



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. Mrs. Wrاندall hears the story of Hetty Castleton's life, except that portion that relates to Wrاندall. This and the story of the tragedy she forbids the girl ever to tell. She offers Hetty a home, friendship and security from peril on account of the tragedy. Mrs. Sara Wrاندall and Hetty attend the funeral of Challis Wrاندall at the home of his parents.

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

Beside Sara Wrاندall, on the small, pink divan, sat a stranger in this somber company: a young woman in black, whose pale face was uncovered, and whose lashes were lifted so rarely that one could not know of the deep, real pain that lay behind them, in her Irish blue eyes.

She had arrived at the house an hour or two before the time set for the ceremony, in company with the widow. True to her resolution, the widow of Challis Wrاندall had remained away from the home of his people until the last hour. She had been consulted, to be sure, in regard to the final arrangements, but the meetings had taken place in her own apartment, many blocks distant from the house in lower Fifth avenue. The afternoon before she had received Redmond Wrاندall and Leslie, his son. She had not sent for them. They came perfunctorily and not through any sense of obligation. These two at least knew that sympathy was not what she wanted, but peace. Twice during the two trying days, Leslie had come to see her, Vivian telephoned.

On the occasion of his first visit, Leslie had met the guest in the house. The second time he called, he made it a point to ask Sara all about her. It was he who gently closed the door after the two women when, on the morning of the funeral, they entered the dark, flower-laden room in which stood the casket containing the body of his brother. He left them alone together in that room for half an hour or more, and it was he who went forward to meet them when they came forth. Sara leaned on his arm as she ascended the stairs to the room where the others were waiting. The wakened girl followed.

Mrs. Wrاندall, the elder, kissed Sara and drew her down beside her on the couch. To her own surprise, as well as that of the others, Sara broke down and wept bitterly. After all, she was sorry for Challis' mother. It was the human instinct, she could not hold out against it. And the older woman put away the ancient grudge she held against this mortal enemy and dissolved into tears of real compassion.

A little later she whispered brokenly in Sara's ear: "My dear, my dear, this has brought us together. I hope you will learn to love me."

Sara caught her breath, but uttered no word. She looked into her mother-in-law's eyes, and smiled through her tears. The Wrاندalls, looking on in amazement, saw the smile reflected in the face of the older woman. Then it was that Vivian crossed quickly and put her arms about the shoulders of her sister-in-law. The white flag on both sides.

Hetty Castleton stood alone and wavering, just inside the door. No stranger situation could be imagined than the one in which this unfortunate girl found herself at the present moment. She was virtually in the hands of those who would destroy her; she was in the house of those who most deeply were affected by her act on that fatal night. Among them all she stood, facing them, listening to the moans and sobs, and yet her limbs did not give way beneath her.

Some one gently touched her arm. It was Leslie. She shrank back, a fearful look in her eyes. In the semi-darkness he failed to note the expression.

"Won't you sit here?" he asked, indicating the little pink divan against the wall. "Forgive me for letting you stand so long."

She looked about her, the wild light still in her eyes. She was like a rat in a trap.

Her lips parted, but the word of thanks did not come forth. A strange, inarticulate sound, almost a gasp, came instead. Pallid as a ghost, she dropped limply to the divan, and dug her fingers into the satiny seat. As if fascinated, she stared over the black heads of the three women immediately in front of her at the full-length portrait hanging where the light from the hall fell upon it: the portrait of a dashing youth in riding togs.

A moment later Sara Wrاندall came over and sat beside her. The girl shivered as with a mighty chill when the warm hand of her friend fell upon hers and enveloped it in a firm clasp. "His mother kissed me," whispered Sara. "Did you see?"

The girl could not reply. She could

The Hollow of Her Hand

by George Barr McCutcheon

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only stare at the open door. A small, hatchet-faced man had come up from below and was nodding his head to Leslie Wrاندall—a man with short side whiskers, and a sepulchral look in his eyes. Then, having received a sign from Leslie, he tiptoed away. Almost instantly the voices of people singing softly came from some distant remote part of the house.

And then, a little later, the perfectly modulated voice of a man in prayer.

Back of her, Wrاندalls; beside her, Wrاندalls; beneath her, friends of the Wrاندalls; outside, the rabble, those who would join with these black, raven-like specters in tearing her to pieces if they but knew!

The droning voice came up from below, each well-chosen word distinct and clear; tribute beautiful to the irreproachable character of the deceased. Leslie watched the face of the girl, curiously fascinated by the set, emotionless features, and yet without a conscious interest in her. He was duly sensible to the fact that she was beautiful, uncommonly beautiful. It did not occur to him to feel that she was out of place among them, that she belonged down stairs. Somehow she was a part of the surroundings, like the specter at the feast.

If he could have witnessed all that transpired while Sara was in the room below with her guest—her companion, as he had come to regard her without having in fact been told as much—he would have been lost in a maze of the most overwhelming emotions.

To go back: The door had barely closed behind the two women when Hetty's trembling knees gave way beneath her. With a low moan of horror, she slipped to the floor, covering her face with her hands.

Sara knelt beside her. "Come," she said gently, but firmly; "I must exact this much of you. If we are to go on together, as we have planned, you must stand beside me at his bier. Together we must look upon her for the last time. You must see him as I saw him up there in the country. I had my cruel blow that night. It is your turn now. I will not blame you for what you did. But if you expect me to go on believing that you did a brave thing that night, you must convince me that you are not a coward now. It is the only test I shall put you to. Come; I know it is hard, I know it is terrible, but it is the true test of your ability to go through with it to the end. I shall know then that you have the courage to face anything that may come up."

She waited a long time, her hand on the girl's shoulder. At last Hetty arose.

"You are right," she said hoarsely. "I should not be afraid." Later on they sat over against the wall beyond the casket, into which they had peered with widely varying emotions. Sara had said: "You know that I loved him." The girl put her hands to her eyes and bowed her head.

"Oh, how can you be so merciful to me?"

"Because he was not," said Sara, white-lipped. Hetty glanced at the half-averted face with queer, indescribable expression in her eyes. If Leslie Wrاندall could have looked in upon them at that moment, or at any time during the half an hour that followed, he would have known who was the slayer of his brother, but it is doubtful if he could have had the heart to denounce her to the world.

When they were ready to leave the room Hetty had regained control of



Hetty's Trembling Knees Gave Way Beneath Her.

her nerves to a most surprising extent, a condition unmistakably due to the influence of the older woman.

"I can trust myself now, Mrs. Wrاندall," said Hetty steadily as they hesitated for an instant before turning the knob of the door.

"Then I shall ask you to open the door," said Sara, drawing back.

Without a word or a look, Hetty opened the door and permitted the other to pass out before her. Then she followed, closing it gently, even deliberately, but not without a swift glance over her shoulder into the depths of the room they were leaving. Of the two, Sara Wrاندall was the

paler as they went up the broad staircase with Leslie.

The funeral oration by the Rev. Dr. Maltby dragged on. Among all his hearers there was but one who believed the things he said of Challis Wrاندall, and she was one of two persons who, so they saying goes, are the last to find a man out; his mother and his sister. But in this instance the mother was alone. The silent, attentive guests on the lower floor listened in grim approval: Dr. Maltby was doing himself proud. Not one but all of them knew that Maltby knew. And yet how soothing he was.

By the end of the week the murder of Challis Wrاندall was forgotten by all save the police. The inquest was over, the law was baffled, the city was serenely waiting for its next sensation. No one cared.

Leslie Wrاندall went down to the steamer to see his sister-in-law off for Europe.

"Goodby, Miss Castleton," he said, as he shook the hand of the slim young Englishwoman at parting. "Take good care of Sara. She needs a friend, a good friend, now. Keep her over there until she has—forgotten."

CHAPTER V.

Discussing a Sister-in-Law.

"You remember my sister-in-law, don't you, Brandy?" was the question that Leslie Wrاندall put to a friend one afternoon, as they sat dreadingly in a window of one of the fashionable uptown clubs, a little more than a year after the events described in the foregoing chapters. Dreadingly, I have said, for the reason that it was Sunday, and raining at that.

"I met Mrs. Wrاندall a few years ago in Rome," said his companion, renewing interest in a conversation that had died some time before of its own exhaustion. "She's most attractive. I saw her but once. I think it was at somebody's fête."

"She's returning to New York the end of the month," said Leslie. "Been abroad for over a year. She had a villa at Nice this winter."

"I remember her quite well. I was of an age then to be particularly sensitive to female loveliness. If I'd been staying on in Rome, I should have screwed up the courage, I'm sure, to have asked her to sit for me."

Brandon Booth was of an old Philadelphia family: an old and wealthy family. Both views considered, he was qualified to walk hand in glove with the fastidious Wrاندalls. Leslie's mother was charmed with him because she was also the mother of Vivian. The fact that he went in for portrait painting and seemed averse to subsisting on the generosity of his father, preferring to live by his talent, in no way opened against him, so far as Mrs. Wrاندall was concerned. That was his lookout, not hers; if he elected to that sort of thing, all well and good. He could afford to be eccentric; there remained, in the perspective he scorned, the bulk of a huge fortune to offset whatever idiosyncrasies he might choose to cultivate. Some day, in spite of himself, she contended serenely, he would be very rich. What could be more desirable than fame, family and fortune all heaped together and thrust upon one exceedingly interesting and handsome young man?

He had been the pupil of celebrated draftsmen and painters in Europe, and had exhibited a sincerity of purpose that was surprising, all things considered. The mere fact that he was not obliged to paint in order to obtain a living was sufficient cause for wonder among the artists he met and studied with or under.

His studio in New York was not a fashionable resting place. It was a workshop. You could have tea there, of course, and you were sure to meet people you knew and liked, but it was quite as much of a workshop as any you could mention. He was not a dabbler in art, not a mere dauber of pigments; he was an artist.

Booth was thirty—perhaps a year or two older; tall, dark and good looking. The air of the thoroughbred marked him. He did not affect loose, flowing cravats and baggy trousers, nor was he careless about his fingernails. He was simply the ordinary, every-day sort of chap you would meet in Fifth avenue during parade hours, and you would take a second look at him because of his face and manner but not on account of his dress. Some of his ancestors came over ahead of the Mayflower, but he did not gloat.

Leslie Wrاندall was his closest friend and harshest critic. It didn't really matter to Booth what Leslie said of his paintings; he quite understood that he didn't know anything about them.

"When does Mrs. Wrاندall return?" asked the painter, after a long period of silence spent in contemplation of the gleaming pavement beyond the club's window.

"That's queer," said Leslie, looking up. "I was thinking of Sara myself. She sails next week. I've had a letter asking me to open her house in the country. Her place is about two miles from father's. It hasn't been opened in two years. Her father built

it fifteen or twenty years ago, and left it to her when he died. She and Challis spent several summers there."

"Vivian took me through it one afternoon last summer."

"It must have been quite as much of a novelty to her as it was to you, old chap," said Leslie gloomily.

"What do you mean?"

"Vivian's a bit of a snob. She never liked the place because old man Gooch built it out of worsteds. She never went there."

"But the old man's been dead for years."

"That doesn't matter. The fact is, Vivian didn't quite take to Sara until after—well, until after Challis died. We're dreadful snobs, Brandy, the whole lot of us. Sara was quite good enough for a much better man than my brother. She really couldn't help the worsteds, you know. I'm very fond of her, and always have been. We're pals. 'Gad, it was a fearful slip at the home folks when Challis justified Sara by getting snuffed out the way he did."

Booth made an attempt to change the subject, but Wrاندall got back to it.

"Since then we've all been exceedingly sweet on Sara. Not because we want to be, mind you, but because we're afraid she'll marry some chap who wouldn't be acceptable to us."

"I should consider that a very neat way out of it," said Booth coldly.

"Not at all. You see, Challis was fond of Sara, in spite of everything. He left a will and under it she came in for all he had. As that includes a third interest in our extremely refined and irreproachable business, it would be a deuce of a trick on us if she married one of the common people and set him up amongst us, willy-nilly. We don't want strange bedfellows. We're too snug—and I might say, too snug. Down in her heart, mother is saying to herself it would be just like Sara to get even with us by doing just that sort of a trick. Of course Sara is rich enough without accepting a sou under the will, but she's a canny person. She hasn't handed it back to us on a silver platter, with thanks; still, on the other hand, she refuses to meddle. She makes us feel pretty small. She won't sell out to us. She just sits tight. That's what gets under the skin with mother."

"I wouldn't say that, Les, if I were in your place."

"It is a rather priggish thing to say, isn't it?"

"Rather."

"You see, I'm the only one who really took sides with Sara. I forget myself sometimes. She was such a brick, all those years."

Booth was silent for a moment, noting the reflective look in his companion's eyes.

"I suppose the police haven't given up the hope that sooner or later the woman will do something to give herself away," said he.

"They don't take any stock in my theory that she made way with herself the same night. I was talking with the chief yesterday. He says that anyone who had wit to cover up her tracks as she did, is not the kind to make way with herself. Perhaps he's right. It sounds reasonable. 'Gad, I felt sorry for the poor girl they had up last spring. She went through the third degree, if ever anyone did, but, by Jove, she came out of it all right. The Ashley girl, you remember. I've dreamed about that girl, Brandy, and what they put her through. It's a sort of nightmare to me, even when I'm awake. Oh, they've questioned others as well, but she was the only one to have the screws twisted in just that way."

"Where is she now?"

"She's comfortable enough now. When I wrote to Sara about what she'd been through, she settled a neat bit of money on her, and she'll never want for anything. She's out west somewhere, with her mother and sisters. I tell you, Sara's a wonder. She's got a heart of gold."

"I look forward to meeting her, old man."

"I was with her for a few weeks this winter. In Nice, you know. Vivian stayed on for a week, but mother had to get to the baths. 'Gad, I believe she hated to go. Sara's got a most adorable girl staying with her. A daughter of Colonel Castleton, and she's connected in some way with the Murgatroyds—old Lord Murgatroyd, you know. I think her mother was a niece of the old boy. Anyhow, mother and Vivian have taken a great fancy to her. That's proof of the pudding."

"I think Vivian mentioned a companion of some sort."

"You wouldn't exactly call her a companion," said Leslie. "She's got money to burn, I take it. Quite keeps up with Sara in making it fly, and that's saying a good deal for her resources. I think it's a pose on her part, this calling herself a companion. An English joke, eh? As a matter of fact, she's an old friend of Sara's and my brother's too. Knew them in England. Most delightful girl. Oh, I say, old man, she's the one for you to paint." Leslie waxed enthusiastic. "A type, a positive type. Never saw such eyes in all my life. Dammit, they haunt you. You dream about 'em."

"You seem to be hard hit," said

Booth indifferently. "He was watching the man in the 'sticker' through moody eyes."

"Oh, nothing like that," disclaimed Leslie with unnecessary promptness. "But if I were given to that sort of thing, I'd be bowled over in a minute. Positively adorable face. If I thought you had it in you to paint a thing as it really is I'd commission you myself to do a miniature for me, just to have it around where I could pick it up when I liked and hold it between my hands, just as I've often wanted to hold the real thing."

Sara Wrاندall returned to New York at the end of the month, and Leslie met her at the dock, as he did on an occasion fourteen months earlier. Then she came in on a fierce gale from the wintry Atlantic; this time the air was soft and balmy and sweet with the kindness of spring. It was May and the sea was blue, the land was green.

Again she went to the small, exclusive hotel near the park. Her apartment was closed, the butler and his wife and all of their hastily recruited company being in the country, awaiting her arrival from town. Leslie attended to everything. He lent his resourceful man servant and his motor to his lovely sister-in-law, and saw to it that his mother and Vivian sent flowers to the ship. Redmond Wrاندall called at the hotel, immediately after banking hours, kissed his daughter-in-law, and delivered an ultimatum second-hand from the power at home: she was to come to dinner and bring Miss Castleton. A little quiet family dinner, you know, because they were all in mourning, he said in conclusion, vaguely realizing all the while that it really wasn't necessary to supply the information, but, for the life of him, unable to think of anything else to say under the circumstances. Somehow it seemed to him that while Sara was in black she was not in mourning in the same sense that the rest of them were. It seemed only right to acquaint her with the conditions in his household. And he knew that he deserved the scowl that Leslie bestowed upon him.

Sara accepted, much to his surprise and gratification. He had been rather dubious about it. It would not have surprised him in the least if she had declined the invitation, feeling, as he did, that he had in a way come to her with a white flag or an olive branch or whatever it is that a combative force utilizes when it wants to surrender in the cause of humanity.

As soon as they were alone Hetty turned to her friend.

"Oh, Sara, can't you go without me? Tell them that I am ill—suddenly ill. I—I don't think it right or honorable of me to accept—"

Sara shook her head, and the words died on the girl's lips.

"You must play the game, Hetty." "It's—very hard," murmured the other, her face very white and bleak.

"I know, my dear," said Sara gently. "If they should ever find out," gasped the girl, suddenly giving way to the dread that had been lying dormant all these months.

"They will never know the truth unless you choose to enlighten them," said Sara, putting her arm about the girl's shoulders and drawing her close. "You never cease to be wonderful. Sara—so very wonderful," cried the girl, with a look of worship in her eyes.

Sara regarded her in silence for a moment, reflecting. Then, with a swift rush of tears to her eyes, she cried fiercely:

"You must never, never tell me all that happened, Hetty! You must not speak it with your own lips."

Hetty's eyes grew dark with pain and wonder.

"That is the thing I can't understand in you, Sara," she said slowly. "We must not speak of it!"

Hetty's bosom heaved. "Speak of it!" she cried, absolute agony in her voice. "Have I not kept it locked in my heart since that awful day—"

"Hush!"

"I shall go mad if I cannot talk with you about—"

"No, no! It is the forbidden subject! I know all that I should know—"

"You Must Play the Game, Hetty."

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"You seem to be hard hit," said

all that I care to know. We have not said so much as this in months—in ages, it seems. Let sleeping dogs lie. We are better off, my dear. I could not touch your lips again."

"I—I can't bear the thought of that!"

"Kiss me now, Hetty."

"I could die for you, Sara," cried Hetty, as she impulsively obeyed the command.

"I mean that you shall live for me," said Sara, smiling through her tears. "How silly of me to cry. It must be the room we are in. These are the same rooms, dear, that you came to on the night we met. Ah, how old I feel!"

"Old? You say that to me? I am ages and ages older than you," cried Hetty, the color coming back to her soft cheeks.

"You are twenty-three."

"And you are twenty-eight."

Sara had a far-away look in her eyes. "About your size and figure," said she, and Hetty did not comprehend.

CHAPTER VI.

Southlook.

Sara Wrاندall's house in the country stood on a wooded knoll overlooking the sound. It was rather remotely located, so far as neighbors were concerned. Her father, Sebastian Gooch, shrewdly foresaw the day when land in this particular section of the suburban world would return dollars for pennies, and wisely bought thousands of acres: woodland, meadowland, beachland and hills, inserted between the environs of New York city and the rich towns up the coast. Years afterward he built a commodious summer home on the choicest point of his property afforded, named it Southlook, and transformed that particular part of his wilderness into a millionaire's paradise, where he could dawdle and putter to his heart's content, where he could spend his time and his money with a prodigality that came so late in life to him that he made waste of both in his haste to live down a rather parsimonious past.

Two miles and a half away, in the heart of a scattered colony of purebred New Yorkers, was the country home of the Wrاندalls, an imposing place and older by far than Southlook. It had descended from well-worn and time-stained ancestors to Redmond Wrاندall, and, with others of his kind, looked with no little scorn upon the modern, mushroom structures that sprouted from the seeds of trade. There was no friendship between the old and the new. Each had recourse to a bitter contempt for the other, though consolation was small in comparison.

It was in the wooded by-ways of this despoiled domain that Challis Wrاندall and Sara, the earthly daughter of Midas, met and loved and defied all things supernal, for matches are made in heaven. Their marriage did not open the gates of Nineveh. Sebastian Gooch's paradise was more completely ostracized than it was before the disaster. The Wrاندalls spoke of it as a disaster.

Clearly the old merchant was not over-pleased with his daughter's choice, a conclusion permanently established by the alteration he made in his will a year or two after the marriage. True, he left the vast estate to his beloved daughter Sara, but he fastened a stout string to it, and with this string her hands were tied. It must have occurred to him that Challis was a profligate in more ways than one, for he deliberately stipulated in his will that Sara was not to sell a foot of the ground until a period of twenty years had elapsed. A very polite way, it would seem, of making his investment safe in the face of considerable odds.

He lived long enough after the making of his will, I am happy to relate, to find that he had made no mistake. As he preceded his son-in-law into the great beyond by a scant three years, it readily may be seen that he wrought too well by far. Seventeen unnecessary years of proscritism remained, and he had not intended them for Sara alone. He was not afraid of

When the will was read and the condition revealed, Challis Wrاندall took it in perfect good humor. He had the grace to proclaim in the bosom of his father's family that the old gentleman was a father-in-law to be proud of. "A canny old boy," he had announced with his most engaging smile, quite free from rancor or resentment. Challis was well acquainted with himself.

And so the acres were strapped together snugly and firmly, without so much as a town lot protruding.

So impressed was Challis by the farsightedness of his father-in-law that he forthwith sat him down and made a will of his own. He would not have it said that Sara's father did a whit better by her than he would do. He left everything he possessed to his wife, but put no string to it, blandly implying that all danger would be past when she came into possession. There was a sort of grim humor in the way he managed to prevent himself to view as the real and ready source of peril.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)