

Angela's Business

of a woman which, all so suddenly, had shot up to fill the world for him.

Fading light from the Green Park just touched Mary's face, where she stood. She was a school-teacher, thirty years old. Life had buffeted her: hard contacts with the real world had left upon her their permanent marks, traced lines not to be eradicated beside these fine eyes. This woman's first youth, her April bloom, was gone forever. But to this man on the hearthside, her presence, her nearness, were charged now with an intense power over depths in him which would stir to no fleshly prettiness.

He had her secret now. He knew her, a Woman revealed. And, standing and looking at her over the darkening room, he was mysteriously shaken with a profound emotion.

This was his best old friend, this was the being he admired most upon earth. She was his dearest comrade, his work-fellow and his playmate, his human free and equal. She had a mind as good as his, a spirit whose integrity he respected no less than his own; hands that were capable and feet that she stood upon, and did not depend. She had an honor that was not woman's honor, a virtue and character that had no part with the business of sex. There was no competence a man had that this woman did not have: she was as versatile and thoughtful and fearless and free as the best of them. And, through and beyond all this, there was the discovered marvel, that she had tilled and kept sweet the garden of her womanhood. Underlying her rich human worthiness, as the mothering earth lies under a tree, there was the treasure he had hardly glimpsed, this store of her secret tenderness.

So it was that Charles Garrott spoke up suddenly, with a kind of huskiness: —