

Angela's Business

"No, there's only one thing to talk of now. You will have to hear my story."

The grammar-school teacher did not move. The twilight sitting-room was stiller than a church. The young man went toward her on feet not now to be stopped.

"But not from the beginning — no. That does n't matter. It's the ending — I have waited to talk with you about."

He stood now by the hard-worked little desk, an elbow rested on the top; he looked down at the bent familiar head, the thick crown of feminine fair hair. Just so, he had stood and looked on that other day, when she had written upon his heart what freedom meant to her.

"I wanted to show how one man — got his education in womanhood — learned how strength is stronger for being sweet — just by coming to see and understand the moral beauty of one woman's life. . . . That is my story. But it is n't enough to end with."

Some of his dignity, some of his self-control, seemed abruptly to forsake the hard-pressed young man.

"You are that woman," he said, hoarsely. "You've educated me. But it is n't enough."

She, his only heroine, raised her head, gave him one look from under her arched brows; a strange look, that might have said good-bye to the perfect friendship he had forever changed now. And he saw in the dusk that her face was very pale.

"You've supposed I want nothing for myself. I am here asking for everything . . ."

Her lashes fell. He was so close to her now that, just by putting out his arm a little, he could have taken one of the small hands on the desk-leaf. So he did put out his arm thus. Her hand, possessed, was cold as ice; but it was not