



# The Hollow of Her Hand

by George Barr McCutcheon



### 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 had loved her so 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. Sara Wrاندall, in the absence of a year in Europe, Leslie Wrاندall, brother of Challis, 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 confides 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. Much to his chagrin Leslie in refusing to believe that Hetty and Hetty confess their love for each other, but the latter declares that she can never marry as there is an insurmountable barrier in the way. Hetty admits to Sara that she loves Booth. Sara declares that Hetty must marry Leslie, who must make up to her for her brother's death. The girl, Hetty, again attempts to tell the real story of the tragedy and Sara threatens to strangle her if she says a word. Sara finally realizes that Hetty is innocent. Leslie again proposes to Hetty and is rejected. Hetty prepares to leave Sara, declaring that after what has happened she can remain no longer. Hetty starts for Europe. At sea she receives a message from Booth that he has started on a faster steamer and will be waiting for her on the other side. Booth meets her and accompanies her to London. In an attempt to escape from him, Hetty starts for Paris, but finds Booth on the same boat. She persists in her refusal to tell him the secret which keeps them apart. She declares that if Sara alone can tell him, Booth leaves for America determined to get the story from Sara.

He started. It was a bolt from a clear sky. "The deuce!" "Yes," she went on in the most casual tone, "mother's had her heart set on it for months. You were supposed to be mine at first sight, I believe. Please don't look so uneasy. I'm not going to propose to you." She laughed her little ironic laugh. "So that is the way things stood, eh?" he said, still a little amazed by her candor. "Yes. And what is more to the point, I am quite sure I should have said yes if you had asked me. Sounds odd, doesn't it? Rather amusing, too, being able to discuss it so unreservedly, isn't it?" "Good heavens, Viv!" he cried uncomfortably. "I—I had no idea you cared—" "Cared!" she cried, as he paused. "I don't care two pins for you in that way. But I would have married you, just the same, because you are worth marrying. I'd very much rather have you for a husband than any man I know, but as for loving you! Poo! I'd love you in just the way mother loves father, and I wouldn't have been a bit more trouble to you than she is to him." "Gad, you don't mind what you say!" "Failing to nab you, Brandy, I dare say I'll have to come down to a duke or, who knows? maybe a mere prince. It isn't very enterprising, is it? And certainly it isn't a gay prospect. Really, I had hoped you would have me. I flatter myself, I suppose, but, honestly now, we would have made a rather nice looking couple, wouldn't we?" "You flatter me," he said. "But," she resumed, calmly exhaling, "you very foolishly fell in love with some one else, and it wasn't necessary for me to pretend that I was in love with you—which I should have done, believe me, if you had given me the chance. You fell in love, first with Hetty Castleton." "First?" he cried, frowning. "And now you are heels over head in love with my beautiful sister-in-law. Which all goes to prove that I would have made just the kind of wife you need, considering your tendency to fluctuate. But how dreadful it would have been for a sentimental, loving girl like Hetty!" He sat bolt upright and stared hard at her. "See here, Viv, what the dickens are you driving at? I'm not in love with Sara—not in the least—and—" "What an ass I am! You're guying me." "In any event, I am right about Hetty," she said, leaning forward, her manner quite serious. "If it will ease your mind," he said stiffly, "I plead guilty with all my heart." She favored him with a slight frown of annoyance. "And you deny the fluctuating charge?" "Most positively. I can afford to be honest with you, Viv. You are a corker. I love Hetty Castleton with all my soul." She leaned back in her chair. "Then why don't you dignify your soul by being honest with her?" "What do you mean?" "For a half-minute she was silent. "Are you and I of the same stripe, after all? Would you marry Sara without loving her, as I would have done by you? It doesn't seem like you, Brandon." "Good heaven, I'm not going to marry Sara!" he blurted out. "It's never entered my head." "Perhaps it has entered hers." "Nonsense! She isn't going to marry anybody. And she knows how I feel toward Hetty. If it came to the point where I decided to marry without love, 'pon my soul, Viv, I believe I'd pick you out as the victim." "Wonderful combination!" she said with a frank laugh. "The quintessence of 'no love lost.' But to resume! Do you know that people are saying you are to be married before the winter is over?" "Let 'em say it," he said gruffly. "Oh, well," she said, dispatching it all with a gesture, "if that's the way you feel about it, there's no more to be said." He was ashamed. "I beg your pardon, I shouldn't have said that." "You see," she went on, reverting to the original topic, "people who know Sara are likely to credit her with motives you appear to be totally ignorant of. She set her heart on my brother Challis, when she was a great deal younger than she is now, and she got him. If age and experience count for anything, how capable she must be by this time." "He was too wise to venture an opinion. I assure you she has no designs on me." "Perhaps not. But I fancy that even you could not escape as St. Anthony did. She is most alluring." "You don't like her." "Obviously. And yet I don't dislike her. She has the virtue of consistency, if one may use the expression. She loved my brother. Leslie says she should have hated him. We have tried to like her. I think I have come nearer to it than any of the others, not excepting Leslie, who has always been

her champion. I suppose you know that he was your rival at one time." "He mentioned it," said Booth drily. "I should have been very much disappointed in her if she had accepted him." "Indeed?" "I sometimes wonder if Sara spiked Leslie's guns for him." "I can tell you something you don't know, Vivian," said he. "Sara was rather keen about making a match there." "Vivian's smile was slow but triumphant. "That is just what I thought. There you are! Doesn't that explain Sara?" "In a measure, yes. But, you see, it developed that Hetty cared for some one else, and that put a stop to everything." "Am I to take it that you are the same one else?" "Yes," he said soberly. "Then, may I ask why she went away so suddenly?" "You may ask, but I can't answer." "Do you want my opinion? She



Her Eyes Were Moody, Her Voice Rather Lifeless.

went away because Sara, failing in her plan to marry her off to Leslie, decided that it would be fatal to a certain project of her own if she remained on the field of action. Do I make myself clear?" "Oh, you are away off in your conclusions, Viv." "Time will tell," was here cabalistic rejoinder. Her father appeared on the lawn below and called up to them. "You are wanted at the telephone, Brandon. I've just been talking to Sara." "Did she call you up, father?" asked Vivian, leaning over the rail. "Yes. About nothing in particular, however." She turned upon Booth with a mocking smile. He felt the color rush to his face, and was angry with himself. He went to the telephone. Almost her first words were these: "What has Vivian been telling you about me, Brandon?" He actually gasped. "Good heavens, Sara!" He heard her low laugh. "So she has been saying things, has she?" she asked. "I thought so. I've had it in my bones tonight." He was at a loss for words. It was positively uncanny. As he stood there, trying to think of a trivial remark, her laugh came to him again over the wire, followed by a drawing "good night," and then the sighing of the wind over the "open" wire. The next day he called her up on the telephone quite early. He knew her habits. She would be abroad in her garden by eight o'clock. He remembered well that Leslie, in commenting on her absurdly early hours, had once said that her "early bird" habit was hereditary: she got it from Sebastian. "What put it into your head, Sara, that Vivian was saying anything unpleasant about you last night?" "Magic," she replied succinctly. "Rubbish!" "I have a magic tapestry that transports me, hither and thither, and by night I always carry Aladdin's lamp. So, you see, I see and hear everything." "Be sensible." "Very well. I will be sensible. If you intend to be influenced by what Vivian or her mother said to you last night, I think you'd be wise to avoid me from this time on." Prepared though he was, he blinked his eyes and said something she didn't quite catch. She went on: "Moreover, in addition to my attainments in the black art, I am quite as clever as Mr. Sherlock Holmes in some respects. I really do some splendid deducing. In the first place, you were asked there and I was not. Why? Because I was to be discussed. You see—" "Marvelous!" he interrupted loudly. "You were to be told that I have cruel designs upon you." "Go on, please." "And all that sort of thing," she said sweepingly, and he could almost see the inclusive gesture with her free hand. He laughed but still marveled at the shrewdness of her perceptions. "I'll come over this afternoon and show you where you are wrong," he

held as an inducement to the morbidly curious who always seek out the gruesome and gloat even as they shudder. For a long time she stood immovably just inside the door, recalling the horrid picture of another day. She tried to imagine the scene that had been enacted there with gentle, lovable Hetty Glynn and her willom husband as the principal characters. The girl had told the whole story of that ugly night. Sara tried to see it as it actually had transpired. For months this present enterprise had been in her mind: the desire to see the place again, to go there with old impressions which she could leave behind when ready to emerge in a new frame of mind. It was true that she meant to shake off the shackles of a horrid dream, to purge herself of the last vestige of bitterness, to cleanse her mind of certain thoughts and memories. Downstairs Booth waited for her. He heard the story of the tragedy from the innkeeper, who crossly maintained that his business had been ruined. Booth was vaguely impressed, he knew not why, by Burton's description of the missing woman. "I'd say she was about the size of Mrs. Wrاندall herself, and much the same figger," he said, as he had said a thousand times before. "My wife noticed it the minute she saw Mrs. Wrاندall. Same height and everything." A bell rang sharply and Burton glanced over his shoulder at the indicator on the wall behind the desk. He gave a great start and his jaw sagged. "Great Scott!" he gasped. A curious grayness stole over his face. "It's—it's the bell in that very room. My soul, what can—" "Mrs. Wrاندall is up there, isn't she?" demanded Booth. "It ain't rung since the night he pushed the button for— Oh, gee! You're right. She is up there. My, what a scare it gave me." He wiped his brow. Turning to a boy, he commanded him to answer the bell. The boy went slowly, and as he went he removed his hands from his pockets. He came back an instant later, more swiftly than he went, with the word that "the lady up there" wanted Mr. Booth to come upstairs. She was waiting for him in the open doorway. A shaft of bright sunlight from a window at the end of the hall fell upon her. Her face was colorless, haggard. He paused for an instant to contrast her as she stood there in the pitiless light with the vivid creature he had put upon canvas so recently. She beckoned to him and turned back into the room. He followed. "This is the room, Brandon, where my husband met the death he deserved," she said quietly. "Deserved? Good heavens, Sara, are you—" "I want you to look about you and try to picture how this place looked on the night of the murder. You have a vivid imagination. None of this rubbish was here. Just a bed, a table and two chairs. There was a carpet on the floor. There were two people here, a man and a woman. The woman had trusted the man. She trusted him until the hour in which he died. Then she found him out. She had come to this place, believing it was

Don't speak! Think first—think well, Brandon Booth. It is what you have been seeking for months—the truth. You share the secret with us now. Again I ask, is it safe with you?" "My God!" he muttered again, and passed his hand over his eyes. His brow was wet. He looked at his fingers dumbly as if expecting to find them covered with blood. "Is it safe with you?" for the third time. "Safe? Safe?" he whispered, following her example without knowing that he did so. "I—I can't believe you, Sara. It can't be true." "It is true." "You have known—all this time?" "From that night when I stood where we are standing now." "And—and—she?" "I had never seen her until that night. I saved her." He dropped suddenly upon the trunk that stood behind him, and buried his face in his hands. For a long time she stood over him, her interest divided between him and the hall, wherein lay their present peril. "Come," she said at last. "Pull yourself together. We must leave this place. If you are not careful they will suspect something downstairs." He looked up with haggard eyes, studying her face with curious intentness. "What manner of woman are you, Sara?" he questioned, slowly, wonderingly. "I have just discovered that I am very much like other women, after all," she said. "For awhile I thought I was different, that I was stronger than my sex. But I am just as weak, just as much to be pitied, just as much to be scorned as any one of my sisters. I have spoiled a great act by stooping to do a mean one. God will bear witness that my thoughts were noble at the outset; my heart was soft. But come! There is much more to tell that cannot be told here. You shall know everything." They went downstairs and out into the crisp autumn air. She gave directions to her chauffeur. They were to traverse for some distance the same road she had taken on that ill-fated night a year and a half before. In course of time the motor approached a well-remembered railway crossing. "Slow down, Cole," she said. "This is a mean place—a very mean place." Turning to Booth, who had been sitting grim and silent beside her for miles, she said, lowering her voice: "I remember that crossing yonder. There is a sharp curve beyond. This is the place. Midway between the two crossings, I should say. Please remember this part of the road, Brandon, when I come to the telling of that night's ride to town. Try to picture this spot—this smooth, straight road as it might be on a dark, freezing night in the very thick of a screaming blizzard, with all the world abed save—two women."

In his mind he began to draw the picture, and to place the two women in the center of it, without knowing the circumstances. There was something fascinating in the study he was making, something gruesome and full of sinister possibilities for the hand of a virile painter. He wondered how near his imagination was to placing the central figures in the picture as they actually appeared on that secret night. At sunset they went together to the little pavilion at the end of the pier which extended far out into the sound. Here they were safe from the ears of eavesdroppers. The boats had been stowed away for the winter. The wind that blew through the open pavilion, now shorn of all its comforts and luxuries, was cold, raw and repelling. No one would disturb them here. With her face set toward the sinking east, she leaned against one of the thick posts, and in a dull, emotionless voice, laid bare the whole story of that dreadful night and the days that followed. She spared no details, she spared not herself in the narration. (TO BE CONTINUED.)

### CHAPTER XVI.—Continued.

The weeks slipped by. He was with her almost daily. Other people came to her house, some for rather protracted visits, others in quest of pillage at the nightly bridge table, but he was seldom missing. There were times when he thought he detected a tendency to waver, but each cunning attempt on his part to encourage the impulse invariably brought a certain mocking light into her eyes and he veered off in defeat. Something kept telling him, however, that the hour was bound to come when she would falter in her resolution; when frankness would meet frankness, and the veil be lifted. There were no letters from Hetty, no word of any description. If Sara knew anything of the girl's movements she did not take Booth into her confidence. Leslie Wrاندall went abroad in August, ostensibly to attend the aviation meets in France and England. His mother and sister sailed in September, but not before the entire colony of which they were a part had begun to discuss Sara and Booth with a relish that was obviously distasteful to the Wrاندalls. Where there is smoke there is fire, said all the gossips, and forthwith proceeded to carry faggots. A week or so before sailing, Mrs. Redmond Wrاندall had Booth in for



Good Heavens, Viv! He Cried, Uncomfortably.

dinner. I think she said on family. At any rate, Sara was not asked, which is proof enough that she was bent on making it a family affair. After dinner, Booth sat in the screened upper balcony with Vivian. He liked her. She was a keen-witted, plain-spoken young woman, with few false ideas and no subtlety. She was less snobbish than arrogant. Of all the Wrاندalls, she was the least self-centered. Leslie never quite understood her for the paradoxical reason that she thoroughly understood him. "You know, Brandon," she said, after a long silence between them, "they've been setting my cap for you for a long, long time." She blew a thin stream of cigarette smoke toward the moon.

### CHAPTER XVII.

Once More at Burton's Inn. Again Sara Wrاندall found herself in that never-to-be-forgotten room at Burton's Inn. On that grim night in March she had entered without fear or trembling because she knew what was there. Now she quaked with a mighty chill of terror, for she knew not what was there in the quiet, now sequestered room. Burton had told them on their arrival after a long drive across country that patrons of the inn invariably asked which room it was that had been the scene of the tragedy, and, on finding out, refused point-blank to occupy it. In consequence he had been obliged to transform it into a sort of store and baggage room. Sara stood in the middle of the murky room, for the shutters had long been closed to the light of day, and looked about her in awe at the heterogeneous mass of boxes, trunks, bundles and rubbish, scattered over the floor without care or system. She had closed the door behind her and was quite alone. Light sneaked in through the cracks in the shutters, but so meagerly that it only served to increase the gloom. A dismantled bedstead stood heaped up in the corner. She did not have to be told what bed it was. The mattress was there too, rolled up and tied with a thick garden rope. She knew there were dull, ugly blood stains upon it. Why the thrifty Burton had persevered in keeping this useless article of furniture, she could only surmise. Perhaps it was

### CHAPTER XVII.

to be her wedding night. She found no minister here. The man laughed at her and scoffed. Then she knew. In horror, shame, desperation she tried to break away from him. He was strong. She was a good woman; a virtuous, honorable woman. She saved herself. He was staring at her with dilated eyes. Slowly the truth was being borne in upon him. "The woman was—Hetty?" came hoarsely from his stiffening lips. "My God, Sara!" She came close to him and spoke in a half-whisper. "Now you know the secret. Is it safe with you?" He opened his lips to speak, but no words came forth. Paralysis seemed to have gripped not only his throat but his senses. He reeled. She grasped his arm in a tense, fierce way, and whispered: "Be careful! No one must hear what we are saying." She shot a glance down the deserted hall. "No one is near. I made sure of that."

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Humility. We tell this story because it seems to us a beautiful story that ought to be told. It concerns General Bell and the opening of the gigantic amphitheater in Manila that follows the lines of the land. The general was much praised for having built this imposing and enormous structure. He pointed to the savage Igorrotes that were standing about, trying to understand what was going on. "I did not build it," he said. "God Almighty built it, but if you want to take building in a different sense, to consider what we did, using the great plans of nature, those poor fellows built it."—Harper's Weekly.

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Not Properly Equipped. Little Gardner, whose big brother had been presented with a bicycle, asked his mother if he could not have one, too. "You're not old enough," she replied, "but I will buy you a velocipede." "I can't use a velocipede on these rough roads," he exclaimed. "The motor cars use the rough roads every day." The youngster thought for a moment, then with a look of scorn remarked: "Do you think I am filled with gasoline?"—New York Times

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