



"I've Heard Enough," She Says, Cold as Ice.

**SYNOPSIS.**

Mr. Solomon Pratt began comical narration of story, introducing well-to-do Nathan Scudder of his town, and Edward Van Brunt and Martin Hartley, two rich New Yorkers seeking rest. Because of latter pair's lavish expenditure of money, Pratt's first impression was connected with lunatics. Van Brunt, it was learned, was the successful suitor for the hand of Miss Agnes Page, who gave Hartley up. Adventure at Fourth of July celebration at Eastwick, Hartley rescued a boy, known as "Reddy," from under a horse's feet and the architect proved to be one of Miss Page's charges, whom she had taken to the country for an outing. Out sailing later, Van Brunt, Pratt and Hopper were wrecked in a squall. Pratt landed safely and a search for the other two revealed an island upon which they were found. Van Brunt rented it from Scudder and called it Ozone Island. In charge of a company of New York poor children Miss Telford and Miss Page visited Ozone Island. In another storm Van Brunt and Hartley narrowly escaped being wrecked, having aboard chickens, pigs, etc., with which they were to start a farm. Eureka Sparrow, a country girl, was engaged as a cook and Van Brunt and Hartley had a visit to her father, who for years had been claiming consumption as an excuse for not working. Upon another island visit by Miss Page, Eureka diagnosed Hartley's case as one of love for Agnes. At a lawn fete, Van Brunt shocked the church community by raffling a quilt for the church's benefit. Hartley invented a plan to make Washington Sparrow work.

**CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.**

We walked on together the rest of the way, laughing and talking. Nobody took the business serious at all. They all thought Washy would go to work when he found 'twas either that or get out and hustle for a place to put his head in.

We marched into the Sparrow yard like a Fourth of July parade. Hartley knocked at the kitchen door. Editha opened it.

"Is your father in?" asked the Twin.

"Yes, sir," says Editha. "He's in. I s'pose you'd like to see him, wouldn't you? Pa, here's Mr. Hartley."

There was a groan from the dining room. Then some coughs, like a string of small earthquakes. Finally a dreadful weak voice orders us to step right in. The rest of the crowd went on ahead. I stopped for a jiffy to speak to Editha.

"Where's the rest of the children?" I asks.

"I sent 'em over to the grocery store on an errand," she says. "I thought you'd be along pretty soon. They took the baby with 'em."

"How's your dad been since he heard the news?" says I.

"Oh, he was going on terrible last night. Had nerve spells and fired the chairs around and carried on so we was all scared. But he went out about nine o'clock with a letter he'd wrote, this morning he seems better. Say, Mr. Pratt," she whispers, eager, "is it true that me and Dewey are going to live with the minister's folks?"

"Maybe so," says I. "Why?"

"Oh! I hope so," she says. "Then I could go to school, and pa wouldn't be 'round to jaw us, and Reky'd have a little rest. She does need it so."

Think of a 12-year-old young one talking like that. But the children was all grown-ups in that family.

I went into the dining room. The delegation was gathered on one side of the table, and Washy was crumpled up in his rocker on the other. He looked some scared.

"Well, Mr. Sparrow," Hartley was beginning when I come in, "have you made up your mind about the position

which this gentleman has been kind enough to offer you?" He pointed to Brown as he said it.

"Hey?" asks the invalid, feeble.

Martin said it all over again; he had to stop in the middle so's to give the candidate for the job a chance to cough and turn loose a few groans.

And all that Washy said when the Twin had finished was another "Hey?"

Hartley began to lose patience. "You heard what I said," he snaps, sharp. "Have you made up your mind?"

"Don't get mad, Mr. Hartley," pleads the sufferer, sad and earnest. "Please don't. My nerves is dreadful weak this morning and I ain't able to stand it. I've had coughing spells ever since I got out of bed. Well, I won't have to linger here much longer. Pretty soon I'll be laid away, and—"

"Have you made up your mind?" interrupts Martin. "Answer quick. The time of these gentlemen is valuable."

"Don't, Mr. Hartley. Please don't. How can you cruelize a poor fellow this way? Don't you know that any kind of stir and rumpus is the worst thing for me? Any doctor'll tell you that—"

"Bosh!" 'Twas Dr. Penrose that said it, and he stepped forward.

"Bosh!" says he again.

"What's that? Why, if it ain't my old friend the doctor! I never noticed you was there. I'm awful glad to see you, Doc. Seems just like old times. You'll excuse my not getting up, won't you? I've wasted away so since you was here that—"

"Bosh!" says the doctor again. "You're fatter than ever. There's nothing in the world the matter with you but pure downright dog laziness. Don't cough on my account. I don't care to hear it."

Washy looked at him as reproachful and goody-goody as a saint.

"I forgive you for them words, doctor," says he. "I realize I ain't been able to pay my bill to you, and so I can make allowances."

"Allowances! Why, you confounded impudent loafer! I've a good mind to—"

He was purple in the face. Peter Brown caught his arm.

"Ain't this a little off the subject?" he says. "Look here, Sparrow. We need a good husky man about your size at the hotel. We'll pay him ten dollars a week. I've offered you the job. Are you going to take it?"

"There ain't nothing in the world I should like better, Mr. Brown. I like to work, and—"

"All right, then. Get your hat and come along."

"Come along! Why, how you talk! If I was to stir out of this house 'twould—"

'Twas Scudder's turn. "You'll have to stir mighty quick," says he. "I won't have no do-nothing tramps in a house of mine. Either take this chance or out you go next Saturday, bag and baggage."

"Why, Mr. Scudder! Why, Nate! How can you talk so! Just for a little matter of rent. You don't need it. Ain't you been telling me that you had a couple of soft rich folks over to Horsefoot Bar that was paying you a good living and more, too, all by them-

selves. Don't you remember you said—"

"Shut up!" 'Twas Scudder who got purple now. It looked to me like the invalid was having all the fun. He seemed to be expecting something and playing-for time. I guess Hartley thought so, too, for he says:

"That's enough of this. It's plain that he doesn't intend to accept. Mr. Scudder, you have given him formal notice. Come on."

Then Washy broke down. He sniffed and half cried and wanted to know things. The work would kill him in a day or so, of course, but he didn't mind that. When he thought of his poor fatherless children—

"The children will be provided for," says Martin. "I told you that. Mr. Morton will care for Editha and the baby."

"Mr. Morton? Morton? Seems to me I've heard that name afore. Ain't he the gambler? The one that come near being run out of town for stealing a bedquilt from the poorhouse, or something like that? Is he the man to trust with innocent little children?"

There it was again. The minister was red as a beet and stammering about "impertinence" and "black-guardism." I thought he'd lick that consumptive right then and there. It took another five minutes to calm him down. And so far we hadn't gained an inch.

And just then a horse and buggy come rattling into the yard. The horse was all over lather, like he'd been drove hard, and the buggy was white with dust. Everybody looked out of the window. Sparrow looked and his face brightened up. I callate 'twas exactly what he had been hoping and waiting for. Martin Hartley looked and his eyes and mouth opened. So did mine.

'Twas Lord James that was driving the buggy, and there was a young woman with him. The young woman was Agnes Page.

Agnes jumped from the step and run to the kitchen door. In spite of the dust and her clothes being rumpled and her hat shook over to one side she was as pretty as a picture. The next minute she was in the room, staring solemn at all us men. And her eyes seemed to look right through a feller.

"Why, Agnes—Miss Page!" exclaimed Hartley. "Why are you here? What's the matter?"

She didn't answer him. Just turned to Washy. And says she:

"Am I in time, Mr. Sparrow? I didn't get your letter until nearly nine, because James was delayed at the office. But I hurried right over. I was so afraid I would be too late. Am I?"

The invalid looked at her. And, if he'd been the picture of misery afore, he was a whole panorama of it now. He coughed afore he answered. She shivered, kind of, at that cough, and I don't wonder. If ever there was a graveyard quick-step, Washy Sparrow's cough was it.

"No, ma'am," says he. "I guess not, but I don't know. The shock of it, and—and all, has pretty nigh finished me up, I'm afraid. I don't callate I'll pull through, but I may. Let's hope for the best, anyhow. But, ma'am, if you'd heard the things that's been said to me!"

She whirled around on us and her eyes flashed chain lightning.

"Ain't you ashamed?" she says. "Great strong men, every one of you, and all banded together to torture a poor helpless invalid!"

A feller's conscience is the biggest fool part of his insides. Now I know that what we'd been doing was exactly the right thing to do, but I felt as mean and small as if I'd been caught stealing eggs. I kind of shriveled up as you might say, and tried to scrouge back into the corner. Maybe I'd have got there, only the rest of the crowd was trying to do the same thing.

All but Hartley. He was a lot set back, but he spoke up prompt.

"Miss Page," said he, "I'm sure you don't understand. We—"

She was back at him afore he'd begun.

"I think that is exactly what I do—understand," she says. "At any rate, I mean to understand thoroughly. Mr. Sparrow, what have they said to you?"

Washy cleared his throat. When he answered 'twas in a sort of beg-pardon voice. You could see how he hated to speak ill of anybody. He wouldn't hurt nobody's feelings for the world. Bless him! he was a cute shyster, if ever there was one.

"It's like I wrote you, ma'am," says he. "They've offered me a place to go to work, and I've been awful tempted to take it. I want to take it. My land! how I want to! But I don't feel able to dig cellar. I wouldn't last at it more'n a few days and then what would become of my fatherless children with nobody to look after 'em? And because I think of these things and can't bring myself to—to—passing away from 'em so soon, I'm going to be put out of my house and home. My little home, that I've thought so much of—"

He had to stop and wipe his eyes. Agnes' eyes were wet, too, and her feet patted the floor. "But why?" says she. "Why?"

"I don't know—that is, for sure, ma'am. You see I ain't been able to earn nothing for some time. Eureka, poor girl, she's had to look out for us all. And I believe the doctor there, his bill ain't been all paid; and we owe Mr. Scudder some rent; and I s'pose likely Eureka would be able to give more of her time to the Island work, and maybe for less pay, if—"

"I see," says Miss Page, scornful. "I see. And so, for a few dollars you are to be turned out of your home. You, a poor sick man! Oh! I can hardly believe there are such people in the world. And yet, I have had some experience."

She flashed a look at Martin as she said it. He turned white under his sunburn.

"Miss Page," he said, "you do not understand. I must insist that you hear our reasons for this proceeding."

"It is not necessary," she says, cold as ice. "I have heard enough."

The minister plucked up spunk to speak. But she snapped him up short as pie crust. Then I tried it—and got my medicine.

"Mr. Sparrow," says she, "let them do their worst. The children shall come to my school. As for you, I mean to—"

Then she turns to me.

"Does Mr. Van Brunt know of this?" she asks. Course I couldn't say nothing but I believed he didn't.

"Thank goodness!" she says. And just then who should walk in but Van himself.

"Hello!" says he, surprised. "Eureka told me you were at the village, Martin, so I came to see you. One of the children said you were here. What is this, a surprise party? And Agnes, too! Am I too late for the refreshments?"

He smiled, but nobody else did.

"Edward," says the Page girl, "will you do a great favor for me?"

"Yours to command, of course," he answers, puzzled.

"Will you find a boarding place for Mr. Sparrow?"

"Who? Eureka's father? Why, certainly. What's the trouble? Is it time for the Sparrows to nest again? He can come over to the island with us. There's plenty of room. Hey, Martin?"

"Never mind your friend, please," says Miss Page. "If he comes will you protect him and treat him kindly? Thank you. Then that is settled. Gentlemen, I believe there is no necessity for your further inconveniencing yourselves. Your several bills will be paid."

I looked at the doctor and he looked at Poundberry. The minister and Brown and Scudder looked at each other. Maybe it seems queer that we didn't speak up and make her hear our side—the right side. It does seem strange now, I'm free to say, but, as for me, I couldn't have faced her then no more than the boy with the jam 'round his mouth could face his ma.

Hartley was the only plucky one. He says, swallowing once, as if he was gulping down his pride, "Miss Page," says he, "you are treating me most unfair. To judge without a hearing is not—"

She held up her hand. There was a kid glove on it, and even then I noticed how well that glove fitted.

"Mr. Pratt," she says to me, "I want to ask you one question. Who is responsible for this? Whose idea was it?"

I hemmed and hawed. The other fellows might not have meant to do it, but somehow their eyes all swung round to Hartley.

"I see," she says. "I thought as much. There is a proverb, I believe, concerning what is bred in the bone. Thank heaven, to me there are some things in this world which outweigh my personal convenience and—money. You needn't answer, Mr. Pratt. He pays your salary, I believe."

My, but she said it bitter and scornful. Hartley was white afore, but now he was like chalk. He bowed to her, stuck his chin into the air and marched out of that house as proud and chilly as a walking icicle. The rest of us, all but Van and Agnes, trailed along astern, like a parcel of kicked dogs.

Washy sung out to us as we went: "Good day, gentlemen," he says; "I hope you'll come and see me sometimes while I'm over to Horsefoot. I forgive you free and clear. I haven't no doubt you meant for the best."

The doctor and the rest was brave enough when we was out of Agnes Page's sight and hearing. They was talking big about what they'd do to Sparrow when they had a chance. But I noticed none of 'em said much to Hartley. He marched ahead, stiff and white and glum. Peter Brown's last word to me was this:

"Pratt," says he, "if you see a hole in the sand anywhere 'tween here and the beach, mark my name around it, will you? The way I feel now I'd like to crawl into it and pull it after me. One about the size of a ten-cent piece would do, and even then I guess there'd be room and to spare for the rest of this gang."

When I got down to the skiff Van comes running to catch up. He caught me by the arm and hauled me to one side.

"Skipper," says he, "what the devil's the matter?"

I told him in as few words as I could. He roared. "That's all right," he says. "I'll fix that."

He went over to his chum and slapped him on the back.

"Brace up, old man," he says; "it's a mistake, and a mighty good joke on you, isn't it? Of course I'll square you with Agnes."

Hartley turned on him so quick that he jumped.

"If you please," says Martin, cutting and clear as a razor, "you will perhaps be good enough to mind your own business. If you mention one word concerning me to that lady you and I part company. Is that thoroughly plain?"

'Twas the first time I'd ever heard them two have a hard word. The trip to Ozone Island was as joyful as a funeral.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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