

# The Hollow of Her Hand

## by George Barr McCutcheon

COPYRIGHT, 1912 BY GEORGE BARR M'UTCHEON; COPYRIGHT, 1912 BY DODD, MEAD & COMPANY



### SYNOPSIS.

Challie Wrاندall is found murdered in a road 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. 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 his 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 Challie Wrاندall at the home of his parents. Sara Wrاندall and Hetty return to New York after an absence of a year in Europe. Leslie Wrاندall, brother of Challie, makes himself useful to Sara and becomes greatly interested in Hetty. Sara sees in Leslie's infatuation possibility for revenge on the Wrاندalls and preparation for the wrong she suffered at the hands of Challie Wrاندall by marrying his murderer into the family. Leslie, in company with his friend Brandon Booth, an artist, visits Sara at her country place. Leslie confesses to Sara that he is madly in love with Hetty.



session—and evidently a thing to be cherished—took away all the pleasure she may have experienced during the first few moments of interest. Booth caught the angry flash in her eyes, preceding the flush and unaccountable pallor that followed almost immediately. He felt guilty, and at the same time deeply annoyed with Leslie. Later on he tried to explain, but the attempt was a lamentable failure. She laughed, not unkindly, in his face. Leslie had refused to allow the sketch to leave his hand. If she could have gained possession of it, even for an instant, the thing would have been torn to bits. But it went back into his commodious pocketbook, and she was too proud to demand it of him. She became oddly sensitive to Booth's persistent though inoffensive scrutiny as time wore on. More than once she had caught him looking at her with a fixedness that betrayed perplexity so plainly that she could not fail to recognize an underlying motive. He was vainly striving to refresh his memory; that was clear to her. There is no mistaking that look in a person's eyes. It cannot be disguised. He was as deeply perplexed as ever when the time came for him to depart with Leslie. He asked her point blank on the last evening of his stay if they had ever met before, and she frankly confessed to a short memory for faces. It was not unlikely, she said, that he had seen her in London or in Paris, but she had not the faintest recollection of having seen him before their meeting in the road. Urged by Sara, she had reluctantly consented to sit to him for a portrait during the month of June. He put the request in such terms that it did not sound like a proposition. It was not surprising that he should want her for a subject; in fact, he put it in such a way that she could not but feel that she would be doing him a great and enduring favor. She imposed but one condition: The picture was never to be exhibited. He met that, with bland magnanimity, by proffering the canvas to Mrs. Wrاندall, as the subject's "next best friend," to "have and to hold so long as she might live," "free gratis," "with the artist's compliments," and so on and so forth, in airy good humor. Leslie's aid had been solicited by both Sara and the painter in the final effort to overcome the girl's objections. He was rather bored about it, but added his voice to the general clamor. With half an eye one could see that he did not relish the idea of Hetty posing for days to the handsome, agreeable painter. Moreover, it meant that Booth, who could afford to gratify his own whims, would be obliged to spend a month or more in the neighborhood, so that he could devote himself almost entirely to the consummation of this particular undertaking. Moreover, it meant that Vivian's portrait was to be temporarily disregarded. Sara Wrاندall was quick to recognize the first symptoms of jealousy on the part of her brother-in-law. The new idol of the Wrاندalls was in love, selfishly, insufferably in love as things went with all the Wrاندalls. They hated selfishly, and so they loved. Her husband had been their king. But their king was dead, long live the king! Leslie had put on the family crown—a little jauntily, perhaps—cocked over the eye a bit, so to speak—but it was there just the same, annoyingly plain to view. Sara had tried to like him. He had been her friend, the only one she could claim among them all. And yet, beneath his genial allegiance, she could detect the air of condescension, the bland attitude of a superior who defends another's cause for the reason that it gratifies Nero. She experienced a thrill of malicious joy in contemplating the fall of Nero. He would bring down his house about his head, and there would be no Rome to pay the fiddler. Brandon Booth took a small cottage on the upper road, half way between the village and the home of Sara Wrاندall, and not far from the abhorred "back gate" that swung in the teeth of her connections by marriage. He set up his establishment in half a day and, being settled, betook himself off to dine with Sara and Hetty. All his household cares, like the world, rested snugly on the shoulders of an Atlas named Pat, than whom there was no more faithful servitor in all the earth, nor in the heavens, for that matter, if we are to accept his own estimate of himself. In any event, he was a treasure. Booth's house was always in order. Try as he would, he couldn't get it out of order. Pat's wife saw to that. As he swung jauntily down the treelined road that led to Sara's portals, Booth was full of the joy of living. Sara was at the bottom of the terrace, moving among the flower beds in the formal garden. At the sound of his footsteps on the gravel, Sara looked up and instantly smiled her welcome. "It is so nice to see you again," she said, giving him her hand. "My heart's in the highlands," he quoted, waving a vague tribute to the heavens. "And it's nice of you to see

me," he added gratefully. Then he pointed up the terrace. "Isn't she a picture? Gad, it's lovely—the whole effect. That picture against the sky—" He stopped short, and the sentence was never finished, although she waited for him to complete it before remarking: "Her heart is not in the highlands." "You mean—something's gone wrong—" "Oh, no," she said, still smiling; "nothing like that. Her heart is in the lowlands. You would consider Washington square to be in the lowlands, wouldn't you?" "Oh, I see," he said slowly. "You mean she's thinking of Leslie." "Who knows? It was a venture on my part, that's all. She may be thinking of you, Mr. Booth." "Or some chap in old England, that's more like it," he retorted. "She can't be thinking of me, you know. No one ever thinks of me when I'm out of view. Out of sight, out of mind. No; she's thinking of something a long way off—or some one, if you choose to have it that way." She smiled upon him with half-closed, shadowy eyes, and shook her head. Then she arose. "Let us go in. Hetty is eager to see you again." They started up the terrace. His face clouded. "I have had a feeling all along that she'd rather not have this portrait painted, Mrs. Wrاندall. A queer sort of feeling that she doesn't just like the idea of being put on canvas." "Nonsense," she said, without looking at him. Hetty met them at the top of the steps. The electric porch lights had just been turned on by the butler. The girl stood in the path of the light. Booth was never to forget the loveliness of her in that moment. He carried the image with him on the long walk home through the black night. (He declined Sara's offer to send him over in the car for the very reason that he wanted the half-hour of solitude in which to concentrate all the impressions she had made on his fancy.) The three of them stood there for a few minutes, awaiting the butler's announcement. Sara's arm was so taken up with the picture they presented that he scarcely heard their light chatter. They were types of loveliness so full of contrast that he marveled at the power of nature to create women in the same mold and yet to model so differently. As they entered the vestibule, a servant came up with the word that Miss Castleton was wanted at the telephone, "long distance from New York."

The girl stopped in her tracks. Booth looked at her in mild surprise, a condition which gave way an instant later to perplexity. The look of annoyance in her eyes could not be disguised or mistaken. "Ask him to call me up later, Watson," she said quietly. "This is the third time he has called, Miss Castleton," said the man. "You were dressing, if you please, ma'am, the first time—" "I will come," she interrupted sharply, with a curious glance at Sara, who for some reason avoided meeting Booth's gaze. "Tell him we shall expect him on Friday," said Mrs. Wrاندall. "By George!" thought Booth, as she left them. "I wonder if it can be Leslie. If it is—well, he wouldn't be flattered if he could have seen the look in her eyes. Later on, he had no trouble in gathering that it was Leslie Wrاندall who called, but he was very much in the dark as to the meaning of that expressive look. He only knew that she was in the telephone room for ten minutes or longer, and that all trace of emotion was gone from her face when she rejoined them with a brief apology for keeping them waiting. He left at ten-thirty, saying good night to them on the terrace. Sara walked to the steps with him. "Don't you think her voice is lovely?" she asked. Hetty had sung for them. "I dare say," he responded absently. "Give me my word, though, I wasn't thinking of her voice. She is lovely." He walked home as if in a dream. The spell was on him. Far in the night, he started up from the easy chair in which he had been smoking and dreaming and racking his brain by turns. "By Jove!" he exclaimed aloud. "I remember! I've got it! And tomorrow I'll prove it." Then he went to bed, with the storm from the sea pounding about the house, and slept serenely until Pat and Mary wondered whether he meant to get up at all. "Pat," said he at breakfast, "I want you to go to the city this morning and fetch out all of the Studios you can find about the place. The old ones are in that Italian hall seat and the late ones are in the studio. Bring all of them."

"There's a devil of a bunch of them," said Pat ruefully. He was not to begin sketching the figure until the following day. After luncheon, however, he had an appointment to inspect Hetty's wardrobe, ostensibly for the purpose of picking out a gown for the picture. As a matter of fact, he had decided the point to his own satisfaction the night before. She should pose for him in the dainty white dress she had worn on that occasion. While they were going over the extensive assortment of gowns, with Sara as the judge from whom there seemed to be no appeal, he casually inquired if she had ever posed before. He watched her closely as he put the question. She was holding up a beautiful point lace creation for his inspection, and there was a pleading smile on her lips. It must have been her favorite gown. The smile faded away. The hand that dangled the garment before his eyes suddenly became motionless, as if paralyzed. In the next instant, she recovered herself, and, giving the lace a quick flip that sent its odor of satchet leaping to his nostrils, responded with perfect composure. "Isn't there a distinction between posing for an artist, and sitting for one's portrait?" she asked. He was silent. The fact that he did not respond seemed to disturb her aft-

er a moment or two. She made the common mistake of pressing the question. "Why do you ask?" was her inquiry. When it was too late she wished she had not uttered the words. He had caught the somewhat anxious note in her voice. "We always ask that, I think," he said. "It's a habit." "Oh," she said doubtfully. "And by the way, you haven't answered." She was busy with the gown for a time. At last she looked him full in the face. "That's true," she agreed; "I haven't answered, have I? No, Mr. Booth, I've never posed for a portrait. It is a new experience for me. You will have to contend with a great deal of stupidity on my part. But I shall try to be plastic." He uttered a polite protest, and pursued the question no farther. Her answer had been so palpably evasive that it struck him as bald, even awkward. Pat, disgruntled and irritable to the point of profanity—he was a privileged character and might have sworn if he felt like it without receiving notice—came shambling up the cottage walk late that afternoon, bearing two large, shoulder-sagging bundles. He had walked a matter of a mile—and it was hot. His employer sat in the shady porch, viewing his approach. The young man drew a chair up to the table and began the task of working out the puzzle that now seemed more or less near to solution. He had a pretty clear idea as to the period he wanted to investigate. To the best of his recollection, the Studios published three or four years back held the key. He selected the numbers and began to run through them. He was searching for a vaguely remembered article on one of the lesser-known English painters who had given great promise at the time it was published but who dropped completely out of notice soon afterward because of a mistaken notion of his own importance. If Booth's memory served him right, the fellow came a cropper, so to speak, in trying to ride rough shod over public opinion, and went to the dogs. He had been painting sensibly up to that time, but suddenly went in for the most violent style of impressionism. That was the end of him. There had been reproductions of his principal canvases, with sketches and studies in charcoal. One of these pictures had made a lasting impression on Booth: The figure of a young woman in deep meditation standing in the shadow of a window casement from which she looked out upon the world apparently without a thought of it. A slender young woman in vague reds and browns, whose shadowy face was positively illuminated by a pair of wonderful blue eyes. He came upon it at last. For a long time he sat there gazing at the face of Hetty Castleton, a look of half-wonder, half-triumph in his eyes. There



The Girl Stopped in Her Tracks.

could be no doubt as to the identity of the subject. The face was hers: the velvety, dreamy, soulful eyes that had haunted him for years, as he now believed. In no sense could the picture be described as a portrait. It was a study, deliberately arranged and deliberately posed for in the artist's studio. He was mystified. Why should she, the daughter of Colonel Castleton, the grand-niece of an earl, be engaged in posing for what evidently was meant to be a commercial product of this whilom artist? Turning from a skillfully colored full page reproduction, he glanced at first casually over the dozen or more sketches and studies on the succeeding pages. Many of them represented studies of women's heads and figures, with little or no attempt to obtain a likeness. Some were half-draped, showing in a sketchy way the long graceful lines of the half-nude figure, of bare shoulders and breasts, of gauze-like fabrics that but illly concealed impressive charms. Suddenly his eyes narrowed and a sharp exclamation fell from his lips. He bent closer to the pages and studied the drawings with redoubled interest. Then he whistled softly to himself, a token of simple amazement. The head of each of these remarkable studies suggested in outline the head and features of Hetty Castleton! She had been Hawkrigt's model! The next morning at ten he was at Southlook, arranging his easel and canvas in the north end of the long living room, where the light from the tall French windows afforded abundant and well-distributed light for the enterprise in hand. Hetty had not yet appeared. Sara, attired in a loose morning gown, was watching him from a comfortable chair in the corner, one shapely bare arm behind her head; the free hand was gracefully employed in managing a cigarette. He was conscious of the fact that her lazy, half-alert gaze was upon him all the time, although she pretended to be entirely indifferent to the preparations. Dimly he could see the faint smile of interest on her lips. Hetty came in, calm, serene and lovelier than ever in the clear morning light. She was wearing the simple white gown he had chosen the day before. If she was conscious of the rather intense scrutiny he bestowed upon her as she gave him her hand in greeting, she did not appear to be in the least disturbed. "You may go away, Sara," she said firmly. "I shall be too dreadfully self-conscious if you are looking on." Booth looked at her rather sharply. Sara indolently abandoned her comfortable chair and left them alone in the room. "Shall we try a few effects, Miss Castleton?" he inquired, after a period of constraint that had its effect on both of them. "I am in your hands," she said simply. He made suggestions. She fell into the position so easily, so naturally, so effectively, that he put aside all previous doubts and blurted out: "You have posed before, Miss Castleton." She smiled frankly. "But not for a really truly portrait," she said. "Such as this is to be." He hesitated an instant. "I think I recall a canvas by Maurice Hawkrigt," he said, and at once experienced a curious sense of perturbation. It was not unlike fear. Instead of betraying the confusion or surprise he expected, Miss Castleton merely raised her eyebrows inquiringly. "What has that to do with me, Mr. Booth?" she asked. He laughed awkwardly. "Don't you know his work?" he inquired, with a slight twist of his lip. "I may have seen his pictures," she replied, puckering her brow as if in reflection. "Oh," she cried, with a bright smile of understanding. "I see! Yes, I have a double—a really remarkable double. Have you never seen Hetty Glynn, the actress?" "I am sure I have not," he said, taking a long breath. It was one of relief, he remembered afterward. "If she is so like you as all that, I couldn't have forgotten her." "She is quite unknown, I believe she went on, ignoring the implied compliment. "A chorus girl, or something like that. They say she is wonderfully like me—or was, at least, a few years ago."

He was silent for a few minutes, studying her face and figure with the critical eye of the artist. As he turned to the canvas with his crayon point, he remarked, with an unmistakable note of relief in his voice: "That explains everything. It must have been Hetty Glynn who posed for all those things of Hawkrigt's." "I dare say," said she indifferently.

### CHAPTER IX.

#### The Ghost at the Feast.

The next day he appeared bright and early with his copy of the Studio. "There," he said, holding it before her eyes. She took it from his hand and stared long and earnestly at the reproduction



He Was Watching Her Closely.

to sift her antecedents thoroughly. He's already done it, and he is quite satisfied with the result. Serve them all right, for that matter." But then there was Hetty Glynn. What of her? Hetty Glynn, real or mythical, was a disturbing factor in his deductions. If there was a real Hetty Glynn and she was Hetty Castleton's double, what then? On the fifth day of a series of rather prolonged and tedious sittings, he was obliged to confine his work to an hour and a half in the forenoon. Mrs. Wrاندall was having a few friends in for auction-bridge immediately after luncheon. She asked him to stay over and take a hand, but he declined. He did not play bridge. (TO BE CONTINUED)

### CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

"I say, Leslie, is she staying here?" cried Booth, lowering his voice to an excited half-whisper. "Who?" demanded Wrاندall vacantly. His mind appeared to be elsewhere. "Why, that's the girl I saw on the road—Wake up! The one on the envelope, you see. Is she the one you were telling me about in the club—the Miss What's-Her-Name-who—" "Oh, you mean Miss Castleton. She's just gone upstairs. You must have met her on the steps." "You know I did. So that is Miss Castleton." "Ripping, isn't she? Didn't I tell you so?" "She's beautiful. She is a type, just as you said, old man—a really wonderful type. I saw her yesterday—and the day before." "I've been wondering how you managed to get a likeness of her on the back of an envelope," said Leslie sarcastically. "Must have had a good long look at her, my boy. It isn't a snap-shot, you know." Both flushed. "It is an impression, that's all. I drew it from memory, 'pon my soul." "She'll be immensely gratified, I'm sure." "For heaven's sake, Les, don't be such a fool as to show her the thing," cried Booth in consternation. "She'd never understand." "Oh, you needn't worry. She has a fine sense of humor." Booth didn't know whether to laugh or scowl. He compromised with himself by slipping his arm through that of his friend and saying heartily: "I wish you the best of luck, old boy." "Thanks," said Leslie drily.

### CHAPTER VIII.

In Which Hetty Is Welghed. Booth and Leslie returned to the city on Tuesday. The artist left behind him a "memory sketch" of Sara Wrاندall, done in the solitude of his room long after the rest of the house was wrapped in slumber on the first night of his stay at Southlook. It was as sketchily drawn as the one he had made of Hetty, and quite as wonderful in the matter of faithfulness, but ut-



He Was as Deeply Perplexed as Ever.

terly without the subtle something that made the other notable. The craftiness of the artist was there, but the touch of inspiration was lacking. Sara was delighted. She was flattered, and made no pretense of disguising the fact. The discussion which followed the exhibition of the sketch at luncheon, was very animated. It served to excite Leslie to such a degree that he brought forth from his pocket the treasured sketch of Hetty, for the purpose of comparison. The girl who had been genuinely enthusiastic over the picture of Sara, and who had not been by way of knowing that the first sketch existed, was covered with confusion. Embarrassment and a shy sense of gratification were succeeded almost at once by a feeling of keen annoyance. The fact that the sketch was in Leslie's pos-