

Angela's Business

with which to communicate the hope, at least: phrases which, though gallantly suppressing his own exploits, might yet be somewhat tinged with a protector's strength.

But all this dropped from Charles's mind in the instant when Mary raised her head over the table, and looked at him.

He had seen his friend for a few minutes on Friday, her first day up and about. But that passing glimpse, it seemed, could hardly have counted. For now her gaze had an unexpected power for him: the sight of her came on him with a sort of impact, as if this were some one he had heard about often, but never before seen. Undoubtedly, that small phenomenon was due to the amount he had been thinking about her of late, behind her back, as it were. But beyond all this, the particular look of Mary's face had made him instantly certain that, whatever she had gone to struggle with Angela about to-day, she had, indeed, been routed. And that he had not miscalculated the effect of this upon her, he was also certain from the first sound of her voice. . . .

Mary did not look up as her helper advanced, or cease the work of her hands. But it was she who spoke first: —

"How did you happen to come here?"

"I've been to your house. Your mother told me you were here."

She said, with a curious stilted politeness: "It was very good of you to come. But really you must not wait for me, please. I have a good deal more to do — a great deal more — and it is work of a sort that I have to do alone."

"Miss Mary," said Charles, "your mother told me, at my request, what has happened this afternoon."

Mary flinched, just perceptibly. But her voice, when she spoke, seemed harder than before.