



The Hollow of Her Hand

by George Barr McCutcheon



WORK ON ROADS IN SUMMER

Building and Maintaining Highways is More Kindly Thought of by Many of the Users.

Gradually the farmers in practically every community are beginning to take personal interest in the matter of making the roads they are forced to use better and more fit for general travel all the year round.

In those states where the road work is done by farmers and their teams it is hard to get the labor done when the weather conditions are best, says a writer in Farm Progress. They will not leave their fields to put in four or five days grading and leveling the public highways unless they are practically forced to do it.

But there are signs of better times in the matter of country road building. I drove 20 miles and back a few weeks ago over roads that used to be impassable at that time of year for anything except a good strong team and a good wagon. Soft clay, soft soil and mud holes of infinite variety were its old-time characteristics.

I made the trip in a very ordinary, four-year-old motor car and drove the round trip in about three hours. Under the old arrangement it would have taken all of one day and possibly part of the night.

The road drags, just the ordinary old road drags made from split logs, made the difference. Something, and I believe it was the necessity of making the road passable for the rural free delivery wagons, has made a big difference along the old road. We saw several road drags along the way, two or three of them in use, and the roads where they were passing were as smooth as a turnpike.

Summer is the time to do really constructive road work. The drag

Handy Road Scraper.

can be used summer or winter, but scraping, grading, culvert repairing and draining ought to be done in June, July, August and September. Earlier in the year the mud will prevent any real work being completed. Later in the fall the rains will turn the freshly graded roads into loblollies of clayey water.

From now on until the first snows and freezes the dirt road can be shaped and graded. I am of the opinion that the plan of appointing some one farmer as overseer or "road boss" and having the rest of the neighborhood work under this inexperienced man is a mistake. The time will come when all road work will be done under the supervision of a man who does nothing but plan and build and possibly maintain roads. He will know roads under all weather conditions and can look after their creation, drainage and repair intelligently. It is mostly a hit or miss proposition now.

WAYS OF A BAD ROAD THIEF

Forces Farmer to Haul Small Loads, Drive Slowly and Occasions Many Expensive Delays.

The bad road thief forces you to haul small loads, drive slowly, wrench and twist the life out of your horse, harness and vehicle, often breaking and damaging the latter until great and expensive delays are occasioned. It also steals your opportunity to dispose of your farm when you wish to sell, for no man will pay as much for a farm bordered by a poor road system as he will for one with a well-kept highway, and some will not buy a farm at all when the road system is poor. The loss of time and money where the above named conditions exist makes it imperative that you open all the drain ditches along the road, and drag this silent, notorious thief to death with the King road drag.

Through Traffic Problem.

There is a phase of the road question which is state-wide in its application. That relates to the through or trunk lines which accommodate through traffic. To leave the construction and care of these roads in the hands of local authorities must result in uneven and inharmonious gaps, and desultory care, involving practically a failure of such roads for a standard of their utility.

Hog Manure Wasted.

Although it has been known that the manure from the hog is very rich in fertilizing ingredients, it is quite generally ignored, and too frequently allowed to go to waste.

Concrete Floors Save Manure.

Concrete floors in the barn help a great deal in saving manure.

Destroy Weeds.

Weeds—destroy them before they go to seed.

CHAPTER XX.—Continued.

"I thought perhaps he had written you about his plans."

"My father does not know that I have returned to New York."

"Oh, I see. Of course. How—um? By the way, I think the column is a corker. One of the most amusing through-breads I've ever come across. Ripping. He's never said anything to me about your antipathy toward him, but I can see with half an eye that he is terribly depressed about it. Can't you get together some way on—"

"Really, Mr. Wrاندall, you are encouraging my imagination to a point where words ultimately must fall you, she said very positively. Booth could hardly repress a chuckle.

"It's not imagination on my part," said Leslie with conviction, falling utterly to recognize the obvious. "I suppose you know that he is coming over to visit me for six weeks or so. We became rattling good friends before we parted. My love, you should hear him on old Lord Murgatroyd's will! The quintessence of wit! I couldn't take it as he does. Expectations and all that sort of thing, you know, going up like a hot air balloon and bursting in plain view. But he never squeaked. Laughed it off. A British attribute, I dare say. I suppose you know that he is obliged to sell his estate in Ireland?"

He started. She could not conceal the look of shame that leaped into her eyes.

"I—I did not know," she murmured. "Must be quite a shock to you. Sit down, Brandy. You look very picturesque standing, but chairs were made to sit upon—or in, whichever is proper. Booth scratched his shoulders.

"I think I'll stand, if you don't mind, Les."

"I merely suggested it, old chap, fearing you might have overlooked the possibility. Yes, Miss Castleton, he left us in London to go up to Belfast on this dismal business. There was something in the back of his mind that he was trying to get at in a tactful manner. "By the way, is this property entailed?"

"I know nothing at all about it, Mr. Wrاندall," said she, with a pleading glance at her lover, as if to inquire what stand she should take in this distressing situation.

"If it is entailed he can't sell it," said Booth quietly.

"That's true," said Leslie, somewhat dubiously. Then, with a magnanimity that covered a multitude of doubts he added: "Of course, I am only interested in seeing that you are properly protected, Miss Castleton. I've no doubt you hold an interest in the estate."

"I can't very well discuss a thing I know absolutely nothing about," she said succinctly.

"Most of it is in building lots and factories in Belfast, of course. It was more in the nature of a question than a declaration. "The old family castle isn't very much of an asset, I take it."

"I fancy you can trust Colonel Castleton to make the best possible deal in the premises," said Booth dryly.

"I suppose so," said the other resignedly. "He is a shrewd beggar, I'm convinced of that. Strange, however, that I haven't heard a word from him since he left us in London. I've been expecting a cablegram from him every day for nearly a fortnight, letting me know when to expect him."

"Are you going to California this winter for the flying?" asked Hetty.

Sara entered at that juncture, and they all sat down to listen for half an hour to Leslie's harangue on the way the California meet was being mismanaged, at the end of which he departed.

He took Booth away with him, much to that young man's disgust.

"Do you know, Brandy, old fellow," said he as they walked down Fifth avenue in the gathering dusk of the early winter evening "ever since I've begun to suspect that damned old hump of a father of hers, I've been congratulating myself that there isn't the remotest chance of his ever becoming my father-in-law. And, by George, you'll never know how near I was to scapling blindly into the brambles. What a close call I had!"

Booth's sarcastic smile was hidden by the dusk. He made no pretense of openly resenting the meanness of spirit that moved Leslie to these casual remarks. He merely announced as a dry, cutting voice:

"I think Miss Castleton is to be congratulated that her injury is no greater than nature made it in the beginning."

"What do you mean by nature?"

"Nature gave her a father, didn't it?"

"Obviously."

"Well, why add insult to injury?"

"By Jove! Oh, I say, old man!"

They parted at the next corner. As Booth started to cross over to the Plaza, Leslie called out after him:

"I say, Brandy, just a second, please. Are you going to marry Miss Castleton?"

"I am."

"Then, I retract the scabby things I said back there. I asked her to marry me three times and she refused me three times. What I said about the brambles was rotten. I'd ask her again if I thought she'd have me. There you are, old fellow. I'm a rotten cad, but I apologise to you just the same."

"You're learning, Leslie," said Booth, taking the hand the other held out to him.

While the painter was dining at his club later on in the evening, he was called to the telephone. Watson was on the wire. He said that Mrs. Wrاندall would like to know if Mr. Booth would drop in on her for a few minutes after dinner, to discuss a very important matter, if you please, sir."

At nine o'clock, Booth was in Sara's library, trying to grasp a new and remarkable phase in the character of that smarting woman.

He found Hetty waiting for him when he arrived.

"I don't know what it all means, Brandy," she said hurriedly, looking over her shoulder as she spoke. "Sara says that she has come to a decision of some sort. She wants us to hear her plan before making it final. I—I don't understand her at all tonight."

"It can't be anything serious, dear-est," he said, but something cold and nameless oppressed him just the same.

"She asked me if I had finally decided to—to be your wife, Brandy. I said I had asked you for two or three days more in which to decide. It seemed to depress her. She said she didn't see how she could give me up, even to you. She wants to be near me always. It is—it is really tragic, Brandy."

He took her hands in his.

"We can fix that," said he confidently. "Sara can live with us if she feels that way about it. Our home shall be hers when she likes, and as long as she chooses. It will be open to her all the time, to come and go or to stay, just as she elects. Isn't that the way to put it?"

"I suggested something of the sort, but she wasn't very much impressed. Indeed, she appeared to be somewhat—yes, I could not have been mistaken—somewhat harsh and terrified when I spoke of it. Afterwards she was more reasonable. She thanked me and—there were tears in her eyes at the time—and said she would think it over. All she asks is that I may be happy and free and untroubled all the rest of my life. This was before dinner. At dinner she appeared to be brooding over something. When we left the table she took me to her room and said that she had come to an important decision. Then she instructed Watson to find you if possible."

"Gad, it's all very upsetting," he said, shaking his head.

"I think her conscience is troubling her. She hates the Wrاندalls, but I—I don't know why I should feel as I do about it—but I believe she wants them to know!"

He stared for a moment, and then his face brightened. "And so do I, Hetty, so do I! They ought to know!"

"I should feel so much easier if the whole world knew," said she earnestly.

Sara heard the girl's words as she stood in the door. She came forward with a strange—even abashed—smile, after closing the door behind her.

"I don't agree with you, dearest, when you say that the world should know, but I have come to the conclusion that you should be tried and acquitted by a jury made up of Challis Wrاندall's own flesh and blood. The Wrاندalls must know the truth."

CHAPTER XXI.

The Jury of Four.

The Wrاندalls sat waiting and wondering. They had been sent for and they had deluged to respond, much to their own surprise. Redmond Wrاندall occupied a place at the head of the library table. At his right sat his wife, Vivian and Leslie, by direction, took seats at the side of the long table, which had been cleared of its mass of books and magazines. Lawyer Carroll sat at the other end of the table, perceptibly nervous and anxious. Hetty sat a little apart from the others, a rather forlorn, detached member of the conclave. Brandon Booth, pale-faced and alert, drew up a chair alongside Carroll, facing Sara who alone remained standing, directly opposite the four Wrандalls.

Not one of the Wrандalls knew why they, as a family, were there. They had not the slightest premonition of what was to come.

The Wrандalls had been routed from their comfortable fireside—for what? They were asking the question of themselves and they were waiting stonily for the answer.

"It is very stuffy in here," Vivian had said with a glance at the closed doors after Sara had successfully placed her jury in the box.

"Keep still, Viv," whispered Leslie, with a fine assumption of awe. "It's a spiritualistic meeting. You'll scare the spooks away."

It was at this juncture that Sara rose from her chair and faced them, as calmly, as complacently as if she were about to ask them to throw a bomb into their midst that would shatter their smug serenity for all time to come. With a glance at Mr. Carroll she began, clearly, firmly and without a pretatory apology for what was to follow.

"I have asked you to come here tonight to be my judges. I am on trial. You are about to hear the story of my unspeakable perfidy. I only require of you that you hear me to the end before passing judgment."

At her words, Hetty and Booth started perceptibly; a quick glance passed between them, as if each was inquiring whether the other had caught the

unspeakable words of self-indictment. A puzzled frown appeared on Hetty's brow.

"Perfidy?" interposed Mr. Wrандall. His wife's expression changed from one of bored indifference to sharp inquiry. Leslie passed in the act of lighting a cigarette.

"It is the mildest term I can command," said Sara. "I shall be as brief as possible in stating the case, Mr. Wrандall. You will be surprised to hear that I have taken it upon myself, as the wife of Challis Wrандall and, as I regard it, the one most vitally concerned if not interested in the discovery and punishment of the person who took his life—I say I have taken it upon myself to shield, protect and defend the unhappy young woman who accompanied him to Burton's inn on that night in March. She has had my constant, my personal protection for more than twenty months."

The Wrандalls leaned forward in their chairs. The match burned Leslie's fingers, and he dropped it without appearing to notice the pain.

"What is this you are saying?" demanded Redmond Wrандall.

"When I left the inn that night, after seeing my husband's body in the little upstairs room, I said to myself that the one who took his life had unwittingly done me a service. He was my husband; I loved him, I adored him. To the end of my days I could have gone on loving him in spite of the cruel return he gave for my love and loyalty. I shall not attempt to tell you of the countless lapses of fidelity on his part. You would not believe me. But he always came back to me with the pitiful love he had for me, and I forgave him his transgressions. These things you know. He confessed many things to you, Mr. Wrандall. He humbled himself to me. Perhaps you will recall that I never complained to you of him. What rancor I had was always directed toward you, his family, who would see no wrong in your kind but looked upon me as dirt beneath his feet. There were moments when I could have slain him with my own hands, but my heart rebelled. There were times when he said to me that I ought to kill him for the things he had done. You may now understand what I mean when I say that the girl who went to Burton's inn with him did me a service. I will not say that I considered her guiltless at the time. On the contrary, I looked upon her in quite a different way. I had no means of knowing then that she was as pure as snow and that he would have despoiled her of everything that was sweet and sacred to her. She took his life in order to save that which was dearer to her than her own life, and she was on her way to pay for her deed with her life if necessary when I came upon her and intervened."

"You—you know who she is?" said Mr. Wrандall, in a low, incredulous voice.

"I have known almost from the beginning. Presently you will hear her story, from her own lips."

Involuntarily four pairs of eyes shifted. They looked blankly at Hetty Castleton.

Speaking swiftly, Sara depleted the scenes and sensations experienced during that memorable motor journey to New York city.

"I could not believe that she was a vicious creature, even then. Something told me that she was a tender, gentle thing that had fallen into evil hands and had struck because she was unwell. I did not doubt that she had been my husband's mistress, but I could not destroy the conviction that somehow she had been justified in doing the thing she had done. My gravest mistake was in refusing to hear her story in all of its details. I only permitted her to acknowledge that she had killed him, no more. I did not want to hear the thing which I assumed to be true. Therein lies my deepest fault. For months and months I misjudged her in my heart, yet secretly loved her. Now I understand why I loved her. It was because she was innocent of the only crime I could lay at her feet. Now I come to the crime of which I stand self-accused. I must have been mad all these months. I had no other defense to offer. You may take it as you see fit for yourselves. I do not ask for pardon. After I deliberately had set about to shield this unhappy girl—to cheat the law, if you please—to cheat for yourselves, I conceived the horrible thought to avenge myself for all the indignities I had sustained at the hands of you Wrандalls, and at the same time to even my account with the one woman whom I could put my finger upon as having robbed me of my husband's love. You see I put it mildly. I have hated all of you, Mrs. Wrандall, even as you have hated me. Today—now—I do not feel as I did in other days toward you. I do not love you, still I do not hate you. I do not forgive you, and yet I think I have come to see things from your point of view. I can only repeat that I do not hate you as I once did."

She paused. The Wrандalls were too deeply submerged in horror to speak. They merely stared at her as if stupefied; as breathless, as motionless as stones.

"There came a day when I observed that Leslie was attracted by the guest in my house. On that day the plan took root in my brain. I—"

"Good God!" fell from Leslie's lips.

"You—you had that in mind?"

"It became a fixed, infernal purpose, Leslie. Not that I hated you, as I hated the rest, for you tried to be considerate. The one grudge I held against you was that in seeking to sustain me you defamed your own brother. You came to me with stories of his misdeeds; you said that he was a scoundrel and that you would not blame me for 'showing him up.' Do you not remember? And so my plot involved you; you were the only one through whom I could strike. There

were times when I talked. I could not bear the thought of sacrificing Hetty Castleton, nor was it easy to thoroughly appraise my conscience in respect to you. Still, if I could have had my way a few months ago, if coercion had been of any avail, you would now be the husband of your brother's sister. Then I came to know that she was not what I had thought she was. She was honest. My bubble burst. I came out of the maze in which I had been living and saw clearly that what I had contemplated was the most atrocious—"

"Atrocious!" cried Mrs. Redmond Wrандall between her set teeth. "Diabolical! Diabolical! My God, Sara, what a devil you—!" She did not complete the sentence, but sank back in her chair and stared with wide, horror-struck eyes at her rigid daughter-in-law.

Her husband, his hand shaking as if with palsy, pointed a finger at Hetty.

"And So You Are the One We Have Been Hunting for All These Months."



And So You Are the One We Have Been Hunting for All These Months.

"And so you are the one we have been hunting for all these months, Miss Castleton! You are the one we want! You who have sat at our table, who have smiled in our faces—"

"Stop, Mr. Wrандall!" commanded Sara, noting the ashen face of the girl. "Don't let the fact escape you that I am the guilty person. Don't forget that she owed her freedom, if not her life to me. I alone kept her from giving herself up to the law. All that I have conquered—not by threats but by love! Do you understand? Because of her love for me, and because she believed that I loved her, she submitted. You are not to accuse her, Mr. Wrандall. Accuse me! I am on trial here. Hetty Castleton is a witness against me, if you choose to call upon her as such. If not, I shall ask her to speak in my defense, if she can do so."

"This is lunacy!" cried Mr. Wrандall, coming to his feet. "I don't care what your motives may have been. They do not make her any less a murderer. She—"

"We must give her over to the police," began his wife, struggling to her feet. She staggered. It was Booth who stepped quickly to her side to support her. Leslie was staring at Hetty.

Vivian touched her father's arm. She was very pale but vastly more composed than the others.

"Father, listen to me," she said. Her voice trembled in spite of her effort to control it. "We are condemning Miss Castleton unheard. Let us hear everything before we—"

"Good God, Vivian! Do you mean to—"

"How can we place any reliance on what she may say?" cried Mrs. Wrандall.

"Nevertheless," said Vivian firmly. "I for one shall not condemn her unheard. I mean to be as fair to her as Sara has been. It shall not be said that all the Wrандalls are smaller than Sara Gooch!"

"My child—" began her father incredulously. His jaw dropped suddenly. His daughter's shot had landed squarely in the heart of the Wrандall pride.

"If she has anything to say"—said Mrs. Wrандall, waving Booth aside and sinking stiffly into her chair. Her husband sat down. Their jaws set hard.

"Thank you, Vivian," said Sara, surprised in spite of herself. "You are nobler than I—"

"Please don't thank me, Sara," said Vivian icily. "I was speaking for Miss Castleton."

Sara flushed. "I suppose it is useless to ask you to be fair to Sara Gooch, as you choose to call me."

"Do you feel in your heart that we still owe you anything?"

"Enough of this, Vivian," spoke up her father harshly. "If Miss Castleton desires to speak we will listen to her. I must advise you, Miss Castleton, that the extraordinary disclosures made by my daughter-in-law do not lessen your culpability. We do not insist on this confession from you. You deliver it at your own risk. I want to be fair with you. If Mr. Carroll is your counsel, he may advise you now to refuse to make a statement."

Mr. Carroll bowed slightly in the general direction of the Wrандalls. "I have already advised Miss Castleton to state the case fully and completely to you, Mr. Wrандall. It was I who originally suggested this—well, what you might call a private trial for her. I am firmly convinced that when you have heard her story, you, as her judges, will acquit her of the charge of murder. Moreover, you will be content to let your own verdict end the matter, sparing yourselves the shame and ignominy of having her story told

in a criminal court for the delectation of an eager but somewhat implacable world."

"Your language is extremely unpleasant, Mr. Carroll," said Mr. Wrандall coldly.

"I meant to speak kindly, sir."

"Do you mean, sir, that we will let the matter rest after hearing her—"

"That is precisely what I mean, Mr. Wrандall. You will not consider her guilty of a crime. Please bear in mind this fact: but for Sara and Miss Castleton you would not have known the truth. Miss Castleton could not be convicted in a court of justice. Nor will she be convicted here this evening. I am the offender. She has already been tried and proved innocent."

Leslie, in his impatience, tapped sharply on the table with his seal ring.

"Please let her tell the story. Permit me to say, Miss Castleton, that you will not find the Wrандalls as harsh and vindictive as you may have been led to believe."

Mrs. Wrандall passed her hand over her eyes. "To think that we have been friendly to this girl all these—"

"Calm yourself, my dear," said her husband, after a glance at his son and daughter, a glance of unexpressed helplessness. He could not understand them.

As Hetty arose, Mrs. Wrандall senior lowered her eyes and not once did she look up during the recital that followed. Her hands were lying limply in her lap, and she breathed heavily, almost stertorously. The younger Wrандalls leaned forward with their clear, unwavering gaze fixed on the earnest face of the young Englishwoman who had slain their brother.

"You have heard Sara accuse herself," said the girl slowly, dispassionately. "The shock was no greater to you than it was to me. All that she has said is true, and yet I—I would so much rather she had left herself unarraigned. We were agreed that I should throw myself on your mercy. Mr. Carroll said that you were fair and just people, that you would not condemn me under the circumstances. But that Sara should seek to take the blame is—"

"Alas, my dear, I am to blame," said Sara, shaking her head. "But for me your story would have been told months ago, the courts would have cleared you, and all the world would have execrated my husband for the thing he did—my husband and your son, Mrs. Wrандall—whom we both loved. God bless me, I think I loved him more than all of you put together!"

She sat down abruptly and buried her face in her arms on the edge of the table.

"If I could only induce you to forgive her," began Hetty, throwing out her hands to the Wrандalls, only to be met by a gesture of repugnance from the grim old man.

"Your story, Miss Castleton," he said hoarsely.

"From the beginning, if you please," added the lawyer quietly. "Leave out nothing."

Clearly, steadily and with the utmost sincerity in her voice and manner, the girl began the story of her life. She passed hastily over the earlier periods, frankly exposing the unhappy conditions attending her home life, her subsequent activities as a performer on the London stage after Colonel Castleton's defection; the few months devoted to posing for Hawright, the painter, and later on her engagement as governess in the wealthy Badlong family. She devoted some time and definiteness to her first encounter with Challis Wrандall on board the west-bound steamer, an in-

teresting and somewhat uneventful story.

"I am not to accuse her, Mr. Wrандall. Accuse me! I am on trial here. Hetty Castleton is a witness against me, if you choose to call upon her as such. If not, I shall ask her to speak in my defense, if she can do so."

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"Your story, Miss Castleton," he said hoarsely.

"From the beginning, if you please," added the lawyer quietly. "Leave out nothing."

Clearly, steadily and with the utmost sincerity in her voice and manner, the girl began the story of her life. She passed hastily over the earlier periods, frankly exposing the unhappy conditions attending her home life, her subsequent activities as a performer on the London stage after Colonel Castleton's defection; the few months devoted to posing for Hawright, the painter, and later on her engagement as governess in the wealthy Badlong family. She devoted some time and definiteness to her first encounter with Challis Wrандall on board the west-bound steamer, an in-

teresting and somewhat uneventful story.

"I am not to accuse her, Mr. Wrандall. Accuse me! I am on trial here. Hetty Castleton is a witness against me, if you choose to call upon her as such. If not, I shall ask her to speak in my defense, if she can do so."

"This is lunacy!" cried Mr. Wrандall, coming to his feet. "I don't care what your motives may have been. They do not make her any less a murderer. She—"

"We must give her over to the police," began his wife, struggling to her feet. She staggered. It was Booth who stepped quickly to her side to support her. Leslie was staring at Hetty.

Vivian touched her father's arm. She was very pale but vastly more composed than the others.

"Father, listen to me," she said. Her voice trembled in spite of her effort to control it. "We are condemning Miss Castleton unheard. Let us hear everything before we—"

"Good God, Vivian! Do you mean to—"

"How can we place any reliance on what she may say?" cried Mrs. Wrандall.

"Nevertheless," said Vivian firmly. "I for one shall not condemn her unheard. I mean to be as fair to her as Sara has been. It shall not be said that all the Wrандalls are smaller than Sara Gooch!"

"My child—" began her father incredulously. His jaw dropped suddenly. His daughter's shot had landed squarely in the heart of the Wrандall pride.

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