not at all dazzling; and the desire to produce such effect was obviously equally foreign to her; in the delicately formed features was expressed a nonchalant equanimity in regard to what was occurring about her; her eye, which gazed calmly ahead, bespoke absolutely unimpaired powers of vision and thoughts quietly withdrawn. So the young woman was fascinating, not at all because of plastic beauty of form, but because she possessed something rare in antique sculpture, a realistic, simple, maidenly grace which gave the impression of imparting life to the relief. This was effected chiefly by the movement represented in the picture. With her head bent forward a little, she held slightly raised in her left hand, so that her sandaled feet became visible, her garment which fell in exceedingly voluminous folds from her throat to her ankles. The left foot had advanced, and the right, about to follow, touched the ground only lightly with the tips of the toes, while the sole and heel were raised almost vertically. This movement produced a double impression of exceptional agility and of confident composure,