

Angela's Business

school-teacher had no sooner pronounced it than her arms spread suddenly out on the table before her, and her head came down upon them.

Charles Garrott, on his ladder, was heard to take one breath, sharply. After that, no sound came from him. Quite motionless he sat, in the chance position in which the sudden disaster had overtaken him: long arms dangling from his knees, large feet hooked under a ladder-rung, some distance down. He hardly winked an eye.

Mary Wing was crying. That painful hard tension had snapped; the indomitable slim figure drooped beaten, for once. She, also, made little sound in her peculiar difficulty. But her body shook with a stormy racking. And it hurt her, he was sure; hurt her physically, as if she could n't find tears without breaking something inside. . . .

Strange it seemed that once, in this very room, and only the other day really, he had wanted to see Mary cry. He had thought of it then as a desirable sort of symbol, had n't he? — something of that sort. What did her tears have to tell him now? Then he had conceived himself as watching her emotion, moved doubtless, but yet with a secretly gratified masculinity. Now every heave of those slender shoulders was like a clutch upon his heart.

And still there was something in Charles that was not distress at all. He was aware of another and quite different inner sense — peace, the end of struggle, fulfillment — he could not say what it was. It was strange. He was not unhappy. . . .

There came, after a time, signs that his friend was overcoming that hard revolt of feelings too much put upon. Even in the beginning she had never seemed to abandon herself, quite. At length, somewhat unexpectedly, she moved, turned from