



# The Hollow of Her Hand

by George Barr McCutcheon

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**SYNOPSIS.**

Challis 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 through she loved her 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. Sara Wrاندall and Hetty return to New York after an absence of a year. In Europe, Leslie Wrاندall, brother of Challis, makes himself useful to Sara and becomes greatly interested in Hetty. Sara sees in Leslie's infatuation possibility for revenge on the Wrاندalls and reparation for the wrongs she suffered at the hands of Challis 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. Sara arranges with Booth to paint a picture of Hetty. Booth has a haunting feeling that he has seen Hetty before. Looking through a portfolio of pictures by an unknown English artist he finds one of Hetty. He speaks to her about it. Hetty declares it must be a picture of Hetty Glynn, an English actress who resembles her very much. Leslie Wrاندall becomes impatient and jealous over the picture painting and chides her in going to propose to Hetty at the first opportunity.

**CHAPTER X.—Continued.**

He looked as though he expected nothing. He could only sit back and wonder why the deuce Sara meant by behaving like this.

They returned at seven. Dinner was unusually merry. Sara appeared to have recovered from her indisposition; there was color in her cheeks and life in her smile. He took it to be an omen of good fortune, and was immeasurably confident. The soft, cool breezes of the starlit night blew visions of impending happiness across his lively imagination; fanned his impatience with gentle ardor; filled him with suppressed sighs of contentment, and made him willing to forego the delight of conquest that he might live the longer in serene anticipation of its thrills.

Ten o'clock came. He arose and stretched himself in a sort of ecstasy. His heart was thumping loudly, his senses swam. Walking to the veranda he looked out across the moonlit sound, then down at the selected nook over against the garden wall—spot to be immortalized!—and actually shivered. In ten minutes' time, or even less, she would be down there in his arms! Exquisite meditations!

He turned to her with an engaging smile, in which she might have discerned a prophecy, and asked her to come with him for a stroll along the wall. And so he cast the die.

Hetty sent a swift, appealing look at Sara's purposely averted face. Leslie observed the act, but misinterpreted its meaning.

"Oh, it is quite warm," he said quickly. "You won't need a wrap," he added, and in spite of himself his voice trembled. Of course she wouldn't need a wrap!

"I have a few notes to write," said Sara, rising. She deliberately avoided the look in Hetty's eyes. "You will find me in the library."

She stood in the doorway and watched them descend to the terrace, a sphinx-like smile on her lips. Hetty seemed very tall and erect, as one going to meet a soldier's fate.

Then Sara entered the house and sat down to wait.

A long time after a door closed stealthily in a distant part of the house—the sun-parlor door, she knew by direction.

A few minutes later an upstairs door creaked on its hinges. Some one had come in from the mellow night, and some one had been left outside. Many minutes passed. She sat there at her father's writing table and waited for the other to come in. At last quick, heavy footsteps sounded on the tiled floor outside and then came swiftly down the hall toward the small, remote room in which she sat. She looked up as he unceremoniously burst into the room.

He came across and stood over her, an expression of utter bewilderment in his eyes. There was a ghastly smile on his lips.

"D—n it all, Sara," he said shrilly, "she—she turned me down."

He seemed incapable of comprehension.

She was unmoved. Her eyes narrowed, but that was the only sign of emotion.

"I—I can't believe—" he began querulously. "Oh, what's the use? She won't have me. 'Gad! I'm trembling like a leaf. Where's Watson? Have him get me something to drink. Never mind! I'll get it from the sideboard. I'm—I'm d—d!"

He dropped heavily into a chair at the end of the table and looked at her with glazed eyes. As she stared back at him she had the curious feeling that he had shrunk perceptibly, that his clothes hung rather limply on him. His face seemed to have lost all of its smart symmetry; there was a looseness about the mouth and chin that had never been there before. The

saucy, arrogant mustache sloped dejectedly.

"I fancy you must have gone about it very badly," she said, pursing her lips.

"Badly?" he gasped. "Why—why, good heavens, Sara, I actually pleaded with her," he went on, quite pathetically. "All but got down on my knees to her. D—n me, if I can understand myself doing it either. I must have lost my head completely. Begged like a love-sick schoolboy! And she kept on saying no—no—no! And I, like a blithering ass, kept on telling her I couldn't live without her, that I'd make her happy, that she didn't know what she was saying, and— But, good Lord, she kept on saying no! Nothing but no! Do—do you think she meant to say no? Could it have been hysteria? She said it so often, over and over again, that it might have been hysteria. I never thought of that. I—"

"No, Leslie, it wasn't hysteria, you may be sure of that," she said deliberately. "She meant it, old fellow."

He sagged deeper in the chair.

"I—I can't get it through my head," he muttered.

"As I said before, you did it badly," she said. "You took too much for granted. Isn't that true?"

"God knows I didn't expect her to refuse me," he exclaimed, glaring at her. "Would I have been such a fool as to ask her if I thought there was the remotest chance of being—?" The very thought of the word caused it to stick in his throat. He swallowed hard.

"You really love her?" she demanded.

"Love her?" There was a sob in his voice. "I adore her, Sara. I can't live without her. And the worst of it is, I love her now more than I did before. Oh, it's appalling! It's horrible! What am I to do, Sara? What am I to do?"

"Be a man for a little while, that's all," she said coolly.

"Don't joke with me," he groaned.

"Go to bed, and when you see her in the morning tell her that you understand. Thank her for what she has done for you. Be—"

"Thank her?" he almost shouted.

"Yes; for destroying all that is detestable in you, Leslie—your self-conceit, your arrogance, your false notions concerning yourself—in a word, your egotism."

He blinked incredulously. "Do you know what you're saying?" he gasped. She went on as if she hadn't heard him.

"Assure her that she is to feel no compunction for what she has done, that you are content to be her loyal, devoted friend to the end of your days."

"But, hang it, Sara, I love her!"

"Don't let her suspect that you are humiliated. On the contrary, give her to understand that you are cleansed and glorified."

"What utter tommy—"

"Wait! Believe me, it is your only chance. You will have to learn some time that you can't ride roughshod among angels. Think it over, old fellow. You have had a good lesson. Profit by it."

"You mean I'm to sit down and twirl my thumbs and let some other chap snap her up under my very nose? Well, I guess not!"



"Damn it All, Sara! She—She Turned Me Down!"

"Not necessarily. If you take it manfully she may discover a new interest in you. Don't breathe a word of love to her. Go on as if nothing had happened. Don't forget that I told you in the beginning not to take no for an answer."

He drooped once more, biting his lip. "I don't see how I can ever tell mother that she refused—"

"Why tell her?" she inquired, rising. His eyes brightened. "By Jove, I shan't," he exclaimed.

"I am going up to the poor child now," she went on. "I dare say you have frightened her almost to death. Naturally she is in great distress. I shall try to convince her that her decision does not alter her position in this house. I depend on you to do your part, Leslie. Make it easy for her to stay on with me."

He mellowed to the verge of tears. "I can't keep on coming out here after this, as I've been doing, Sara."

"Don't be silly! Of course you can. This will blow over."

"Blow over?" he almost gasped.

"I mean the first effects. Try being a martyr for a while, Leslie. It isn't a bad plan, I can assure you. It may interest you to know that Challis proposed to me three times before I accepted him, and yet I—I loved him from the beginning."

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, coming to his feet with a new light in his eyes. The hollows in his cheeks seemed to fill out perceptibly.

"Good night!"

"I say, Sara, dear, you'll— you'll help me a bit, won't you? I mean you'll talk it over with her and—"

"My sympathy is entirely with Miss Castleton," she said from the doorway. His jaw dropped.

He was still ruminating over the callousness of the world in respect to lovers when she mounted the stairs and tapped firmly on Hetty's door.

Hetty Castleton was standing in the middle of her room when Sara entered. From her position it was evident that she had stopped short in her nervous, excited pacing of the floor. She was very pale, but there was a dogged, set expression about her mouth.

"Come in, dear," she said, in a manner that showed she had been expecting the visit. "Have you seen him?"

Sara closed the door, and then stood with her back against it, regarding her agitated friend with serious, compassionate eyes.

"Yes, He is terribly upset. It was a blow to him, Hetty."

"I am sorry for him, Sara. He was so dreadfully in earnest. But, thank God, it is over!" She threw back her head and breathed deeply. "That horrible, horrible nightmare is ended. I suppose it had to be. But the mockery of it—think of it, Sara—the damnable mockery of it!"

"Poor Leslie!" sighed the other.

"Poor old Leslie."

Hetty's eyes filled with tears. "Oh, I am sorry for him. He didn't deserve it. I go for him, if he really knew everything! If he knew why I could not listen to him, why I almost screamed when he held my hands in his and begged—actually begged me to— Oh, it was ghastly, Sara!"

She covered her face with her hands, and swayed as if about to fall. Sara came quickly to her side. Putting an arm about the quivering shoulders, she led the girl to the broad window seat and threw open the blinds.

"Don't speak of it, dearest—don't think of that. Sit here quietly in the air and pull yourself together. Let me talk to you. Let me tell you how deeply distressed I am, not only on your account, but his."

They were silent for a long time, the girl lying still and almost breathless against the other's shoulders. She was still wearing the delicate blue dinner gown, but in her fingers was the exquisite pearl necklace Sara had given her for Christmas. She had taken it off and had forgotten to drop it in her jewel box.

"I suppose he will go up to the city early," she said monotonously.

"Leslie is a better loser than you think, my dear," said Sara, looking out over the tops of the cedars. "He will not run away."

Hetty looked up in alarm. "You mean he will persist in— in his attentions," she cried.

"Oh, no. I don't believe you will find him to be the bugbear you imagine. He can take defeat like a man. He is devoted to you, he is devoted to me. Your decision no doubt wrecks his fondest hopes in life, but it doesn't make a weakening of him."

"I don't quite understand—"

"He is sustained by the belief that he has paid you the highest honor a man can pay to a woman. There is no reason why he should turn his back on you, as a sulky boy might do. No, my dear, I think you may count on him as your best, most loyal friend from this night on. He has just said to me that his greatest pain lies in the fear that you may not be willing to accept him as a simple, honest, unassuming friend since—"

"Oh, Sara, if he will only be that and nothing more!" cried the girl wonderingly.

Sara smiled confidently. "I fancy you haven't much to fear in that direction, my dear. It isn't in Leslie Wrاندall's make-up to court a second repulse. He is all pride. The blow it suffered tonight can't be repeated—at least, not by the same person."

"I am so sorry it had to be Leslie," murmured Hetty.

"Be nice to him, Hetty. He deserves that much of you, to say the least. I should miss him if he found it impossible to come here on account of—"

"I wouldn't have that happen for the world," cried the girl in distress. "He is your dearest friend. Send me away, Sara, if you must. Don't let anything stand in the way of your friendship for Leslie. You depend on him for so much, dear. I can't bear the thought of—"

"Hush, dearest! You are upset in my

love. Better for me to lose all the others and still have you."

The girl looked at her in wonder for a long time. "Oh, I know you mean it, Sara, but— but how can it be true?"

"Put yourself in my place," was all that Sara said in reply, and her companion had no means of translating the sentence.

She could only remain mute and wondering, her eyes fixed on that other mystery, the cameo face in the moon that hung high above the somber forest.

"Poor Leslie," murmured Sara, a long time afterward, a dreamy note in her voice. "I can't put him out of my thoughts. He will never get over it. I have never seen one so stricken and yet so brave. He would have been more than a husband to you, Hetty. It is in him to be a slave to the woman he loves. I know him well, poor boy."

Hetty was silent, brooding. Sara resumed her thoughtful observations.

"Why should you let what happened months ago stand in the way of—"

She got no farther than that. With an exclamation of horror, the girl sprang away from her and glowered at her with dilated eyes.

"My God, Sara!" she whispered hoarsely. "Are you mad?"

The other sighed. "I suppose you must think it of me," she said dimly. "We are made differently, you and I. If I cared for a man, nothing in all this world could stand between me and him."

Hetty was still staring. "You don't mean to say you would have me marry Challis Wrاندall's brother?" she said, in a sort of stupefaction.

Sara shook her head. "I mean this: you would be justified in permitting Leslie to glorify that which his brother desecrated; your womanhood, my dear."

"My God, Sara!" again fell in a hoarse whisper from the girl's lips.

"I simply voice my point of view," explained Sara calmly. "As I said before, we look at things differently."

"I can't believe you mean what you said," cried Hetty. "Why—why, if I loved him with all my heart, soul and body I could not even think of— Oh, I shudder to think of it!"

"I love you," continued Sara, fixing her mysterious eyes on those of the girl, "and yet you took from me something more than a brother. I love you, knowing everything, and I am paying in full the debt he owes to you. Leslie, knowing nothing, is no less your debtor. All this is paradoxical, I know, my dear, but we must remember that while other people may be indebted to us, we also owe something to ourselves. We ought to take pay from ourselves. Please do not conclude that I am urging or even advising you to look with favor upon Leslie Wrاندall's honorable, sincere proposal of marriage. I am merely trying to convince you that you are entitled to all that any man can give you in this world of ours—we women all are, for that matter."

"I was sure that you couldn't ask me to marry him. I couldn't believe—"

"Forget what I have said, dearest, if it grieves you," cried Sara warmly. She arose and drew the girl close to her. "Kiss me, Hetty." Their lips met. The girl's eyes were closed, but Sara's were wide open and gleaming.

"It is because I love you," she said softly, but she did not complete the sentence that burned in her brain. To herself she repeated: "It is because I love you that I would scourge you with Wrاندall's!"

"You are very good to me, Sara," sobbed Hetty.

"You will be nice to Leslie?"

"Yes, yes! If he will only let me be his friend."

"He asks no more than that. Now, you must go to bed."

Suddenly, without warning, she held the girl tightly in her arms. Her breathing was quick, as of one moved by some sharp sensation of terror. When Hetty, in no little wonder, opened her eyes Sara's face was turned away, and she was looking over her shoulder as if cause for alarm had come from behind.

"What is it?" cried Hetty anxiously. She saw the look of dread in her companion's eyes, even as it began to fade.

"I don't know," muttered Sara. "Something, I can't tell what, came over me. I thought some one was stealing up behind me. How silly of me."

"Ah," said Hetty, with an odd smile. "I can understand how you felt."

"Hetty, will you take me in with you tonight?" whispered Sara nervously. "Let me sleep with you, I can't explain it, but I am afraid to be alone tonight." The girl's answer was a glad smile of acquiescence.

"Come with me, then, to my bedroom while I change. I have the queerest feeling that some one is in my room. I don't want to be alone. Are you afraid?"

Hetty held back, her face blanching.

"No, I am not afraid," she cried at once, and started toward the door.

"There is some one in this room," said Sara a few moments later, when they were in the big bedroom down the hall.

"I—I wonder," murmured Hetty,

And yet neither of them looked about in search for the intruder!

Far into the night Sara sat in the window of Hetty's dressing room, her chin sunk low in her hands, staring moodily into the now opaque night, her eyes somber and unblinking, her body as motionless as death itself.

The cooling wind caressed her and whispered warnings into her unheeded ears, but she sat there unprotected against its chill, her nightdress damp with the mist that crept up with sinister stealth from the sea.

**CHAPTER XI.**

**In the Shadow of the Mill.**

The next day but one was overcast. On cloudy, bleak days Hetty Castleton always felt depressed.

Leslie was to return from the wilds on the following day. Early in the morning Booth had telephoned to inquire if she did not want to go for a long walk with him before luncheon. The portrait was finished, but he could not afford to miss the morning hour with her. He said as much to her in pressing his invitation.

"Tomorrow Leslie will be here and I shan't see as much of you as I'd like," he explained, rather wistfully. "There is a crowd, you know. I've got so used to having you all to myself, it's hard to break off suddenly."

"I will be ready at eleven," she said, and was instantly surprised to find that her voice rang with new life, new interest. The grayness seemed to lift from the view that stretched beyond the window; she even looked for the sun in her eagerness.

It was then that she knew why the world had been bleaker than usual, even in its cloak of gray.

A little before eleven she set out briskly to intercept him at the gates. Unknown to her, Sara sat in her window, and viewed her departure with gloomy eyes. The world also was gray for her.

They came upon each other unexpectedly at a sharp turn in the avenue. Hetty colored with a sudden rush of confusion, and had all she could do to meet his eager, happy eyes as he stood over her and proclaimed his pleasure in jerky, awkward sentences. Then they walked on together, a strange shyness attending them. She experienced the faintness of breath that comes when the heart is filled with pleasant alarms. As for Booth, his blood sang. He thrilled with the joy of being near her, of the feel of her all about him, of the delicious feminine appeal that made her so wonderful to him. He wanted to crush her in his arms, to keep her there forever, to exert all of his brute physical strength so that she might never again be herself but a part of him.

They uttered commonplaces. The spell was on them. It would lift, but for the moment they were powerless to struggle against it. At length he saw the color fade from her cheeks; her eyes were able to meet his without the look in them that all men love. Then he seemed to get his feet on the ground again, and a strange, ineffably sweet sense of calm took possession of him.

"I must paint you all over again," he said, suddenly breaking in on one of her remarks. "Just as you are today—an outdoor girl, a glorious outdoor girl in—"

"In muddy boots," she laughed, drawing her skirt away to reveal a

shapely foot in an American walking shoe.

He smiled and gave voice to a new thought. "By Jove, how much better looking our American shoes are than the kind they wear in London!"

"Sara insists on American shoes, so long as I am with her. I don't think our boots are so villainous, do you?"

"Just the same, I'm going to paint you again, boots and all. You—"

"Oh, how tired you will become of me!"

"Try me!"

"Besides, you are to do Sara at once. She has consented to sit to you. She will be wonderful, Mr. Booth, oh, how wonderful!"

There was no mistaking the sincerity of this rapt opinion.

"Stunning," was his brief comment. She was silent for a long time, so long indeed that he turned to look at her.

"A thoroughly decent, fair minded chap is Leslie Wrاندall," he pronounced, for want of something better to say. "Still, I'm bound to say, I'm sorry he is coming home tomorrow."

The red crept into her cheeks again. "I thought you were such pals," she said nervously.

"I expect to be his best man if he ever marries," said he, whacking a stone at the roadside with his walking stick. Then he looked up at her furtively and added, with a quizzical smile: "Unless something happens."

"What could happen?"

"He might marry the girl I'm in love with, and, in that case, I'd have to be excused."

"Where shall we walk to this morning?" she asked abruptly. He had drawn closer to her in the roadway.

"Is it too far to the old stone mill? That's where I first saw you, if you remember."

"Yes, let us go there," she said, but her heart sank. She knew what was coming. Perhaps it were best to have it over with; to put it away with the things that were to always be her lost treasures. It would mean the end of their companionship, the end of a love dream. She would have to lie to him: to tell him she did not love him.

Coming to the jog in the broad macadam, they were striking off into the narrow road that led to the quaint old mill, long since abandoned in the forest glade beyond, when their attention was drawn to a motor car, which was slowing down for the turn into Sara's domain. A cloud of dust swam in the air far behind the machine.

A bare-headed man on the seat beside the driver waved his hand to them, and two women in the tonneau bowed gravely. Both Hetty and Booth flushed uncomfortably, and hesitated in their progress up the forest road.

The man was Leslie Wrاندall. His mother and sister were in the back seat of the touring car.

"Why—why, it was Leslie," cried Booth, looking over his shoulder at the rapidly receding car. "Shall we turn back, Miss Castleton?"

"No," she cried instantly, with something like impatience in her voice. "And spoil our walk?" she added in the next breath, adding a nervous little laugh.

"It seems rather—" he began dubiously.

"Oh, let us have our day," she cried sharply, and led the way into the by-road.

They came, in the course of a quarter of an hour, to the bridge over the mill race. Beyond, in the mossy shades, stood a dilapidated, century-old structure known as Rangely's mill, a landmark with a history that included incidents of the Revolutionary war, when eager patriots held secret meetings inside its walls and plotted under the very noses of Tory adherents to the crown.

Pausing for a few minutes on the bridge, they leaned on the rail and looked down into the clear, mirror-like water of the race. Their own eyes looked up at them; they smiled into their own faces. And a fleecy white cloud passed over the glittering stream and swept through their faces, off to the bank, and was gone forever.

Suddenly he looked up from the water and fixed his eyes on her face. He had seen her clear blue eyes fill with tears as he gazed into them from the rail above.

"Oh, my dear!" he cried. "What is it?"

She put her handkerchief to her eyes as she quickly turned away. In another instant she was smiling up at him, a soft, pleading little smile that went straight to his heart.

"Shall we start back?" she asked, a quaver in her voice.

"No," he exclaimed. "I've got to go on with it now, Hetty. I didn't intend to, but—come, let us go up and sit on that familiar old log in the shade of the mill. You must, dear!"

She suffered him to lead her up the steep bank beyond and through the rocks and rotten timbers to the great beam that protruded from the shattered foundations of the mill. The rickety old wheel, weather-beaten and sad, rose above them and threatened to topple over if they so much as touched its flimsy supports.

He did not release her hand after drawing her up beside him.

"You must know that I love you," he said simply.

She made no response. Her hand lay limp in his. She was staring straight before her.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

**Perfectly Justifiable.**

A somewhat laggard and procrastinating student one Sunday evening went to his instructor for aid in one of his studies, asking him if he thought it was wrong to study on Sunday. He was somewhat surprised to receive the reply, "If the Master was justified in pulling the ass out of the ditch on the Sabbath, was not the ass justified in trying to get himself out?"

