

**THE
BRONZE VENUS**

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The bronze Venus by Eden Phillpotts

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EDEN PHILLPOTTS

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BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

AUTHOR OF "EVANDER," "THE GIRL AND THE FAUN," ETC.



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I

A SHOCK FOR MRS. FAIRBROTHER

THE library at Orchard Dene, Tunbridge Wells, was a handsome apartment—indeed more than a library, for Mrs. Fairbrother loved it as well as her husband did and spent much of her leisure there. Notable book-shelves adorned the walls. They were Sheraton and of great distinction. Between them hung a series of large etchings: the ruins of our Norman Castles. French windows opened upon the garden, and though the electric light now blazed from silver sconces, a blue summer dusk still hung over the grounds and a fountain not far distant plashed lazily, as though wearying of its labours.

The marble mantelpiece was a copy of that famous work by Stevens—the rare artist too little recognised and revered. A few flowering plants in massive bronze tubs broke the lines of the room, and one peculiar object, built into the wall upon the right-hand side of the mantelpiece, must have arrested any observant eye. It was

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a small safe inefficiently disguised. Rich fabrics hung about the room ; a coat-of-arms appeared blazoned above the central book-shelf ; the chairs were numerous and comfortable ; many objects of ancient art were scattered through the apartment, and others collected together under the glass face of a large silver-table. The decorations were old fashioned to modern taste, yet they lacked not an air of repose rarely to be found where chambers are designed and adorned in the latest fashion.

But it was a remarkable room to have been created by a man who had begun life as a navy, and it argued enthusiasms and emotions rarely to be found in that valuable class of the community.

Josiah Fairbrother was a self-made man who knew what to do with his money—a *rara avis*. By some streak of heredity, not necessary to investigate, he had been born with a sense of beauty, and when his other more practical endowments of mind raised him from the railway and road-making, he developed æsthetic tastes and employed a gigantic fortune in the manner that his bent inclined.

Now his wife and two daughters were about to drink their coffee in the library, and Mrs. Fairbrother, a large and handsome woman of sixty, expressed pleasure at the companionship