

Angela's Business

women not to bother to try to be womanly when being feminine comes so much cheaper. Why, look at me, criticizing you in my thoughts, not liking it because you were — independent. What was that but just pique — don't you know? — just common ordinary male jealousy — because a woman did n't need my shoulder to lean on. Manly protector . . . seventeenth-century stuff. Well, you've punished me, don't you worry. . . . Just standing where you always stood, just being your Self. Acting straight from your own law all the time, doing the best sort of things, one after the other — the biggest, the — the *tenderest* — ”

“Don't,” said the grammar-school teacher again, but in the littlest voice he had ever heard from her lips.

Rapt as he was, that voice penetrated him. More, it alarmed him: and with reason, too. Staring down with a new fixedness, touched with a faint, purely masculine horror, Charles beheld the strangest sight seen by him in many a day. Mary Wing, the unconquerable, had suddenly put her face into her hands.

He had really only been finishing that other talk of theirs, with a certain sense of right; but of course this was n't the time for that. He had been indulging his analytic propensity, his fatal tendency to comment, at her expense. Had n't he understood that she feared nothing so much as his sympathies? . . .

His friend, in her arresting attitude, sat as rigid as a carven woman. The stillness in the little office was profound. Then a voice strained out, very thin, but still not defeated: —

“Don't be alarmed. I'm . . . not going to cry.”

And that seemed to settle it. It was as if, in that silent struggle waged all the way from the Flowers' to now, the speaking of the word itself was the fatal admission. The