

# The Hollow of Her Hand

by George Barr McCutcheon

COPYRIGHT, 1912 BY GEORGE BARR MCCUTCHEON; COPYRIGHT, 1912 BY DODD, MEAD & COMPANY



### SYNOPSIS.

Charles Wransall is found murdered in a room near New York. Mrs. Wransall is arrested from the city and identified the body. A young woman who accompanied Wransall to the inn and subsequently disappeared, is suspected. Mrs. Wransall starts back for New York in an auto during a blinding snow storm. On the way she meets a young woman in the road who proves to be the woman who killed Wransall. Feeling that the girl had done her a service in ridding her of the man who loved her, she took her to her own home. Mrs. Wransall hears the story of Henry Castleton's life, except that portion that relates to Wransall. This and the story of the tragedy she forbids the girl ever to tell. She offers Hetty a home, friendship and security from perils on account of the tragedy. Wransall and Hetty return to New York after an absence of a year in Europe. Leslie Wransall, brother of Charles, is a young man who is very much interested in Hetty. She sees in Leslie's attentions a possibility for revenge on the Wransalls and her very much. Much to his chagrin, she declines to marry him. Hetty is then married to a man who is an insurmountable barrier in the way. Hetty admits to Sara that she loves Leslie. She declares that Hetty must marry Leslie, who must be made to pay his brother's debt to her. Hetty again attempts to tell the real story of the tragedy and Sara threatens to strangle her if she says a word. Sara finally tells her that all this time she has believed Hetty to have aimed in her relations with Charles Wransall. Later she realizes that Hetty is innocent. Leslie again proposes to Hetty and is rejected. Hetty prepares to leave Sara, declaring that after what has happened she can remain no longer. Hetty starts for Europe. As she receives a message from Booth by which she is to wait for her on the other side. Booth meets her and accompanies her to London. In an attempt to escape from him, Hetty starts for Paris, but finds Booth on the boat. She reveals in her refusal to tell him the secret which keeps them apart. She declares that Sara alone can tell him. Booth leaves for America, determined to get the story from Sara.

### CHAPTER XVI.—Continued.

The weeks slipped by. He was with her almost daily. Other people came to her house, some for rather protracted visits, others in quest of pillage at the nightly bridge table, but he was seldom missing. There were times when he thought he detected a tendency to waver, but each cunning attempt on his part to encourage the impulse invariably brought a certain mocking light into her eyes and he veered off in defeat. Something kept telling him, however, that the hour was bound to come when she would falter in her resolution; when frankness would meet frankness, and the veil be lifted.

There were no letters from Hetty, no word of any description. If Sara knew anything of the girl's movements she did not take Booth into her confidence.

Leslie Wransall went abroad in August, ostensibly to attend the aviation meets in France and England. His mother and sister sailed in September, but not before the entire colony of which they were a part had begun to discuss Sara and Booth with a relish that was obviously distasteful to the Wransalls.

Where there is smoke there is fire, said all the gossips, and forthwith proceeded to carry faggots.

A week or so before sailing, Mrs. Richmond Wransall had Booth in for dinner. I think she said in family. At any rate, Sara was not asked, which is proof enough that she was bent on making it a family affair.

After dinner, Booth sat in the screened upper balcony with Vivian. He liked her. She was a keen-witted, plain-spoken young woman, with few false ideals and no subtlety. She was less snobbish than arrogant. Of all the Wransalls, she was the least self-centered. Leslie never quite understood her for the paradoxical reason that she thoroughly understood him.

"You know, Brandon," she said,



"Good heavens, Viv!" he cried, uncomfortably. "I—I had no idea you cared!"

"Cared!" she cried, as he paused. "I don't care two pines for you in that way. But I would have married you, just the same, because you are worth marrying. I'd very much rather have you for a husband than any man I know, but as for loving you! Poo! I'd love you in just the way mother loves father, and I wouldn't have been a bit more trouble to you than she is to him."

"Gad, you don't mind what you say!"

"Falling to nab you, Brandy, I dare say I'll have to come down to a duke or who knows? maybe a mere prince. It isn't very enterprising, is it? And certainly it isn't a ray prospect. Really, I had hoped you would have me. I flatter myself, I suppose, but, honestly now, we would have made a rather nice looking couple, wouldn't we?"

"You flatter me," he said.

"But," she resumed, calmly exhaling, "you very foolishly fell in love with some one else, and it wasn't necessary for me to pretend that I was in love with you—which I should have done, believe me, if you had given me the chance. You fell in love, first with Hetty Castleton."

"First?" he cried, frowning.

"And now you are heels over head in love with my beautiful sister-in-law. Which all goes to prove that I would have made just the kind of wife you need, considering your tendency to fluctuate. But how dreadful it would have been for a sentimental, loving girl like Hetty!"

He sat bolt upright and stared hard at her.

"See here, Viv, what the dickens are you driving at? I'm not in love with Sara—not in the least—and—" He checked himself sharply. "What an ass I am! You're ruying me."

"In any event, I am right about Hetty," she said, leaning forward, her manner quite serious.

"If it will ease your mind," he said stiffly, "I plead guilty with all my heart."

She favored him with a slight frown of annoyance.

"And you deny the fluctuating charge?"

"Most positively. I can afford to be honest with you, Viv. You are a corker. I love Hetty Castleton with all my soul."

She leaned back in her chair. "Then why don't you dignify your soul by being honest with her?"

"What do you mean?"

"For a half-minute she was silent. 'Are you and I of the same stripe, after all? Would you marry Sara without loving her, as I would have done by you? It doesn't seem like you, Brandon?'"

"Good heaven, I'm not going to marry Sara!" he blurted out. "It's never entered my head."

"Perhaps it has entered hers."

"Nonsense! She isn't going to marry anybody. And she knows how I feel toward Hetty. If it came to the point where I decided to marry without love, 'pon my soul, Viv, I believe I'd pick you out as the victim."

"Wonderful combination!" she said with a frank laugh. "The quintessence of 'no love lost.' But to resume! Do you know that people are saying you are to be married before the winter is over?"

"Let 'em say it," he said gruffly.

"Oh, well," she said, dispatching it all with a gesture, "if that's the way you feel about it, there's no more to be said."

He was ashamed. "I beg your pardon, I shouldn't have said that."

"You see," she went on, reverting to the original topic, "people who know Sara are likely to credit her with motives you appear to be totally ignorant of. She set her heart on my brother Charles, when she was a great deal younger than she is now, and she got him. If age and experience count for anything, how capable she must be by this time."

He was too wise to venture an opinion. "I assure you she has no designs on me."

"Perhaps not. But I fancy that even you could not escape as St. Anthony did. She is most alluring."

"You don't like her?"

"Obviously. And yet I don't dislike her. She has the virtue of consistency, if one may use the expression. She loved my brother. Leslie says she should have hated him. We have tried to like her. I think I have come nearer to it than any of the others, not excepting Leslie, who has always been her champion. I suppose you know that he was your rival at one time."

"He mentioned it," said Booth dryly. "I should have been very much disappointed in her if she had accepted him."

"Indeed?"

"I sometimes wonder if Sara spiked Leslie's guns for him."

"I can tell you something you don't know, Vivian," said he. "Sara was rather keen about making a match there."

Vivian's smile was slow but triumphant. "That is just what I thought. There you are! Doesn't that explain Sara?"

"In a measure, yes. But you see, it developed that Hetty cared for some one else, and that put a stop to everything."

"Am I to take it that you are the some one else?"

"Yes," he said soberly.

"Then, may I ask why she went away so suddenly?"

"You may ask, but I can't answer."

"Do you want my opinion?" She went away because Sara, falling in her plan to marry her off to Leslie, decided that it would be fatal to a certain project of her own if she remained on the field of action. Do I make myself clear?"

"Oh, you are away off in your conclusions, Viv."

"Time will tell," was here cabalistic rejoinder.

Her father appeared on the lawn below and called up to them.

"You are wanted at the telephone, Brandon. I've just been talking to Sara."

"Did she call you up, father?" asked Vivian, leaning over the rail.

"Yes. About nothing in particular, however."

She turned upon Booth with a mocking smile. He felt the color rush to his face, and was angry with himself. He went to the telephone. Almost her first words were these:

"What has Vivian been telling you about me, Brandon?"

He actually gasped. "Good heavens, Sara!"

He heard her low laugh. "So she has been saying things, has she?" she asked. "I thought so. I've had it in my bones tonight."

He was at a loss for words. It was positively uncanny. As he stood there,



Her Eyes Were Moody, Her Voice Rather Lifeless.

trying to think of a trivial remark, her laugh came to him again over the wire, followed by a drawing "good night," and then the sighing of the wind over the "open" wire.

The next day he called her up on the telephone quite early. He knew her habits. She would be abroad in her gardens by eight o'clock. He remembered well that Leslie, in commenting on her absurdly early hours, had once said that her "early bird" habit was hereditary; she got it from Sebastian.

"What put it into your head, Sara, that Vivian was saying anything unpleasant about you last night?"

"Magic," she replied succinctly. "Rubbish!"

"I have a magic tapestry that transports me, hither and thither, and by night I always carry Aladdin's lamp. So, you see, I see and hear everything!"

"Be sensible."

"Very well. I will be sensible. If you intend to be influenced by what Vivian or her mother said to you last night, I think you'd be wise to avoid me from this time on."

Prepared though he was, he blinked his eyes and said something she didn't quite catch.

She went on: "Moreover, in addition to my attainments in the black art, I am quite as clever as Mr. Sherlock Holmes in some respects. I really do some splendid deducing. In the first

place, you were asked there and I was not. Why? Because I was to be discussed. You see—"

"Marvelous!" he interrupted loudly.

"You were to be told that I have cruel designs upon you."

"Go on, please."

"And all that sort of thing," she said sweepingly, and he could almost see the inclusive gesture with her free hand. He laughed but still marveled at the shrewdness of her perceptions.

"I'll come over this afternoon and show you wherein you are wrong," he began, but she interrupted him with a laugh.

"I am starting for the city before noon, by motor, to be gone at least a fortnight."

"What! This is the first I've heard of it."

Again she laughed. "To be perfectly frank with you, I hadn't heard of it myself until just now. I think I shall go down to the Homestead with the Carrolls."

"Hot Springs?"

"Virginia," she added explicitly.

"I say, Sara, what does all this mean? You—"

"And if you should follow me there, Vivian's estimate of us will not be so far off of the way as we'd like to make it."

True to her word, she was gone when he drove over later on in the day. Somehow, he experienced a queer feeling of relief. Not that he was oppressed by the rather vicious opinions of Vivian and her ilk, but because something told him that Sara was wavering in her determination to withhold the secret from him and fed for perfectly obvious reasons.

He had two commissions among the rich summer colonists. One, a full length portrait of young Beardsley in shooting togs, was nearly finished. The other was to be a half-length of Mrs. Ravenscroft, who wanted one just like Hetty Castleton's, except for the eyes, which she admitted would have to be different. Nothing was said of the seventeen years' difference in their ages. Vivian had put off posing until Lent.

The Wransalls departed for Scotland, and other friends of his began to desert the country for the city. The fortnight passed and another week besides. Mrs. Ravenscroft decided to go to Europe when the picture was half-finished.

"You can finish it when I come back in December, Mr. Booth," she said. "I'll have several new gowns to choose from, too."

"I shall be busy all winter, Mrs. Ravenscroft," he said coldly.

"How annoying," she said calmly, and that was the end of it all. She had made the unpleasant discovery that it wasn't going to be in the least like Hetty Castleton's, so why bother about it?

Booth waited until Sara came out to superintend the closing of her house for the winter. He called at South-look on the day of her arrival. He was struck at once by the curious change in her appearance and manner. There was something bleak and desolate in the vividly brilliant face: the tired, wistful, harassed look of one who has begun to quail and yet fights on.

"Will you go out with me tomorrow, Brandon, for an all-day trip in the car?" she asked, as they stood together before the open fireplace on this late November afternoon. Her eyes were moody, her voice rather lifeless.

"Certainly," he said, watching her closely. Was the break about to come? "I will stop for you at nine." After a short pause, she looked up and said: "I suppose you would like to know where I am taking you."

"It doesn't matter, Sara."

"I want you to go with me to Burton's inn."

"Burton's inn."

"That is the place where my husband was killed," she said, quite steadily.

He started. "Oh! But—do you think it best, Sara, to open old wounds by—"

"I have thought it all out, Brandon. I want to go there—just once. I want to go into that room again."

CHAPTER XVII.

Once More at Burton's Inn.

Again Sara Wransall found herself in that never-to-be-forgotten room at Burton's inn. On that grim night in March she had entered without fear or trembling because she knew what was there. Now she quaked with a mighty chill of terror, for she knew no more of what was there in the quiet, now sequestered room. Burton had told them of their arrival after a long drive across country that patrons of the inn invariably asked which room it was that had been the scene of the tragedy, and, on finding out, refused point-blank to occupy it. In consequence he had been obliged to transform it into a sort of store and baggage room.

Sara stood in the middle of the murky room, for the shutters had long been closed to the light of day, and looked about her in awe at the heterogeneous mass of boxes, trunks, bundles and rubbish, scattered over the floor without care or system. She had closed the door behind her and was quite alone. Light sneaked in through the cracks in the shutters, but so meagerly that it only served to increase the gloom. A dismantled bedstead stood heaped up in the corner. She did not have to be told what bed it was. The mattress was there too, rolled up and tied with a thick garden rope. She knew there were dull, ugly blood stains upon it. Why the thrifty Burton had persevered in keeping this useless article of furniture, she could only surmise. Perhaps it was held as an inducement to the morbidly curious who always seek out the gruesome and gloat even as they shudder.

For a long time she stood immovable just inside the door, recalling the horrid picture of another day. She tried to imagine the scene that had been enacted there with gentle, lowly Hetty Glynn and her whilom husband as the principal characters. The girl had told the whole story of that ugly night. Sara tried to see it as it actually had transpired. For months this present enterprise had been in her mind: the desire to see the place again, to go there with old impressions which she could leave behind when ready to emerge in a new frame of mind. It was true that she meant to shake off the shackles of a horrid dream, to purge herself of the last vestige of bitterness, to cleanse her mind of certain thoughts and memories.

Downstairs Booth waited for her. He heard the story of the tragedy and that his business had been ruined. Booth was vaguely impressed, he knew not why, by Burton's description of the missing woman. "I'd say she was about the size of Mrs. Wransall herself, and much the same figure," he said, as he had said a thousand times before. "My wife noticed it the minute she saw Mrs. Wransall. Same height and everything."

A bell rang sharply and Burton glanced over his shoulder at the indicator on the wall behind the desk. He gave a great start and his jaw sagged.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. A curious grayness stole over his face. "It's—the bell in that very room. My soul, what can—"

"Mrs. Wransall is up there, isn't she?" demanded Booth.

"It ain't rung since the night he pushed the button for—Oh, gee! You're right. She is up there. My, what a scare it gave me." He wiped his brow. "Turning to a boy, he commanded him to answer the bell. The boy went slowly, and as he went he removed his hands from his pockets. He came back an instant later, more swiftly than he went, with the word that 'the lady up there' wanted Mr. Booth to come upstairs."

She was waiting for him in the open doorway. A shaft of bright sunlight from a window at the end of the hall fell upon her. Her face was colorless, haggard. He paused for an instant to contrast her as she stood there in the pitiless light with the vivid creature he had put upon canvas so recently.

She beckoned to him and turned back into the room. He followed.

"This is the room, Brandon, where my husband met the death he deserved," she said quietly.

"Deserved? Good heavens, Sara, are you—"

"I want you to look about you and try to picture how this place looked on the night of the murder. You have a vivid imagination. None of this rubbish was here. Just a bed, a table and two chairs. There was a carpet on the floor. There were two people here, a man and a woman. The woman had trusted the man. She trusted him until the hour in which he died. Then she found him out. She had come to this place, believing it was to be her wedding night. She found no minister here. The man laughed at her and scoffed. Then she knew. In horror, shame, desperation she tried to break away from him. He was strong. She was a good woman; a virtuous, honorable woman. She saved herself."

Her Eyes Were Moody, Her Voice Rather Lifeless.

WOULD MARK ALL CRIMINALS FOUND STONE AGE CEMETERY

Woman's Suggestion to Mayor of New York Is to Have Them All Appropriately Tattooed.

Among the helpful letters daily received by Mayor Mitchell came one the other day signed "Mme. Mercury," the New York Sun states. She wrote that since all other forms of punishment had failed she would suggest that each criminal be tattooed with a suitable mark across his forehead or on the cheek.

"A pickpocket," she said, "should have a long fingered red hand grasping a purse tattooed on the cheek. A 'Black Hand' should have a black heart pierced with a red dagger, a gunman should be marked with a red hand grasping a gun, grafters with a hand grasping the long green, thugs marked with a blue hand grasping a blackjack, burglars marked with a doorlock and pick."

"Please give this system a trial," she asked. "It is humane and will not require any extra expense. See how many gunmen, pickpockets, murderers and thieves the police can tattoo in the next 12 months, and you will realize the old axiom of 'catching before hanging.'"

This system would lower the cost of living, reduce the cost of maintaining prisons and make all the poor and criminals self-supporting, taxpaying citizens.

The revolution that I suggest in the system of handling crime and criminals will rotate the wheels of crime backward into oblivion in time."

The mayor received Mme. Mercury's suggestions to late to incorporate them in the Goethals police bills.

Preserving the Verities.

Star Actor — "I must insist, Mr. Sager, on having real food in the banquet scene." Manager—"Very well, then; if you insist on that you will be supplied with real poison in the death scene."

Recent Discovery in Italian Province Will Arouse Keen Interest Among Archeologists.

A burial place of the Stone Age has just been found by Prof. Dall'Osso of Ancona, in the Valle Vibrata (province of Abruzzi), Italy.

The bodies are not buried, but are all laid in small cabins containing from two to eight each, and are ranged on either side of these little huts on low platforms sloping toward the center.

With a single exception the bodies all rest on one side, with the knees drawn up, and it is assumed that the dead were placed in this position to give them the attitude of prayer in their death chamber, for it has been established that the custom of praying on one's knees was already in existence in the Stone Age in Egypt.

In one of the cabins, almost in the center of the group, there are no bodies, but a big circular hearth, around which it is assumed, from the fragments of broken earthenware pots around it, the funeral banquets were held.

The objects found in the cabins with the bodies have remarkable importance from the archeological point of view, as they prove the existence of a degree of civilization, especially as regards vases and such utensils, never hitherto observed in the Neolithic age.

Ingenious Calculating Machine.

A Hungarian citizen has invented an instrument which shows instantly the amount of interest due on any given sum for any period at any given rate of interest. The instrument, made in the size and shape of a watch, is of very simple construction and inexpensive. All that is necessary to operate it is to place the hands in the proper position on the dial and the exact amount of interest in each case is indicated on the dial.

He was staring at her with dilated eyes. Slowly the truth was borne in upon him.

"The woman was—Hetty?" came hoarsely from his stiffening lips. "My God, Sara!"

She came close to him and spoke in a half-whisper. "Now you know the secret. Is it safe with you?"

He opened his lips to speak, but no words came forth. Paralysis seemed to have gripped not only his throat but his senses. He reeled. She grasped his arm in a tense, fierce way, and whispered:

"Be careful! No one must hear what we are saying." She shot a glance down the deserted hall. "No one is near. I made sure of that. Don't speak! Think first—think well, Brandon Booth. It is what you have been seeking for months—the truth. You share the secret with my now. Again I ask, is it safe with you?"

"My God!" he muttered again, and passed his hand over his eyes. His brow was wet. He looked at his fingers dumbly as if expecting to find them covered with blood.

"Is it safe with you?" for the third time.

"Safe? Safe?" he whispered, following her example without knowing that he did so. "I—I can't believe you, Sara. It can't be true."

"It is true."

"You have known—all this time?"

"From that night when I stood where we are standing now."

"And—and—she?"

"I had never seen her until that night. I saved her."

He dropped suddenly upon the trunk that stood behind him, and buried his face in his hands. For a long time she stood over him, her interest divided between him and the hall, wherein lay their present peril.

"Come," she said at last. "Pull yourself together. We must leave this place. If you are not careful they will suspect something downstairs."

He looked up with haggard eyes, studying her face with curious intentness.

"What manner of woman are you, Sara?" he questioned, slowly, wonderingly.

"I have just discovered that I am very much like other women, after all," she said. "For awhile I thought I was different, that I was stronger than my sex. But I am just as weak, just as much to be pitied, just as much to be scorned as any one of my sisters. I have spoiled a great act by stooping to do a mean one. God will bear witness that my thoughts were noble at the outset; my heart was soft. But come! There is much more to tell that cannot be told here. You shall know everything."

They went downstairs and out into the crisp autumn air. She gave directions to her chauffeur. They were to traverse for some distance the same road she had taken on that ill-fated night a year and a half before. In course of time the motor approached a well-remembered railway crossing.

"Slow down, Cole," she said. "This is a mean place—a very mean place." Turning to Booth, who had been sitting grim and silent beside her for miles, she said, lowering her voice: "I remember that crossing yonder. There is a sharp curve beyond. This is the place. Midway between the two crossings, I should say. Please remember this part of the road, Brandon, when I come to the telling of that night's ride to town. Try to picture this spot—this smooth, straight road as it might be on a dark, freezing night in the very thick of a screaming blizzard, with all the world abed save—two women."

In his mind he began to draw the picture, and to place the two women in the center of it, without knowing the circumstances. There was something fascinating in the study he was making, something gruesome and full of sinister possibilities for the hand of a virile painter. He wondered how near his imagination was to placing

He Dropped Suddenly Upon the Trunk.

the central figures in the picture as they actually appeared on that secret night.

At sunset they went together to the little pavilion at the end of the pier which extended far out into the sound. Here they were safe from the ears of eavesdroppers. The boats had been stowed away for the winter. The wind that blew through the open pavilion, now shorn of all its comforts and luxuries, was cold, raw and repelling. No one would disturb them here.

With her face set toward the sinking east, she leaned against one of the thick posts, and in a dull, emotionless voice, laid bare the whole story of that dreadful night and the days that followed. She spared no details, she spared not herself in the narration.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Spilled the Effect.

Alice was playing store with her youngest sister. Mother asked to become a purchaser, played well her part, but, in saying good-day, stooped and kissed both children.

"Oh, mamma," she wailed, "you've spoiled everything! You never kiss the man in the real store."

Sympathy.

Charity Worker—Will you do something for a poor woman whose husband comes out of jail today?

Ally—Here's a quarter. Wire her my condolence.—Judge.

Largest Insect Is 13 Inches.

The largest known insect is a species of phasmid, or walking stick found in Borneo. This, which is wingless, has a body 13 inches long.

Baltimore Is rapidly motorizing its fire department.

Delays Sometimes Expensive

Business or social engagement—just a few minutes for lunch—can't wait for service. What can be had quickly?

Order

Post Toasties

with fresh berries or fruit and cream. They will be served immediately, they are nourishing and taste mighty good, too.

Sold by Grocers everywhere!

Delays Sometimes Expensive

Business or social engagement—just a few minutes for lunch—can't wait for service. What can be had quickly?

Order

Post Toasties

with fresh berries or fruit and cream. They will be served immediately, they are nourishing and taste mighty good, too.

Sold by Grocers everywhere!

Delays Sometimes Expensive

Business or social engagement—just a few minutes for lunch—can't wait for service. What can be had quickly?

Order

Post Toasties

with fresh berries or fruit and cream. They will be served immediately, they are nourishing and taste mighty good, too.

Sold by Grocers everywhere!

Delays Sometimes Expensive

Business or social engagement—just a few minutes for lunch—can't wait for service. What can be had quickly?

Order

Post Toasties

with fresh berries or fruit and cream. They will be served immediately, they are nourishing and taste mighty good, too.

Sold by Grocers everywhere!

Delays Sometimes Expensive

Business or social engagement—just a few minutes for lunch—can't wait for service. What can be had quickly?

Order