A Lost Story

Frank Norris

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I

AT nine o'clock that morning Rosella arrived in her little office on the third floor of the great publishing−house of Conant Company, and putting up her veil without removing her hat, addressed herself to her day's work.

She went through her meager and unimportant mail, wrote a few replies, and then turned to the pile of volunteer manuscripts which it was her duty to read and report upon.

For Rosella was Conant's "reader," and so well was she acquainted with the needs of the house, so thorough was she in her work, and so great was the reliance upon her judgment, that she was the only one employed. Manuscripts that she "passed up" went direct to Conant himself, while the great army of the "declined" had no second chance. For the "unavailables" her word was final.

From the first — which was when her initial literary venture, a little book of short tales of Sicily and the Sicilians, was published by the house — her relations with the Conants had been intimate. Conant believed in her, and for the sake of the time when her books could be considered safe investments was willing to lose a few dollars during the time of her apprenticeship. For the tales had enjoyed only a fleeting succ s d'estime. Her style was, like her temperament, delicately constructed and of extreme refinement, not the style to appeal to the masses. It was "searched," a little precieuse, and the tales themselves were diaphanous enough, polished little contes, the points subtle, the action turning upon minute psychological distinctions.

Yet she had worked desperately hard upon their composition. She was of those very few who sincerely cannot write unless the mood be propitious; and her state of mind, the condition of her emotions, was very apt to influence her work for good or ill, as the case might be.

But a succes d'estime fills no purses, and favorable reviews in the literary periodicals are not "negotiable paper." Rosella could not yet live wholly by her pen, and, while awaiting the time of her arrival, thought herself fortunate when the house offered her the position of reader.

This arrival of hers was no doubt to be hastened, if not actually assured, by the publication of her first novel, "Patroclus," upon which she was at this time at work. The evening before, she had read the draft of the story to Trevor, and even now, as she cut the string of the first manuscript of the pile, she was thinking over what Trevor had said of it, and smiling as she thought.

It was through Conant that Rosella had met the great novelist and critic, and it was because of Conant that Trevor had read Rosella's first little book. He had taken an interest at once, and had found occasion to say to her that she had it in her to make a niche for herself in American letters.

He was a man old enough to be her grandfather, and Rosella often came to see him in his study, to advise with him as to doubtful points in her stories or as to ideas for those as yet unwritten. To her his opinion was absolutely final. This old gentleman, this elderly man of letters, who had seen the rise and fall of a dozen schools, was above the influence of fads, and he whose books were among the classics even before his death was infallible in his judgments of the work of the younger writers. All the stages of their evolution were known to him — all their mistakes, all their successes. He understood; and a story by one of them, a poem, a novel, that bore the stamp of his approval, was "sterling." Work that he declared a failure was such in very earnest, and might as well be consigned as speedily as possible to the grate or the waste−basket.

When, therefore, he had permitted himself to be even enthusiastic over "Patroclus," Rosella had been elated beyond the power of expression, and had returned home with blazing cheeks and shining eyes, to lie awake half the night thinking of her story, planning, perfecting, considering and reconsidering.

Like her short stories, the tale was of extreme delicacy in both sentiment and design. it was a little fanciful, a little elaborate, but of an ephemeral poetry. It was all "atmosphere," and its success depended upon the minutest precision of phrasing and the nicest harmony between idea and word. There was much in mere effect of words; and more important than mere plot was the feeling produced by the balancing of phrases and the cadence of sentence and paragraph.

Only a young woman of Rosella's complexity, of her extreme sensitiveness, could have conceived "Patroclus," nor could she herself hope to complete it successfully at any other period of her life. Any earlier she would have

been too immature to adapt herself to its demands; any later she would have lost the spontaneity, the jeunesse, and the freshness which were to contribute to its greatest charm.

The tale itself was simple. Instead of a plot, a complication, it built itself around a central idea, and it was the originality of this idea, this motif, that had impressed Trevor so strongly. Indeed, Rosella's draft could convey no more than that. Her treatment was all to follow. But here she was sure of herself. The style would come naturally as she worked.

She was ambitious, and in her craving to succeed, to be recognized and accepted, was all that passionate eagerness that only the artist knows. So far success had been denied her; but now at last she seemed to see light. Her "Patroclus" would make her claims good. Everything depended upon that.

She had thought over this whole situation while she removed the wrappings from the first manuscript of the pile upon her desk. Even then her fingers itched for the pen, and the sentences and phrases of the opening defined themselves clearly in her mind. But that was not to be the immediate work. The unlovely bread−and−butter business pressed upon her. With a long breath she put the vision from her and turned her attention to the task at hand.

After her custom, she went through the pile, glancing at the titles and first lines of each manuscript, and putting it aside in the desk corner to be considered in detail later on.

She almost knew in advance that of the thirty−odd volunteers of that day's batch not one would prove available. The manuscripts were tagged and numbered in the business office before they came to her, and the number of the first she picked up that morning was 1120, and this since the first of the year. Of the eleven hundred she had accepted only three. Of these three, two had failed entirely after publication; the third had barely paid expenses. What a record! How hopeless it seemed! Yet the strugglers persisted. Did it not seem as if No. 1120, Mrs. Allen Bowen of Bentonville, South Dakota — did it not seem as if she could know that the great American public has no interest in, no use for, "Thoughts on the Higher Life," a series of articles written for the county paper — foolish little articles revamped from Ruskin and Matthew Arnold?

And 1121 — what was this? The initial lines ran: "'Oh, damn everything!' exclaimed Percival Holcombe, as he dropped languidly into a deep−seated leather chair by the club window which commanded a view of the noisy street crowded with fashion and frivolity, wherein the afternoon's sun, freed from its enthralling mists, which all day long had jealously obscured his beams, was gloating o'er the panels of the carriages of noblemen who were returning from race−track and park, and the towhead of the little sweeper who plied his humble trade which earned his scanty supper that he ate miles away from that gay quarter wherein Percival Holcombe, who — " Rosella paused for sheer breath. This sort did not need to be read. it was declined already. She picked up the next. It was in an underwear−box of green paste−board.

"The staid old town of Salem," it read, "was all astir one bright and sunny morning in the year 1604." Rosella groaned. "Another!" she said. "Now," she continued, speaking to herself and shutting her eyes — "now about the next page the 'portly burgess' will address the heroine as 'Mistress,' and will say, 'An' whither away so early?'" She turned over to verify. She was wrong. The portly burgess had said: "Good morrow, Mistress Priscilla. An' where away so gaily bedizened?" She sighed as she put the manuscript away. "Why, and, oh, why will they do it!" she murmured.

The next one, 1123, was a story "Compiled from the Memoirs of One Perkin Althorpe, Esq., Sometime Field−Cornet in His Majesty's Troop of Horse," and was sown thick with objurgation — "Ods−wounds!" "Body o' me!" "A murrain on thee!" "By my halidom!" and all the rest of the sweepings and tailings of Scott and the third−rate romanticists.

"Declined," said Rosella, firmly, tossing it aside. She turned to 1124:

"About three o'clock of a roseate day in early spring two fashionables of the softer sex, elegantly arrayed, might have been observed sauntering languidly down Fifth Avenue.

"'Are you going to Mrs. Van Billion's musicale to−night?' inquired the older of the two, a tall and striking demi−brunette, turning to her companion.

"'No, indeed,' replied the person thus addressed, a blonde of exquisite coloring. 'No, indeed. The only music one hears there is the chink of silver dollars. Ha! ha! ha! ha!'"

Rosella winced as if in actual physical anguish. "And the author calls it a 'social satire'!" she exclaimed. "How can she! How can she!"

She turned to the next. It was written in script that was a model of neatness, margined, correctly punctuated, and addressed, "Harold Vickers," with the town and State. Its title was "The Last Dryad," and the poetry of the phrase stuck in her mind. She read the first lines, then the first page, then two.

"Come," said Rosella, "there is something in this." At once she was in a little valley in Boeotia in the Arcadian day. It was evening. There was no wind. Somewhere a temple opalescent in the sunset suggested rather than defined itself. A landscape developed such as Turner in a quiet mood might have evolved, and with it a feeling of fantasy, of remoteness, of pure, true classicism. A note of pipes was in the air, sheep bleated, and Daphne, knee−deep in the grass, surging an answer to the pipes, went down to meet her shepherd.

Rosella breathed a great sigh of relief. Here at last was a possibility — a new writer with a new, sane view of his world and his work. A new poet, in fine. She consulted the name and address given — Harold Vickers, Ash Fork, Arizona. There was something in that Harold; perhaps education and good people. But the Vickers told her nothing. And where was Ash Fork, Arizona; and why and how had "The Last Dryad" been written there, of all places the green world round? How came the inspiration for that classic paysage, such as Ingres would have loved, from the sage−brush and cactus? "Well," she told herself, "Moore wrote 'Lalla Rookh' in a back room in London, among the chimney−pots and soot. Maybe the proportion is inverse. But, Mr. Harold Vickers of Ash Fork, Arizona, your little book is, to say the least, well worth its ink."

She went through the other manuscripts as quickly as was consistent with fairness, and declined them all. Then settling herself comfortably in her chair, she plunged, with the delight of an explorer venturing upon new ground, into the pages of "The Last Dryad."

II

FOUR hours later she came, as it were, to herself, to find that she sat lax in her place, with open, upturned palms, and eyes vacantly fixed upon the opposite wall. "The Last Dryad," read to the final word, was tumbled in a heap upon the floor. It was past her luncheon−hour. Her cheeks flamed; her hands were cold and moist; and her heart beat thick and slow, clogged, as it were, by its own heaviness.

But the lapse of time was naught to her, nor the fever that throbbed in her head. Her world, like a temple of glass, had come down dashing about her. The future, which had beckoned her onward, — a fairy in the path wherein her feet were set, — was gone, and at the goal of her ambition and striving she saw suddenly a stranger stand, plucking down the golden apples that she so long and passionately had desired.

For "The Last Dryad" was her own, her very, very own and cherished "Patroclus."

That the other author had taken the story from a different view−point, that his treatment varied, that the approach was his own, that the wording was his own, produced not the least change upon the final result. The idea, the motif, was identical in each; identical in every particular, identical in effect, in suggestion. The two tales were one. That was the fact, the unshakable fact, the block of granite that a malicious fortune had flung athwart her little pavilion of glass.

At first she jumped to the conclusion of chicanery. At first there seemed no other explanation. "He stole it," she cried, rousing vehemently from her inertia — "mine — mine. He stole my story."

But common sense prevailed in the end. No, there was no possible chance for theft. She had not spoken of "Patroclus" to any one but Trevor. Her manuscript draft had not once left her hands. No; it was a coincidence, nothing more — one of those fateful coincidences with which the scientific and literary worlds are crowded. And he, this unknown Vickers, this haphazard genius of Ash Fork, Arizona, had the prior claim. Her "Patroclus" must remain unwritten. The sob caught and clutched at her throat at last.

"Oh," she cried in a half−whisper — "oh, my chance, my hopes, my foolish little hopes! And now this! To have it all come to nothing — when I was so proud, so buoyant — and Mr. Trevor and all! Oh, could anything be more cruel!"

And then, of all moments, ex machina, Harold Vickers's card was handed in.

She stared at it an instant, through tears, amazed and incredulous. Surely some one was playing a monstrous joke upon her to−day. Soon she would come upon the strings and false bottoms and wigs and masks of the game. But the office−boy's contemplation of her distress was real. Something must be done. The whole machine of things could not indefinitely hang thus suspended, inert, waiting her pleasure.

"Yes," she exclaimed all at once. "Very well; show him in"; and she had no more than gathered up the manuscript of "The Last Dryad" from the floor when its author entered the room.

He was very young, — certainly not more than twenty−three, — tall, rather poorly dressed, an invalid, beyond doubt, and the cough and the flush on the high cheek−bone spelled the name of the disease. The pepper−and−salt suit, the shoe−string cravat, and the broad felt hat were frankly Arizona. And he was diffident, constrained, sitting uncomfortably on the chair as a mark of respect, smiling continually, and, as he talked, throwing in her name at almost every phrase:

"No, Miss Beltis; yes, Miss Beltis; quite right, Miss Beltis."

His embarrassment helped her to her own composure, and by the time she came to question him as to his book and the reasons that brought him from Ash Fork to New York, she had herself in hand.

"I have received an unimportant government appointment in the Fisheries Department," he explained, "and as I was in New York for the week I thought I might — not that I wished to seem to hurry you, Miss Beltis — but I thought I might ask if you had come to — to my little book yet."

In five minutes of time Rosella knew just where Harold Vickers was to be placed, to what type he belonged. He was the young man of great talent who, so far from being discovered by the outside world, had not even discovered himself. He would be in two minds as yet about his calling in life, whether it was to be the hatching of fish or the writing of "Last Dryads." No one had yet taken him in hand, had so much as spoken a word to him. If she told him now that his book was a ridiculous failure, he would no doubt say — and believe — that she was

quite right, that he had felt as much himself. If she told him his book was a little masterpiece, he would be just as certain to tell himself, and with equal sincerity, that he had known it from the first.

He had offered his manuscript nowhere else as yet. He was as new as an overnight daisy, and as destructible in Rosella's hands.

"Yes," she said at length, "I have read your manuscript." She paused a moment, then: "But I am not quite ready to pass upon it yet."

He was voluble in his protestations.

"Oh, that is all right," she interrupted. "I can come to the second reading in a day or two. I could send you word by the end of the week."

"Thank you, Miss Beltis." He paused awkwardly, smiling in deprecatory fashion. "Do you — from what you have seen of it — read of it — do you — how does it strike you? As good enough to publish — or fit for the waste−basket?"

Ah, why had this situation leaped upon her thus unawares, and all unprepared! Why had she not been allowed time, opportunity, to fortify herself! What she said now would mean so much. Best err, then, on the safe side; and which side was that? Her words seemed to come of themselves, and she almost physically felt herself withdraw from the responsibility of what this other material Rosella Beltis was saying.

"I don't know," said the other Rosella. "I should not care to say — so soon. You see — there are so many manuscripts. I generally trust to the first impression on the second reading." She did not even hear his answer, but she said, when he had done speaking, that even in case of an unfavorable report there were, of course, other publishers.

But he answered that the judgment of such a house as the Conants would suffice for him. Somehow he could not peddle his story about New York. If the Conants would not take his work, nobody would.

And that was the last remark of importance he made. During the few remaining moments of his visit they spoke of unessentials, and before she was aware he had gone away, leaving with her a memorandum of his address at the time.

III

SHE did not sleep that night. When she left the office she brought "The Last Dryad" home with her, and till far into the night she read it and re−read it, comparing it and contrasting it with "Patroclus," searching diligently if perhaps there were not some minute loophole of evasion for her, some devious passage through which tortuously she might escape. But amid the shattered panes of her glass pavilion the block of stone persisted, inert, immovable. The stone could not be raised, the little edifice could not be rebuilt.

Then at last, inevitably, the temptation came — came and grew and shut about her and gripped her close. She began to temporize, to advance excuses. Was not her story the better one? Granted that the idea was the same, was not the treatment, the presentation, more effective? Should not the fittest survive? Was it not right that the public should have the better version? Suppose "Patroclus" had been written by a third person, and she had been called upon to choose between it and "The Last Dryad," would she not have taken "Patroclus" and rejected the other? Ah, but "Patroclus" was not yet written! Well, that was true. But the draft of it was; the idea of it had been conceived eight months ago. Perhaps she had thought of her story before Vickers had thought of his. Perhaps? No; it was very probable; there was no doubt of it, in fact. That was the important thing: the conception of the idea, not the execution. And if this was true, her claim was prior.

But what would Conant say of such reasoning, and Trevor — would they approve? Would they agree?

"Yes, they would," she cried the instant the thought occurred to her. "Yes, they would, they would, they would; I know they would. I am sure of it; sure of it."

But she knew they would not. The idea of right persisted and persisted. Rosella was on the rack, and slowly, inevitably, resistlessly the temptation grew and gathered, and snared her feet and her hands, and, fold on fold, lapped around her like a veil.

A great and feminine desire to shift the responsibility began to possess her mind.

"I cannot help it," she cried. "I am not to blame. It is all very well to preach, but how would — any one do in my case? It is not my fault."

And all at once, without knowing how or why, she found that she had written, sealed, stamped, and addressed a note to Harold Vickers declining his story.

But this was a long way from actually rejecting "The Last Dryad" — rejecting it in favor of "Patroclus." She had only written the note, so she told herself, just to see how the words would look. It was merely an impulse; would come to nothing, of course. Let us put it aside, that note, and seriously consider this trying situation.

Somehow it seemed less trying now; somehow the fact of her distress seemed less poignant. There was a way out of it — stop. No; do not look at the note there on the table. There was a way out, no doubt, but not that one; no, of course not that one. Rosella laughed a little. How easily some one else, less scrupulous, would solve this problem! Well, she could solve it, too, and keep her scruples as well; but not to−night. Now she was worn out. To−morrow it would look different to her.

She went to bed and tossed wide−eyed and wakeful till morning, then rose, and after breakfast prepared to go to the office as usual. The manuscript of "The Last Dryad" lay on her table, and while she was wrapping it up her eye fell upon the note to Harold Vickers.

"Why," she murmured, with a little grimace of astonishment — "why, how is this? I thought I burned that last night. How could I have forgotten!"

She could have burned it then. The fire was crackling in the grate; she had but to toss it in. But she preferred to delay.

"I will drop it in some ash−can or down some sewer on the way to the office," she said to herself. She slipped it into her muff and hurried away. But on the way to the cable−car no ash−can presented itself. True, she discovered the opening of a sewer on the corner where she took her car. But a milkman and a police officer stood near at hand in conversation, occasionally glancing at her, and no doubt they would have thought it strange to see this well−dressed young woman furtively dropping a sealed letter into a sewer−vent.

She held it awkwardly in her hand all of her way down−town, and still carried it there when she had descended from her car and took her way up the cross−street toward Conant's.

She suddenly remembered that she had other letters to mail that morning. For two days the weekly epistles that she wrote home to her mother and younger sister had been overlooked in her pocket. She found a mail−box on the corner by the Conant building and crossed over to it, holding her mother's and sister's letters in one hand and the note to Vickers in the other.

Carefully scanning the addresses, to make sure she did not confuse the letters, she dropped in her home correspondence, then stood there a moment irresolute.

Irresolute as to what, she could not say. Her decision had been taken in the matter of "The Last Dryad." She would accept it, as it deserved. Whether she was still to write "Patroclus" was a matter to be considered later. Well, she was glad she had settled it all. If she had not come to this conclusion she might have been, at that very instant, dropping the letter to Harold Vickers into the box. She would have stood, thus, facing the box, have raised the cast−iron flap, — this with one hand, — and with the other have thrust the note into the slide — thus.

Her fingers closed hard upon the letter at the very last instant — ah, not too late. But suppose she had, but for one second, opened her thumb and forefinger and — what? What would come of it?

And there, with the letter yet on the edge of the drop she called up again the entire situation, the identity of the stories, the jeopardizing — no, the wrecking — of her future career by this chance−thrown barrier in the way. Why hesitate, why procrastinate? Her thoughts came to her in a whirl. If she acted quickly now, — took the leap with shut eyes, reckless of result, — she could truly be sorry then, truly acknowledge what was right, believe that Vickers had the prior claim without the hard necessity of acting up to her convictions. At least, this harrowing indecision would be over with.

"Indecision?" What was this she was saying? Had she not this moment told herself that she was resolved — resolved to accept "The Last Dryad"? Resolved to accept it? Was that true? Had she done so? Had she not made up her mind long ago to decline it — decline it with full knowledge that its author would destroy it once the manuscript should be returned?

These thoughts had whisked through her mind with immeasurable rapidity. The letter still rested half in, half out of the drop. She still held it there.

By now Rosella knew if she let it fall she would do so deliberately, with full knowledge of what she was about. She could not afterward excuse herself by saying that she had been confused, excited, acting upon an unreasoned impulse. No; it would be deliberate, deliberate, deliberate. She would have to live up to that decision, whatever it was, for many months to come, perhaps for years. Perhaps, — who could say? — perhaps it might affect her character permanently. In a crisis little forces are important, disproportionately so. And then it was, and thus it was, that Rosella took her resolve. She raised the iron flap once more, and saying aloud and with a ring of defiance in her voice: "Deliberately, deliberately; I don't care," loosed her hold upon the letter. She heard it fall with a soft rustling impact upon the accumulated mail−matter in the bottom of the box.

A week later she received her letter back with a stamped legend across its face informing her with dreadful terseness that the party to whom the letter was addressed was deceased. She divined a blunder, but for all that, and with Heaven knew what conflicting emotions, sought confirmation in the daily press. There, at the very end of the column, stood the notice:

VICKERS. At New York, on Sunday, November 12, Harold Anderson Vickers, in the twenty−third year of his age. Arizona papers please copy. Notice of funeral hereafter.

Three days later she began to write "Patroclus."

IV

ROSELLA stood upon the door−step of Trevor's house, closing her umbrella and shaking the water from the folds of her mackintosh. It was between eight and nine in the evening, and since morning a fine rain had fallen steadily. But no stress of weather could have kept Rosella at home that evening. A week previous she had sent to Trevor the type−written copy of the completed "Patroclus," and to−night she was to call for the manuscript and listen to his suggestions and advice.

She had triumphed in the end — triumphed over what, she had not always cared to inquire. But once the pen in her hand, once "Patroclus" begun, and the absorption of her mind, her imagination, her every faculty, in the composition of the story, had not permitted her to think of or to remember anything else.

And she saw that her work was good. She had tested it by every method, held it up to her judgment in all positions and from all sides, and in her mind, so far as she could see, and she was a harsh critic for her own work, it stood the tests. Not the least of her joys was the pleasure that she knew Trevor would take in her success. She could foresee just the expression of his face when he would speak, could forecast just the tones of the voice, the twinkle of the kindly eyes behind the glasses.

When she entered the study, she found Trevor himself, as she had expected, waiting for her in slippers and worn velvet jacket, pipe in hand, and silk skullcap awry upon the silver−white hair. He extended an inky hand, and still holding it and talking, led her to an easy−chair near the hearth.

Even through the perturbation of her mind Rosella could not but wonder — for the hundredth time — at the apparent discrepancy between the great novelist and the nature of his books. These latter were, each and all of them, wonders of artistic composition, compared with the hordes of latter−day pictures. They were the aristocrats of their kind, full of reserved force, unimpeachable in dignity, stately even, at times veritably austere.

And Trevor himself was a short, rotund man, rubicund as to face, bourgeois as to clothes and surroundings (the bisque statuette of a fisher−boy obtruded the vulgarity of its gilding and tinting from the mantel−piece), jovial in manner, indulging even in slang. One might easily have set him down as a retired groceryman — wholesale perhaps, but none the less a groceryman. Yet touch him upon the subject of his profession, and the bonhomie lapsed away from him at once. Then he became serious. Literature was not a thing to be trifled with.

Thus it was to−night. For five minutes Trevor filled the room with the roaring of

his own laughter and the echoes of his own vociferous voice. He was telling a story — a funny story, about what Rosella, with her thoughts on "Patroclus," could not for the life of her have said, and she must needs listen in patience and with perfunctory merriment while the narrative was conducted to its close with all the accompaniment of stamped feet and slapped knees.

"'Why, becoth, mithtah,' said that nigger. 'Dat dawg ain' good fo' nothin' ailse; so I jes rickon he 'th boun' to be a coon dawg'"; and the author of "Snow in April" pounded the arm of his chair and roared till the gas−fixtures vibrated.

Then at last, taking advantage of a lull in the talk, Rosella, unable to contain her patience longer, found breath to remark:

"And 'Patroclus' — my — my little book?"

"Ah — hum, yes. 'Patroclus,' your story. I've read it."

At once another man was before her, or rather the writer — the novelist — in the man. Something of the dignity of his literary style immediately seemed to invest him with a new character. He fell quiet, grave, not a little abstracted, and Rosella felt her heart sink. Her little book (never had it seemed so insignificant, so presumptuous as now) had been on trial before a relentless tribunal, had indeed undergone the ordeal of fire. But the verdict, the verdict! Quietly, but with cold hands clasped tight together, she listened while the greatest novelist of America passed judgment upon her effort.

"Yes; I've read it," continued Trevor. "Read it carefully — carefully. You have worked hard upon it. I can see that. You have put your whole soul into it, put all of yourself into it. The narrative is all there, and I have nothing

but good words to say to you about the construction, the mere mechanics of it. But — "

Would he never go on? What was this? What did that "But" mean? What else but disaster could it mean? Rosella shut her teeth.

"But, to speak very frankly, my dear girl, there is something lacking. Oh, the idea, the motif — that — " he held up a hand. "That is as intact as when you read me the draft. The central theme, the approach, the grouping of the characters, the dialogue — all good — all good. The thing that is lacking I find very hard to define. But the mood of the story, shall we say? — the mood of the story is — " he stopped, frowning in perplexity, hesitating. The great master of words for once found himself at a loss for expression. "The mood is somehow truculent, when it should be as suave, as quiet, as the very river you describe. Don't you see? Can't you understand what I mean? In this 'Patroclus' the atmosphere, the little, delicate, subtle sentiment, is everything — everything. What was the mere story? Nothing without the proper treatment. And it was just in this fine, intimate relationship between theme and treatment that the success of the book was to be looked for. I thought I could be sure of you there. I thought that you of all people could work out that motif adequately. But — " he waved a hand over the manuscript that lay at her elbow — "this — it is not the thing. This is a poor criticism, you will say, merely a marshaling of empty phrases, abstractions. Well, that may be; I repeat, it is very hard for me to define just what there is of failure in your 'Patroclus.' But it is empty, dry, hard, barren. Am I cruel to speak so frankly? If I were less frank, my dear girl, I would be less just, less kind. You have told merely the story, have narrated episodes in their sequence of time, and where the episodes have stopped there you have ended the book. The whole animus that should have put the life into it is gone, or, if it is not gone, it is so perverted that it is incorrigible. To my mind the book is a failure."

Rosella did not answer when Trevor ceased speaking, and there was a long silence. Trevor looked at her anxiously. He had hated to hurt her. Rosella gazed vaguely at the fire. Then at last the tears filled her eyes.

"I am sorry, very, very sorry," said Trevor, kindly. "But to have told you anything but the truth would have done you a wrong — and, then, no earnest work is altogether wasted. Even though 'Patroclus' is — not what we expected of it, your effort over it will help you in something else. You did work hard at it. I saw that. You must have put your whole soul into it."

"That," said Rosella, speaking half to herself — "that was just the trouble."

But Trevor did not understand.