



SYNOPSIS.

Challis Wrاندall is found murdered in a room house near New York. Mrs. Wrاندall is summoned from the city and identifies the body. A young woman who accompanied Wrاندall to the inn and subsequently disappeared, is suspected. Wrاندall, it appears, had led a gay life and neglected his wife. Mrs. Wrاندall 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 Wrاندall. Feeling that the girl had done her a service in ridding her of the man, who though she loved him deeply, had caused her great sorrow, Mrs. Wrاندall determines to shield her and takes her to her own home.

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

Half an hour later he departed, to rejoin her at eleven o'clock; when the reporters were to be expected. He was to do all the talking for her. While he was there, Leslie Wrاندall called her up on the telephone. Hearing but one side of the rather prolonged conversation, he was filled with wonder at the tactful way in which she met and parried the inevitable questions and suggestions coming from her horror-stricken brother-in-law. Without the slightest trace of offensiveness in her manner, she gave Leslie to understand that the final obsequies must be conducted in the home of his parents, to whom once more her husband belonged, and that she would abide by all arrangements his family elected to make. Mr. Carroll surmised from the trend of conversation that young Wrاندall was about to leave for the scene of the tragedy, and that the house was in a state of unspeakable distress. The lawyer smiled grimly to himself as he turned to look out of the window. He did not have to be told that Challis was the idol of the family, and that, so far as they were concerned, he could do no wrong!

After his departure, Mrs. Wrاندall gently opened the bedroom door and was surprised to find the girl wide-awake, resting on one elbow, her staring eyes fastened on the newspaper that topped the pile on the chair.

Catching sight of Mrs. Wrاندall she pointed to the paper with a trembling hand and cried out, in a voice full of horror:

"Did you place them there for me to read? Who was with you in the other room just now? Was it some one about the—some one looking for me? Speak! Please tell me. I heard a man's voice—"

The other crossed quickly to her side.

"Don't be alarmed. It was my lawyer. There is nothing to fear—at present. Yes, I left the papers there for you to see. You can see what a sensation it has caused. Challis Wrاندall was one of the most widely known men in New York. But I suppose you know that without my telling you."

The girl sank back with a groan. "My God, what have I done? What will come of it all?"

"I wish I could answer that question," said the other, taking the girl's hand in hers. Both were trembling.

After an instant's hesitation, she laid her other hand in the dark, disheveled hair of the wild-eyed creature, who still continued to stare at the headlines. "I am quite sure they will not look for you here, or in my home."

"In your home?"

"You are to go with me. I have thought it all over. It is the only way. Come, I must ask you to pull yourself together. Get up at once, and dress. Here are the things you are to wear." She indicated the orderly pile of garments with a wave of her hand.

Slowly the girl crept out of bed, confused, bewildered, stunned.

"Where are my own things? I—I cannot accept these. Pray give me my own—"

Mrs. Wrاندall checked her.

"You must obey me, if you expect me to help you. Don't you understand that I have had a—bereavement? I cannot wear these things now. They are useless to me. But we will speak of all that later on. Come, be quick; I will help you to dress. First, go to the telephone and ask them to send a waiter to—these rooms. We must have something to eat. Please do as I tell you."

Standing before her benefactress, her fingers fumbling impotently at the neck of the night-dress, the girl still continued to stare dumbly into the calm, dark eyes before her.

"You are so good. I—I—"

"Let me help you," interrupted the other, deliberately setting about to remove the night-dress. The girl caught it up as it slipped from her shoulders, a warm flush suffusing her face, a shamed look springing into her eyes.

"Thank you, I can—get on very well. I only wanted to ask you a question. It has been on my mind, waking and sleeping. Can you tell me anything about—do you know his wife?"

The question was so abrupt, so startling that Mrs. Wrاندall uttered a sharp little cry. For a moment she could not reply.

"I am so sorry, so desperately sorry for her," added the girl plaintively.

"I know her," the other managed to say with an effort.

"If I had only known that he had a wife—"

"He despised his mother. That's all there is to that side of my story,"

The Hollow of Her Hand

by George Barr McCutcheon

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arm. "You did not know that he had a wife?" she cried.

The girl's eyes flashed with a sudden, fierce fire in their depths.

"God in heaven, no! I did not know it until— Oh, I can't speak of it! Why should I tell you about it? Why should you be interested in hearing it?"

Mrs. Wrاندall drew back and regarded the girl's set, unhappy face. There was a curious light in her eyes that escaped the other's notice—a light that would have puzzled her not a little.

"But you will tell me—everything—a little later," she said, strangely calm. "Not now, but—before many hours have passed. First of all, you must tell me who you are, where you live—everything except what happened in Burton's inn. I don't want to hear that at present—perhaps never. Yes, on second thoughts, I will say never! You are never to tell me just what happened up there, or just what led up to it. Do you understand? Never!"

The girl stared at her in amazement. "But I—I must tell some one," she cried vehemently. "I have a right to defend myself—"

"I am not asking you to defend yourself," said Mrs. Wrاندall shortly. Then, as if afraid to remain longer, she rushed from the room. In the doorway, she turned for an instant to say: "Do as I told you. Telephone. Dress as quickly as you can." She closed the door swiftly.

Standing in the center of the room, her hands clenched until the nails cut the flesh, she said over and over again to herself: "I don't want to know! I don't want to know!"

A few minutes later she was critically inspecting the young woman who came from the bedroom attired in a street dress that neither of them had ever donned before. The girl, looking fresher, prettier and even younger than when she had seen her last, was in no way abashed. She seemed to have accepted the garments and the situation in the same spirit of resignation and hope; as if she had decided to make the most of her slim chance to profit by these amazing circumstances.

They sat opposite each other at the little breakfast table.

"Please pour the coffee," said Mrs. Wrاندall. The waiter had left the room at her command. The girl's hand shook, but she complied without a word.

"Now you may tell me who you are and—but wait! You are not to say anything about what happened at the inn. Guard your words carefully. I am not asking for a confession. I do not care to know what happened there. It will make it easier for me to protect you. You may call it conscience. Keep your big secret to yourself. Not one word to me. Do you understand?"

"You mean that I am not to reveal, even to you, the causes which led up to—"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing," said Mrs. Wrاندall firmly.

"But I cannot permit you to judge me, to—well, you might say to acquit me—without hearing the story. It is so vital to me."

"I can judge you without hearing all of the—the evidence, if that's what you mean. Simply answer the ques—"

"My girl," she said, ever so gently, "I shall not ask what your life has been; I do not care. I shall not ask for references. You are alone in the world and you need a friend. I too am alone. If you will come to me I will do everything in my power to make you comfortable and—contented. Perhaps it will be impossible to make you happy. I promise faithfully to help you, to shield you, to repay you for the thing you have done for me. You could not have fallen into gentler hands than mine will prove to be. That much I swear to you on my soul, which is sacred. I bear you no ill-will. I have nothing to avenge."

Hetty drew back, completely mystified.

"Who are you?" she murmured, still staring.

"I am Challis Wrاندall's wife."

me? You will not desert me now?"

The girl's eyes grew wide with wonder. "Desert you? Why do you put it in that way? I don't understand."

"You will come back to me?" insisted the other.

"Yes. Why—why, it means everything to me. It means life—more than that, most wonderful friend. Life isn't very sweet to me. But the joy of giving it to you for ever is the dearest boon I crave. I do give it to you. It belongs to you. I—I could die for you."

She dropped to her knees and pressed her lips to Sara Wrاندall's hand; hot tears fell upon it.

Mrs. Wrاندall laid her free hand on the dark, glossy hair and smiled; smiled warmly for the first time in—well, in years she might have said to herself if she had stopped to consider.

"Get up, my dear," she said gently.



"I Am Challis Wrاندall's Wife."

"I shall not ask you to die for me—if you do come back. I may be sending you to your death, as it is, but it is the chance we must take. A few hours will tell the tale. Now listen to what I am about to say—to propose. I offer you a home, I offer you friendship and I trust security from the perils that confronts you. I ask nothing in return, not even a word of gratitude. You may tell the people at your lodgings that I have engaged you as companion and that we are to sail for Europe in a week's time if possible. Now we must prepare to go to my own home. You will see to packing my— that is, our trunks—"

"Oh, it—must be a dream!" cried Hetty Castleton, her eyes swimming. "I can't believe—"

Suddenly she caught herself up, and tried to smile. "I don't see why you do this for me. I do not deserve—"

"You have done me a service," said Mrs. Wrاندall, her manner so peculiar that the girl again assumed the stare of perplexity and wonder that had been paramount since their meeting; as if she were on the verge of grasping a great truth.

"What can you mean?"

Sara laid her hands on the girl's shoulders and looked steadily into the puzzled eyes for a moment before speaking.

"My girl," she said, ever so gently, "I shall not ask what your life has been; I do not care. I shall not ask for references. You are alone in the world and you need a friend. I too am alone. If you will come to me I will do everything in my power to make you comfortable and—contented. Perhaps it will be impossible to make you happy. I promise faithfully to help you, to shield you, to repay you for the thing you have done for me. You could not have fallen into gentler hands than mine will prove to be. That much I swear to you on my soul, which is sacred. I bear you no ill-will. I have nothing to avenge."

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CHAPTER IV.

While the Mob Waited.

The next day but one, in the huge old-fashioned mansion of the Wrاندalls in lower Fifth avenue, in the drawing-room directly beneath the chamber in which Challis was born, the impressive but grimly conventional funeral services were held.

Contrasting sharply with the somber, absolutely correct atmosphere of the gloomy interior was the exterior display of joyous curiosity that must have jarred severely on the high-bred sensibilities of the chief mourners, not to speak of the invited guests who had been obliged to pass between rows of gaping bystanders in order to reach the portals of the house of grief, and who must have reckoned with extreme distaste the cost of subsequent departure. A dozen raucous-voiced policemen were employed to keep back the hundreds that thronged the sidewalk and blocked the street. Curiosity was rampant. Ever since the moment that the body of Challis Wrاندall was carried into the house of his father, a motley, varying crowd of people shifted restlessly in front of the mansion, filled with gruesome interest in the ab-

solutely unseen, animated by the sly hope that something sensational might happen if they waited long enough.

Motor after motor, carriage after carriage, rolled up to the curb and emptied its sober-faced, self-conscious occupants in front of the door with the great black bow; with each arrival the crowd surged forward, and names were uttered in undertones, passing from lip to lip until every one in the street knew that Mr. So-and-So, Mrs. This-or-That, the What-Do-You-Call-Em's and others of the city's most exclusive but most garishly advertised society leaders had entered the house of mourning. It was a great show for the plebeian spectators. Much better than Miss So-and-So's wedding, said one woman who had attended the aforesaid ceremony as a unit in the well-dressed mob that almost wrecked the carriages in the desire to see the terrified bride. Better than a circus, said a man who held his little daughter above the heads of the crowd so that she might see the fine lady in a wild-beast fur. Swallest funeral New York ever had, remarked another, excepting one "way back when he was a kid."

At the corner below stood two patrol wagons, also waiting.

Inside the house sat the carefully selected guests, hushed and stiff and gratified. (Not because they were attending a funeral, but because the occasion served to separate them from the chaff; they were the elect.) It would be going too far to intimate that they were proud of themselves, but it is not stretching it very much to say that they counted noses with considerable satisfaction and were glad that they had not been left out. The real, high-water mark in New York society was established at this memorable function. As one after the other arrived and was ushered into the huge drawing-room, he or she was accorded a congratulatory look from those already assembled, a tribute returned with equal amiability. Each one noted who else was there, and each one said to himself that at last they really had something all to themselves. It was truly a pleasure, a relief, to be able to do something without being pushed about by people who didn't belong but thought they did. They sat back—stuffy, of course—and in utter stillness confessed that there could be such a thing as the survival of the fittest. Yes, there wasn't a nose there that couldn't be counted with perfect serenity. It was a notable occasion.

Mrs. Wrاندall, the elder, had made out the list. She did not consult her daughter-in-law in the matter. It is true that Sara forestalled her in a way by sending word, through Leslie, that she would be pleased if Mrs. Wrاندall would issue invitations to as many of Challis' friends as she deemed advisable. As for herself, she had no wish in the matter; she would be satisfied with whatever arrangements the family cared to make.

It is not to be supposed, from the foregoing, that Mrs. Wrاندall, the elder, was not stricken to the heart by the lamentable death of her idol. He was her idol. He was her first-born, he was her love-born. He came to her in the days when she loved her husband without much thought of respecting him. She was beginning to regard him as something more than a lover when Leslie came, so it was different. When their daughter Vivian was born, she was plainly annoyed but wholly respectful. Mr. Wrاندall was no longer the lover; he was her lord and master. The head of the house of Wrاندall was a person to be looked up to, to be respected and admired by her, for he was a very great man, but he was dear to her only because he was the father of Challis, the first-born.

In the order of her nature, Challis therefore was her most dearly beloved, Vivian the least desired and last in her affections as well as in sequence. Strangely enough, the three of them perfected a curiously significant record of conjugal endowments. Challis had always been the wild, wayward, unrestrained one, and by far the most lovable; Leslie, almost as good looking but with scarcely a noticeable trace of charm that made his brother attractive; Vivian, handsome, selfish and as cheerless as the wind that blows across the icebergs in the north. Challis had been born with a widely enveloping heart and an elastic conscience; Leslie with a brain and a soul and not much of a heart, as things go; Vivian with a soul alone, which belonged to God, after all, and not to her. Of course she had a heart, but it was only for the purpose of pumping blood to remote extremities, and had nothing whatever to do with anything so unutterably extraneous as love, charity or self-sacrifice.

As for Mr. Redmond Wrاندall he was a very proper and dignified gentleman, and old for his years.

It may be seen, or rather surmised, that if the house of Wrاندall had not been so admirably centered under its own vine and fig tree, it might have become divided against itself without much of an effort.

Mrs. Redmond Wrاندall was the vice and fig tree.

And now they had brought her dearly beloved son home to her, murdered and—disgraced. If it had been either

of the others, she could have said: "God's will be done." Instead, she cried out that God had turned against her.

Leslie had had the bad taste—or perhaps it was misfortune—to blurt out an agonized "I told you so" at a time when the family was sitting numb and hushed under the blight of the first horrid blow. He did not mean to be unfeeling. It was the truth bursting from his unhappy lips.

"I knew Chal would come to this—I knew it," he had said. His arm was about the quivering shoulders of his mother as he said it.

She looked up, a sob breaking in her throat. For a long time she looked into the face of her second son.

"How can you—how dare you say such a thing as that?" she cried, aghast.

He colored, and drew her closer to him.

"I—I didn't mean it," he faltered. "You have always taken sides against him," began his mother.

"Please, mother," he cried miserably.

"You say this to me now," she went on. "You who are left to take his place in my affection—why, Leslie, I—"

Vivian interposed. "Les is upset, mamma darling. You know he loved Challis as deeply as any of us loved him."

Afterwards the girl said to Leslie when they were quite alone: "She will never forgive you for that, Les. It was a beastly thing to say."

He bit his lip, which trembled. "She's never cared for me as she cared for Chal. I'm sorry if I've made it worse."

"See here, Leslie, was Chal so—"

"Yes, I meant what I said a while ago. It was sure to happen to him one time or another. Sara's had a lot to put up with."

"Sara! If she had been the right sort of a wife, this never would have happened."

"After all is said and done, Vivie, Sara's in a position to rub it in on us if she's of a mind to do so. She won't do it, of course, but—I wonder if she isn't gloating, just the same."

"Haven't we treated her as one of us?" demanded he, dabbing her handkerchief in her eyes. "Since the wedding, I mean. Haven't we been kind to her?"

"Oh, I think she understands us perfectly," said her brother.

"I wonder what she will do now?" mused Vivian, in that speech casting her sister-in-law out of her narrow little world as one would throw aside a burnt-out match.

"She will profit by experience," said he, with some pleasure in a superior wisdom.

In Mrs. Wrاندall's sitting room at the top of the broad staircase sat the family—that is to say, the immediate family—a solemn-faced footman in front of the door that stood fully ajar so that the occupants might hear the words of the minister as they ascended, sonorous and precise, from the hall below. A minister was he who knew the buttered side of his bread. His discourse was to be a beautiful one. He stood at the front of the stairs and



He Did Not Mean to Be Unfeeling.

He did not mean to be unfeeling. He faced the assembled listeners in the hall, the drawing room and the entrance, but his infinitely touching words went up one flight and lodged.

Sara Wrاندall sat a little to the left of and behind Mrs. Redmond Wrاندall, about whom were grouped the three remaining Wrاندalls, father, son and daughter, closely drawn together. Well to the fore were Wrاندall uncles and cousins and aunts, and one or two carefully chosen blood relations to the mistress of the house, whose hand had long been set against kinsmen of less exalted promise.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Beyond the Styx.

Plato—Let me see: They condemned you to die, but permitted you to choose the manner of your death. Am I right? Socrates—That's right. I told them hemlock juice was my poison. I said ice cream first, but they made me guess again.—Puck.