

The Hollow * of Her Hand George Barr McCutcheon



CHAPTER XX .- Continued. "I thought perhaps he had written

you about his plans.' 'My father does not know that I

have returned to New York." "Oh, I see. Of course. Um-um! By the way, I think the colonel is a corker. One of the most amiable thoroughbreds I've ever come across. Ripping. He's never said anything to me about your antipathy toward him, but I can see with half an eye that he is terribly depressed about it. Can't you get together some way on-

"Really, Mr. Wrandall, you are encouraging your imagination to a point where words ultimately must fail you," she said very positively. Booth could hardly repress a chuckle.

"It's not imagination on my part," said Leslie with conviction, failing utterly to recognize the obvious. "I suppose you know that he is coming over to visit me for six weeks or so. We became rattling good friends before we parted. My Jove, you should hear him on old Lord Murgatroyd's will! The quintessence of wit! I couldn't take it as he does. Expectations and all that sort of thing, you know, going up like a hot air balloon and bursting in plain view. But he never squeaked, Laughed It off. A British attribute, I dare say. I suppose you know that he is obliged to sell his estate in Ireland?"

Hetty started. She could not conceal the look of shame that leaped into her eyes.

'I-I did not know," she murmured. "Must be quite a shock to you. Sit down, Brandy. You look very picturesque standing, but chairs were made to sit upon-or in, whichever is proper.

Booth shrugged his shoulders. "I think I'll stand, if you don't mind,

"I merely suggested it, old chap, fearing you might have overlooked the possibilities. Yes, Miss Castleton, he left us in London to go up to Belfast on this dismal business." There was something in the back of his mind that he was trying to get at in a tactful manner. "By the way, is this property entailed?"

"I know nothing at all about it, Mr. Wrandall," said she, with a pleading stance at her lover, as if to inquire what stand she should take in this distressing situation.

'If it is entailed he can't sell it,' said Booth quietly.

"That's true," said Leelie, somewhat dubiously. Then, with a magnanimity that covered a multiude of doubts he added: "Of course, I am only interested in seeing that you are properly protected, Miss Castleton. I've no doubt you hold an interest in the estates."

"I can't very well discuss a thing I know absolutely nothing about," she

said succinctly.

"Most of it is in building lots and factories in Belfast, of course. It was more in the nature of a question than a declaration. "The old family castle isn't very much of an asset, I take it."

"I fancy you can trust Colonel Castleton to make the best possible deal in the premises," said Booth drily.

"I suppose so," said the other resignedly. "He is a shrewd beggar, I'm convinced of that. Strange, however, that I haven't heard a word from him since he left us in London. I've been expecting a cablegram from him every day for nearly a fortnight, letting me know when to expect him."

"Are you going to California this winter for the flying?" asked Hetty. Sara entered at that juncture, and they all sat down to listen for half an hour to Leslie's harangue on the way the California meet was being mismanaged, at the end of which he de-

He took Booth away with him, much

to that young man's disgust. "Do you know, Brandy, old fellow," said he as they walked down Fifth avenue in the gathering dusk of the early winter evening, "ever since I've begun to suspect that damned old humbug of a father of hers, I've been congratutating myself that there isn't the remotest chance of his ever becoming my father-in-law. And, by George, you'll never know how near' I was to leaping blindly into the brambles. What a close call I had!"

Booth's sarcastic smile was hidden by the dusk. He made no pretense of openly resenting the meanness of spirit that moved Leslie to these caddish remarks. He merely announced in a dry, cutting voice:

"I think Miss Castleton is to be congratulated that her injury is no greater than nature made it in the beginning." "What do you mean by 'nature?" " "Nature gave her a father, didn't

"Obviously." "Well, why add insult to injury?" "By Jove! Oh, I say, old man!"

They parted at the next corner. As Booth started to cross over to the Plaza, Leslie called out after him: "I say, Brandy, just a second, please. Are you going to marry Miss Castle-

"Then, I retract the scurvy things I said back there. I asked her to marry me three times and she refused me three times. What I said about the brambles was rotten. I'd ask her again If I thought she's have me. There you are, old fellow. I'm a rotten cad, but had not the slightest premonition of yet secretly loved her. Now I under-I apologize to you just the same."

You're learning, Leslie," said Booth, | taking the hand the other held out to him

club later on in the evening, he was stonily for the answer. called to the telephone. Watson was on the wire. He said that Mrs. Wrancould drop in on her for a few minutes after dinner, "to discuss a very important matter, if you please, sir." At nine o'clock, Booth was in Sara's library, trying to grasp a new and re- the spooks away." markable phase in the character of that amazing woman.

when he arrived.

"I don't know what it all means, Brandon," she said hurriedly, looking over her shoulder as she spoke. "Sara says that she has come to a decision of some sort. She wants us to hear her plan before making it final. I-I don't understand her at all tonight."

"It can't be anything serious, dearest," he said, but something cold and nameless oppressed him just the same.

"She asked me if I had finally decided te-to be your wife, Brandon. I said I had asked you for two or three days more in which to declde. It seemed to depress her. She said she didn't see how she could give me up, even to you. She wants to be near me always. It is-it is really tragic, Brandon.

He took her hands in his.

"We can fix that," said he confident-"Sara can live with us if she feels that way about it. Our home shall be hers when she likes, and as long as she chooses. It will be open to her all the time, to come and go or to stay just as she elects. Isn't that the way to put it?"

"I suggested something of the sort, but she wasn't very much impressed. Indeed, she appeared to be somewhat -yes, I could not have been mistaken somewhat harsh and terrified when I spoke of it. Afterwards she was more reasonable. She thanked me and -there were tears in her eyes at the time and said she would think it over. All she asks is that I may be happy and free and untroubled all the rest of my life. This was before dinner. At dinner she appeared to be brooding over something. When we left the table she took me to her room and said that she had come to an important decision. Then she instructed Watson to find you if possible."

"'Gad, it's all very upsetting," he said, shaking his head.

her. She hates the Wrandalls, but I-I don't know why I should feel as I do about it-but I believe she wants them to know!"

He stared for a moment, and then his face brightened. "And so do I, Hetty, so do I! They ought to know!"

"I should feel so much easier if the whole world knew," said she earnestly. Sara heard the girl's words as she stood in the door. She came forward with a strange even abashed-smile, after closing the door behind her.

"I don't agree with you, dearest, when you say that the world should know, but I have come to the conclusion that you should be tried and acquitted by a jury made up of Challis Wrandall's own flesh and blood. The Wrandalls must know the truth."

CHAPTER XXI.

The Jury of Four. The Wrandalle sat waiting and wondering. They had been sent for and they had deigned to respond, much to



The Wrandalis Leaned Forward in Their Chairs.

their own surprise. Redmond Wrandall occupied a place at the head of the library table. At his right sat his wife. Vivian and Leslie, by direction, took seats at the side of the long table, which had been cleared of its mass of books and magazines. Lawyer Carroll was at the other end of the table, perceptibly nervous and anxious. Hetty sat a little apart from the others, a rather forlorn, detached member of the conclave. Brandon Booth, pale-faced and alert, drew up a chair alongside Carroll, facing Sara who alone remained standing, directly opposite the four Wrandalls.

Not one of the Wrandalls knew why they, as a family, were there. They what was to come.

While the painter was dining at his of themselves and they were waiting

placed her jury in the box.

"Keep still, Viv," whispered Leslie, with a fine assumption of awe. "It's a spiritualistic meeting. You'll scare

It was at this juncture that Sara rose from her chair and faced them, He found Hetty waiting for him as calmly, as complacently as if she the dining-room instead of to throw a come. With a glance at Mr. Carroll a prefatory apology for what was to follow.

> "I have asked you to come here tonight to be my judges. I am on trial. You are about to hear the story of my unspeakable perfidy. I only require of you that you hear me to the end be-

> fore passing judgment." At her words, Hetty and Booth started perceptibly; a quick glance passed between them, as if each was inquiring whether the other had caught the extraordinary words of self-indictment. A puzzled frown appeared on Hetty's brow.

> "Perfidy?" interposed Mr. Wrandall. His wife's expression changed from one of bored indifference to sharp inquiry. Leslie paused in the act of

lighting a cigarette. "It is the mildest term I can command," said Sara. "I shall be as brief as possible in stating the case, Mr. Wrandall. You will be surprised to hear that I have taken it upon myself, as the wife of Challis Wrandall and, as I regard it, the one most vitally concerned if not interested in the discovery and punishment of the person who took his life-I say I have taken it upon myself to shield, protect and defend the unhappy young woman who accompanied him to Burton's inn on that night in March. She has had my constant, my personal protection for

more than twenty months.' The Wrandalls leaned forward in their chairs. The match burned Leslie's fingers, and he dropped it without appearing to notice the pain.

"What is this you are saying?" de manded Redmond Wrandall.

"When I left the inn that night, after seeing my husband's body in the little upstairs room, I said to myself that the one who took his life had unwittingly done me a service. He was my husband: I loved him, I adored him, To the end of my days I could have gone on loving him in spite of the her chair and stared with wide, horror cruel return he gave for my love and loyalty. I shall not attempt to tell you of the countless lapses of fidelity on his part. You would not believe me. But he always came back to me with the pitiful love he had for me, and I forgave him his transgressions. These things you know. He confessed many things to you, Mr. Wrandall. He humbled himself to me. Perhaps you will recall that I never complained to you of him. What rancor I had was always directed toward you, his family, who would see no wrong in your king but looked upon me as dirt beneath his feet. There were moments when I could have slain him with my own hands, but my heart rebelled. There were times when he said to me that I ought to kill him for the things he had done. You may now understand what I mean when I say that the girl who went to Burton's inn with him did me a service. I will not say that I considered her guiltless at the time. On the contrary, I looked upon her in quite a different way. I had no means of knowing then that she was as pure as snow and that he would have despoiled her of everything that was sweet and sacred to her. She took his life in order to save that which was she was on her way to pay for her deed with her life if necessary when came upon her and intervened."

"You-you know who she is?" said

"I have known almost from the beginning. Presently you will hear her story, from her own lips." Involuntarily four pairs of eyes shift-

ed. They looked blankly at Hetty Castleton.

Speaking swiftly, Sara depicted the scenes and sensations experienced during that memorable motor journey to New York city. "I could not believe that she was a

vicious creature, even then. Some-

thing told me that she was a tender. gentle thing who had fallen into evil hands and had struck because she was unevil. I did not doubt that she had been my husband's mistress, but I could not destroy the conviction that somehow she had been justified in doing the thing she had done. My gravest mistake was in refusing to hear her story in all of its details. I only permitted her to acknowledge that she had killed him, no more. I did not want to hear the thing which I assumed to be true. Therein lies my deepest fault. For months and months I misjudged her in my heart,

The Wrandalls had been routed | she was innocent of the only crime I | husband sat down. Their jaws set from their comfortable fireside-for could lay at her feet. Now I come hard. what? They were asking the question to the crime of which I stand selfaccused. I must have been mad all these months. I have no other defense "It is very stuffy in here," Vivian to offer. You may take it as you see had said with a glance at the closed it for yourselves. I do not ask for dall would like to know if Mr. Booth doors after Sara had successfully pardon. After I deliberately had set Castleton." about to shield this unhappy girl-to cheat the law, if you please-to cheat you, perhaps-I conceived the horrible thought to avenge myself for all the indignities I had sustained at the hands of you Wrandalls, and at the same time to even my account with the one woman whom I could put my were about to ask them to proceed to finger upon as having robbed me of my husband's love. You see I put it ton, that the extraordinary disclosures bomb into their midst that would shat- mildly. I have hated all of you, Mrs. ter their smug serenity for all time to Wrandall, even as you have hated me. Today-now-I do not feel as I did in she began, clearly, firmly and without other days toward you. I do not love you, still I do not hate you. I do not forgive you, and yet I think I have come to see things from your point of view. I can only repeat that I do not hate you as I once did."

She paused. The Wrandalls were too deeply submerged in horror to speak. They merely stared at her as if stupefied; as breathless, as motionless as stones.

"There came a day when I observed that Leslie was attracted by the guest in my house. On that day the plan took root in my brain. I-

"Good God!" fell from Leslie's lips. You-you had that in mind?"

"It became a fixed, inflexible purpose, Leslie. Not that I hated you as I hated the rest, for you tried to be considerate. The one grudge I held against you was that in seeking to sustain me you defamed your own brother. You came to me with stories of his misdeeds; you said that he was a scoundrel and that you would not blame me for 'showing him up.' Do you not remember? And so my plot involved you; you were the only one through whom I could strike. There were times when I faltered. I could not bear the thought of sacrificing Hetty Castleton, nor was it easy to thoroughly appease my conscience in respect to you. Still, if I could have had my way a few months ago, if coercion had been of any avail, you would now be the husband of your brother's slayer. Then I came to know that she was not what I had thought she was. She was honest. My bubble burst. I came out of the maze in which I had been living and saw clearly that what I had contemplated was the most atrocic

"Atroclous?" cried Mrs. Redmond Wrandall between her set teeth. "Diabolical! Diabolical! My God, Sara, what a devil you-" She did not complete the sentence, but sank back in struck eyes at her rigid daughter-in-

Her husband, his hand shaking as f with palsy, pointed a finger at Hetty. "And so you are the one we have been hunting for all these months, Miss Castleton! You are the one we want! You who have sat at our table,

you who have smiled in our faces-"Stop, Mr. Wrandall!" commanded Sara, noting the ashen face of the girl. "Don't let the fact escape you that I am the guilty person. Don't forget that she owed her freedom, if not her life to me. I alone kept her from giving herself up to the law. All that has transpired since that night in March must be placed to my account. Hetty Castleton has been my prisoner. She has rebelled a thousand times and I have conquered—not by threats but by love! Do you understand? Because of her love for me, and because she believed that I loved her, she submitted. You are not to accuse her, Mr. Wrandall. Accuse me! I am on trial here. Hetty Castleton is a witness against me, if you choose to call upon her as such. If not, I shall ask her to speak in my defense, if she can

"This is lunacy!" cried Mr. Wrandearer to her than her own life, and dall, coming to his feet. "I don't care what your motives may have been. They do not make her any less a murderess. She-"

"We must give her over to the po-Mr. Wrandall, in a low, incredulous lice-" began his wife, struggling to her feet. She staggered. It was Booth who stepped quickly to her side to support her. Leslie was staring at Hetty.

Vivian touched her father's arm She was very pale but vastly more composed than the others.

"Father, listen to me," she said. Her voice trembled in spite of ner effort to control it. "We are condemning Miss Castleton unheard. Let us hear everything before we-"Good God, Vivian! Do you mean

"How can we place any reliance on

what she may say?" cried Mrs. Wran-"Nevertheless," said Vivian firmly, I for one shall not condemn her un-

that all the Wrandalls are smaller than Sara Gooch!" "My child-" began her father in credulously. His jaw dropped suddenly. His daughter's shot had landed squarely in the heart of the Wrandall

pride. "If she has anything to say"-said stand why I loved her. It was because and sinking stiffly into her chair. Her the table,

"Thank you, Vivian," said Sara, sur-

prised in spite of herself. "You are nobler than I-"Please don't thank me, Sara," said

Vivian icily. "I was speaking for Miss Sara flushed. "I suppose it is use-

less to ask you to be fair to Sara Gooch, as you choose to call me." "Do you feel in your heart that we still owe you anything?"

"Enough of this, Vivian," spoke up her father harshly. "If Miss Castleton desires to speak we will listen to her. I must advise you, Miss Castlemade by my daughter-in-law do not lessen your culpability. We do not insist on this confession from you. You deliver it at your own risk. I want to be fair with you. If Mr. Carroll is your counsel, he may advise you now to refuse to make a statement."

Mr. Carroll bowed slightly in the general direction of the Wrandalls. "I have already advised Miss Castleton to state the case fully and completely to you, Mr. Wrandall. It was I who originally suggested this-well, what you might call a private trial for her. I am firmly convinced that when you have heard her story, you, as her judges, will acquit her of the charge of murder. Moreover, you will be content to let your own verdict end the matter, sparing yourselves the shame and ignominy of having her story told in a criminal court for the delectation of an eager but somewhat implacable world."

"Your language is extremely unpleasant, Mr. Carroll," said Mr. Wrandall coldly.

"I meant to speak kindly, sir." "Do you mean, sir, that we will let the matter rest after hearing the-"

"That is precisely what I mean, Mr. Wrandall. You will not consider her guilty of a crime. Please bear in mind this fact: but for Sara and Miss Castleton you would not have known the truth. Miss Castleton could not be convicted in a court of justice. Nor will she be convicted here this evening, in this little court of ours."

"Miss Castleton is not on trial," interposed Sara calmly. "I am the offender. She has already been tried and proved innocent,"

Leslie, in his impatience, tapped sharply on the table with his seal ring. "Please let her tell the story. Permit me to say, Miss Castleton, that you will not find the Wrandalls as harsh and vindictive as you may have been led to believe.

Mrs. Wrandall passed her hand over her eyes. "To think that we have been friendly to this girl all these-"Calm yourself, my dear," said her husband, after a glance at his son and daughter, a glance of unspeakable helplessness. He could not understand them.

As Hetty arose, Mrs. Wrandall senfor lowered her eyes and not once did she look up during the recital that followed. Her hands were lying limply in her lap, and she breathed heavily, almost stertoriously. The younger Wrandalls leaned forward with their clear, unwavering gazet fixed on the earnest face of the young Englishwoman who had slain their brother.

"You have heard Sara accuse herself," said the girl slowly, dispassionately. "The shock was no greater to you than it was to me. All that she has said is true, and yet I-I would



And So You Are the One We Have Been Hunting for All These Months."

so much rather she had left herself unarraigned. We were agreed that I should throw myself on your mercy. Mr. Carroll said that you were fair and just people, that you would not condemn me under the circumstances. But that Sara should seek to take the blame is-"

"Alas, my dear, I am to blame," said Sara, shaking her head. "But for me heard. I mean to be as fair to her as your story would have been told Sara has been. It shall not be said months ago, the courts would have cleared you, and all the world would have execrated my husband for the thing he did-my husband and your ives. son, Mrs. Wrandall-whom we both loved. God believe me, I think I loved him more than all of you put together!"

She sat down abruptly and buried Mrs. Wrandall, waving Booth aside her face in her arms on the edge of

"If I could only induce you to forgive her," began Hetty, throwing out her hands to the Wrandalls, only to be met by a gesture of repugnance from the grim old man.

"Your story, Miss Castleton," he said hoarsely.

"From the beginning, if you please," added the lawyer quietly. "Leave out nothing."

Clearly, steadily and with the utmost sincerity in her voice and manner, the girl began the story of her life. She passed hastily over the earlier periods, frankly exposing the unhappy conditions attending her home life, her subsequent activities as a performer on the London stage after Colonel Castleton's defection; the few months devoted to posing for Hawkright, the painter, and later on her engagement as governess in the wealthy Budlong family. She devoted some time and definiteness to her first encounter with Challis Wrandall on board the west-bound steamer, an incident that came to pass in a perfectly natural way. Her deck chair stood next to his, and he was not slow in making himself agreeable. It did not occur to her till long afterwards that he deliberately had traded positions with an elderly gentleman who occupied the chair on the first day out. Before the end of the voyage they were very good friends.

"When we landed in New York, he assisted me in many ways. Afterwards, on learning that I was not to go to California, I called him up on the telephone to explain my predicament. He urged me to stay in New York; he guaranteed that there would be no difficulty in securing a splendid position in the east. I had no means of knowing that he was married. I accepted him for what I thought him to be: a genuine American gentleman. They are supposed to be particularly considerate with women. His conduct toward me was beyond reproach. I have never known a man who was so courteous, so gentle. To me, he was the most fascinating man in the world. No woman could have resisted him I am sure of that."

She shot a quick, appealing glance at Booth's hard-set face. Her 'ip trembled for a second.

"I fell madly in love with him," she went on resolutely. "I dreamed of him, I could hardly wait for the time to come when I was to see him. He never came to the wretched little lodging house I have told you about. I-I met him outside. One night he told me that he loved me, loved me passionately. I-I said that I would be his wife. Somehow it seemed to me that he regarded me very curiously for a moment or two. He seemed to be surprised, uncertain. I remember that he laughed rather queerly. It did not occur to me to doubt him. One day he came for me, saving that he wanted me to see the little apartment he had taken, where we were to live after we were married. I went with him. He said that if I liked it, I could move in at once, but I would not consent to such an arrangement. For the first time I began to feel that everything was not as it should be. I-I remained in the apartment but a few minutes. The next day he came to me, greatly excited and more demonstrative than ever before, to say that he had arranged for a quiet, jolly little wedding up in the country. Strangely enough, I experienced a queer feeling that all was not as it should be, but his eagerness, his persistence dispelled the small doubt that had begun even then to shape itself. I consented to go with him on the next night to an inn out in the country, where a college friend who was a minister of the gospel would meet us, driving over from his parish a few miles away. I said that I preferred to be married in a church. He laughed and said it could be arranged when we got to the inn and had talked it over with the minister. Still uneasy, I asked why it was necessary to employ secrecy. He told me that his family were in Europe and that he wanted to surprise them by giving them a daughter who was actually related to an English nobleman. The family had been urging him to marry a stupid but rich New York girl and he-oh, well he uttered a great deal of nonscuse about my beauty, my charm, and all that sort of thing-'

She paused for a moment. No one spoke. Her audience of judges, with the exception of the elder Mrs. Wrandall, watched her as if fascinated. Their faces were almost expressionless.. With a perceptible effort, she resumed her story, narrating events that carried it up to the hour when she walked into the little upstairs room at Burton's inn with the man who was to be her husband.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Poets Put to Hard Labor. The sixth grade of a certain school in a foreign settlement in South Dakota was learning the use of possess-

The book required the pupils to correct and expand into a complete sentence the following expression: "Milton and Shakespeare's works." Joseph Nikodym handed in this sentence: 'Milton and Shakespeare work in a coal mine."-Youth's Companion.