

EVANDER

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Evander by Eden Phillpotts

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EDEN PHILLPOTTS

EVANDER

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BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

AUTHOR OF

"THE GIRL AND THE FAUN," "A SHADOW PASSES"
"DELIGHT," ETC.



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HOW FESTUS WEDDED LIVIA

IN time past lawful marriage might only be contracted among the nobler folk. Patricians alone enjoyed the privilege, so that many admirable wives were lost to the community and many good men denied the pleasure of exhibiting a husband's virtues. It is not easy for us to imagine a high civilisation, wherein the upper ten alone were permitted this domestic delight ; but thus it happened, until came the tribune, Canuleius, who—advanced spirit that he was—perceived and declared no reason in the nature of things to prevent the marriage of the middle classes. Nay, this innovator went farther, and, greatly daring, claimed that every Roman citizen might become a husband, if it so pleased him.

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Heaven was sustained, though we may suppose the forum thundered with fierce and bitter opposition, for doubtless your patricians resented with all their might so grave an instalment of progressive legislation. The populace began to wed—charily at first, then with greater trust; and since the gods smiled upon their nuptials, even the rag-picker, or dustman felt he might take a wife without affront to Olympus.

From the Latins to all the Italians this prodigious boon presently extended, and when Caracalla donned the purple, he conferred marriage as a royal gift on every inhabitant of the Roman Empire.

Thus we find that even Caracalla, an emperor for whom few just persons spare a smile, can claim one item on the credit side of his sanguinary account.

But, by Apollo and Bacchus, who shall dogmatise on this great subject? Has not marriage itself been weighed in the balance of public opinion and found wanting? The invention loses its old, four-square majesty.

HOW FESTUS WEDDED LIVIA

Indeed, what institution but grows ruinous and moss-covered in these our days?

Moreover, while the gods were held to commend all lawful unions, they themselves could not deny that even in celestial circles the marital state worked not to much edification.

No shadow, however, had crept over marriage when the woodman, Festus, desired to wed Livia, the daughter of Carmenta, the washerwoman. For their humble class, a vernal bloom of youth still graced the rite. They were themselves pioneers—the very first in that hamlet to venture upon the doubtful privileges and certain obligations of wedlock. It was, indeed, counted something of an eccentricity when the young man's intentions proved strictly honourable, and the pagan folk doubted whether Festus were not taking himself and Livia almost too seriously.

There needed a pinch of the heroine in your soul, also, to wed if you happened to be a washerwoman's daughter in those days, and Livia, when she accepted the woodman, while earning uneasy admiration from certain of her