

Angela's Business

Strength came into her low voice: "Why — *why* do you always belittle him so?"

Continuing to look at her, he said, remotely surprised: "Belittle him? But I don't."

The school-teacher's fingers closed over the mantel, and the tips of her nails whitened.

"Then I don't understand at all," she said, steadily. "I've been thinking that it was he who almost murdered the villain, and gave one of the Spinsters her old place back. . . ."

Charles Garrott stood like a man turned to stone, fascinated gaze upon the eyes in the mirror: girlish eyes, doubtless, but quite unflinching now. And then, in an instant, his face was scarlet from neck to brow. His embarrassment was frightful to see: that of a soul too suddenly stripped bare.

"Oh! . . . So you've been looking through me — all along. I see . . . the Judge did n't confine himself to . . . Well, his knowing — was purely an accident. He had, of course, no —"

"And why must my knowing be an accident, too?"

"I — it was simply something you had nothing whatever to do with. And there was an understanding — the — the matter was entirely private. You'll please forget the Judge's — small-talk, and —"

"Not if I live to be a thousand! I'll forget everything — I'll forget my name! — but that! — no, you ask too much of my feelings."

That, indeed, checked the young man's horrible self-consciousness. He saw, with unsteady bewilderment, that this was no light conversation of hers, that Mary Wing was more deeply moved than he had ever seen her. And suddenly he was aware, by some swift flicker of his intuition, that it was to say this to him, and nothing else, that she had come home, made a holiday, to-day. . . .