The Hollow ✣ ✣ ✣ Of Her Hand

by George Barr McCutcheon

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SYNOPSIS.

Wrandall is found murdered in house near New York. Mrs. Wran- ummoned from the city and iden- body. A young woman who ac- d Wrandall to the inn and sub- disappeared, is suspected. , it appears, had led a gay life lected his wife. Mrs. Wrandall ck for New York in an auto dur- inding snow storm. On the way ts a young woman in the road ves to be the woman who killed ll. Feeling that the girl had done ervice in ridding her of the man ough she loved him deeply, had her great sorrow. Mrs. Wrandall nes to shield her and takes her to a home. Mrs. Wrandall hears the f Hetty Castleton's life, except that that relates to Wrandall. This a story of the tragedy she forbids l ever to tell. She offers Hetty a friendship and security from peril count of the tragedy. Mrs. Sara all and Hetty attend the funeral allis Wrandall at the home of his s. Sara Wrandall and Hetty re- o New York after an absence of a n Europe. Leslie Wrandall, brother allis, makes himself useful to Sara becomes greatly interested in Hetty.

CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

ra and Hetty did not stay long in . The newspapers announced the n of Challis Wrandall's widow reporters sought her out for inter- s. The old interest was revived columns were printed about the der at Burton's inn, with sharp orial comments on the failure of police to clear up the mystery.

"I shall ask Leslie down for the week-end," said Sara, the third day after their arrival in the country. The house was huge and lonely, and time hung rather heavily despite the glorious uplift of spring.

Hetty looked up quickly from her book. A look of dismay flickered in her eyes for an instant and then gave way to the calmness that had come to dwell in their depths of late. Her lips parted in the sudden impulse to cry out against the plan, but she checked the words. For a moment her dark, questioning eyes studied the face of her benefactress; then, as if nothing had been revealed to her, she allowed her gaze to drift pensively out toward the sunset sea.

They were sitting on the broad verandah overlooking the sound. The dusk of evening was beginning to steal over the earth. She laid her book aside.

"Will you telephone in to him after dinner, Hetty?" went on Sara, after a long period of silence.

Again Hetty started. This time a look of actual pain flashed in her eyes.

"Would not a note by post be more certain to find him in the—" she began hurriedly.

"I dislike writing notes," said Sara calmly. "Of course, dear, if you feel that you'd rather not telephone him, I can—"

"I dare say I am finicky, Sara," apologized Hetty in quick contrition. "Of course he is your brother. I should remem—"

"My brother-in-law, dear," said Sara, a trifle too literally.

"He will come often to your house," went on Hetty rapidly. "I must make the best of it."

"He is your friend, Hetty. He admires you."

"I cannot see him through your eyes, Sara."

"But he is charming and agreeable, you'll admit," persisted the other.

"He is very kind, and he is devoted to you. I should like him for that."

"You have no cause for disliking him."

"I do not dislike him. I—I am—Oh, you always have been so thoughtful, so considerate, Sara, I can't understand your failing to see how hard it is for me to—to—well, to endure his open-hearted friendship."

Sara was silent for a moment. "You draw a pretty fine line, Hetty," she said gently.

Hetty flushed. "You mean that there is little to choose between wife and brother? That isn't quite fair. You know everything, he knows nothing. I wear a mask for him; you have seen into the very heart of me. It isn't the same."

Sara came over and stood beside the girl's chair. After a moment of indecision she laid her hand on Hetty's shoulder. The girl looked up, the ever-recurring question in her eyes.

Hetty Looked Up Quickly From the Book.

"We haven't spoken of—of these ... many months, Hetty."

... Wrandall and Viv- ... upset—dread- ... n't know ... with ... ced ... ghten ... "I

"Listen, my dear," said Sara, a hard note growing in her voice: "this is my home. I do not love it, but I can see no reason for abandoning it. That is why we came back to New York."

Hetty pressed her friend's hand to her lips. "Forgive me," she cried impulsively. "I shouldn't have complained. It was detestable."

"Besides," went on Sara evenly, "you were quite free to remain on the other side. I left it to you."

"You gave me a week to decide," said Hetty in a hurried manner of speaking. "I—I took but twenty-four hours—less than that. Over night, you remember. I love you, Sara. I could not leave you. All that night I could feel you pulling at my heart strings, pulling me closer, and holding me. You were in your room, I in mine, and yet all the time you seemed to be bending over me in the darkness, urging me to stay with you and love you and be loved by you. It couldn't have been a dream."

"It was not a dream," said Sara, with a queer smile.

"You do love me?" tensely.

"I do love you," was the firm answer. Sara was staring across the water, her eyes big and as black as night itself. She seemed to be looking far beyond the misty lights that bobbled with nearby schooners, far beyond the yellow mass on the opposite shore where a town lay cradled in the shadows, far into the fast darkening sky that came up like a wall out of the east.

"Good God, Sara!" Cried the Girl in Horror.

Hetty's fingers tightened in a warmer clasp. Unconsciously perhaps, Sara's grip on the girl's shoulder tightened also; unconsciously, for her thoughts were far away. The younger woman's pensive gaze rested on the peaceful waters below, taking in the slow approach of the fog that was soon to envelop the land. Neither spoke for many minutes: inscrutable thinkers, each a prey to thoughts that leaped backward to the beginning and took up the puzzle at its inception.

"I wonder—" began Hetty, her eyes narrowing with the intensity of thought. She did not complete the sentence.

Sara answered the unspoken question. "It will never be different from what it is now, unless you make it so."

Hetty started. "How could you have known what I was thinking?" she cried in wonder.

"It is what you are always thinking, my dear. You are always asking yourself when will I turn against you,"

"Sara!"

"Your own intelligence should supply the answer to all the questions you are asking of yourself. It is too late for me to turn against you." She abruptly removed her hand from Hetty's shoulder and walked to the edge of the veranda. For the first time, the English girl was conscious of pain. She drew her arm up and cringed. She pulled the light scarf about her bare shoulders.

The butler appeared in the doorway.

"The telephone, if you please, Miss Castleton. Mr. Leslie Wrandall is calling."

The girl stared. "For me, Watson?"

"Yes, miss."

Hetty had risen, visibly agitated.

"What shall I say to him, Sara?" she cried.

"Apparently it is he who has something to say to you," said the other, still smiling. "Wait and see what it is. Please don't neglect to say that we'd like to have him over Sunday."

"A box of flowers has just come up from the station for you, miss," said Watson.

Hetty was very white as she passed into the house. Mrs. Wrandall resumed her contemplation of the fog-screened sound.

"Shall I fetch you a wrap, ma'am?" asked Watson, hesitating.

"I am coming in, Watson. Open the box of flowers for Miss Castleton. Is there a fire in the library?"

"Yes, Mrs. Wrandall."

"Mr. Leslie will be out on Saturday. Tell Mrs. Conkling."

"The evening train, ma'am?"

"No. The eleven-thirty. He will be here for luncheon."

When Hetty hurried into the library a few minutes later, her manner was that of one considerably disturbed by something that has transpired almost on the moment. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were reflectors of a no uncertain distress of mind. Mrs. Wrandall was standing before the fireplace, an exquisite figure in the ... evening gown which she ... in her dark hair, where it had been placed by the whimsical Hetty an hour earlier as they left the dinner table.

"He is coming out on the eleven-thirty, Sara," said the girl nervously, "unless you will send the motor in for him. The body of his car is being changed and it's in the shop. He must have been jesting when he said he would pay for the petrol—I should have said gasoline."

Sara laughed. "You will know him better, my dear," she said. "Leslie is very light-hearted."

"He suggested bringing a friend," went on Hetty hurriedly. "A Mr. Booth, the portrait painter."

"I met him in Italy. He is charming. You will like him, too, Hetty." The emphasis did not escape notice.

"It seems that he is spending a fortnight in the village, this Mr. Booth, painting spring lambs for rest and recreation, Mr. Leslie says."

"Then he is at our very gates," said Sara, looking up suddenly.

"I wonder if he can be the man I saw yesterday at the bridge," mused Hetty. "Is he tall?"

"I really can't say. He's rather vague. It was six or seven years ago."

"It was left that Mr. Wrandall is to come out on the eleven-thirty," explained Hetty. "I thought you wouldn't like sending either of the motors in."

"And Mr. Booth?"

"We are to send for him after Mr. Wrandall arrives. He is stopping at the inn, wherever that may be."

"Poor fellow!" sighed Sara, with a grimace. "I am sure he will like us immensely if he has been stopping at the inn."

Hetty stood staring down at the blazing logs for a full minute before giving expression to the thought that troubled her.

"Sara," she said, meeting her friend's eyes with a steady light in her own, "why did Mr. Wrandall ask for me instead of you? It is you he is coming to visit, not me. It is your house. Why should—"

"My dear," said Sara glibly, "I am merely his sister-in-law. It wouldn't be necessary to ask me if he should come. He knows he is welcome."

"Then why should he feel called upon to—"

"Some men like to telephone, I suppose," said the other coolly.

"I wonder if you will ever understand how I feel about—about certain things, Sara,"

"What, for instance?"

"Well, his very evident interest in me," cried the girl hotly. "He sends me flowers—this is the second box this week—and he is so kind, so very friendly, Sara, that I can't bear it—I really can't."

Mrs. Wrandall stared at her. "You can't very well send him about his business," she said, "unless he becomes more than friendly. Now, can you?"

"But it seems so—so horrible, so beastly," groaned the girl.

Sara faced her squarely. "See here, Hetty," she said levelly, "we have made our bed, you and I. We must lie in it—together. If Leslie Wrandall chooses to fall in love with you, that is his affair, not ours. We must face every condition. In plain words, we must play the game."

"What could be more appalling than to have him fall in love with me?"

"The other way 'round would be more dramatic, I should say."

"Good God Sara!" cried the girl in horror. "How can you even speak of such a thing?"

"After all, why shouldn't—" began Sara, but stopped in the middle of her suggestion, with the result that it had its full effect without being uttered in so many cold-blooded words. The girl shuddered.

I wish, Sara, you would let me unburden myself completely to you," she pleaded, seizing her friend's hands. "You have forbidden me—"

Sara jerked her hands away. Her eyes flashed. "I do not want to hear it," she cried fiercely. "Never, never! Do you understand? It is your secret. I will not share it with you. I should hate you if I knew everything. As it is, I love you because you are a woman who suffered at the hand of one who made me suffer. There is nothing more to say. Don't bring up the subject again. I want to be your friend for ever, not your confidante. There is a distinction. You may be able to see how very marked it is in our case, Hetty. What one does not know, seldom hurts."

"But I want to justify myself—"

"It isn't necessary," cut in the other so peremptorily that the girl's eyes spread into a look of anger. Whereupon Sara Wrandall threw her arm about her and drew her down beside her in the chaise-lounge. "I didn't mean to be harsh," she cried. "We must not speak of the past, that's all. The future is not likely to hurt us, dear. Let us avoid the past."

"The future!" sighed the girl, staring blankly before her.

"To appreciate what it is to be," said the other, "you have but to think of what it might have been."

"I know," said Hetty, in a low voice. "And yet I sometimes wonder if—"

Sara interrupted. "You are paying me, dear, instead of the law," she said gently. "I am not a harsh creditor, am I?"

"My life belongs to you. I give it cheerfully, even gladly."

"So you have said before. Well, if it belongs to me, you might at least permit me to develop it as I would any other possession. I take it as an investment. It will probably fluctuate."

"Now you are jesting!"

"Perhaps," said Sara laconically.

The next morning Hetty set forth for her ... customed tramp o... ... She came to the bridge by the mill, long since deserted and now a thing of ruin and decay. A man in knickerbockers stood leaning against the rail, idly gazing down at the trickling stream below. The brier pipe that formed the circuit between hand and lips sent up soft blue coils to float away on the drizzle.

She passed behind him, with a single furtive, curious glance at his handsome, undisturbed profile, and in that glance recognized him as the man she had seen the day before.

When she was a dozen rods away, the tall man turned his face from the stream and sent after her the long-restrained look. There was something akin to cautiousness in that look of his, as if he were afraid that she might turn her head suddenly and catch him at it. Something began stirring in his heart, the nameless something that awakens when least expected. He felt the subtle, sweet femininity of her as she passed. It lingered with him as he looked.

She turned the bend in the road a hundred yards away. For many minutes he studied the stream below without really seeing it. Then he straightened up, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and set off slowly in her wake, although he had been walking in quite the opposite direction when he came to the bridge—and on a mission of some consequence, too.

There was the chance that he would meet her coming back.

CHAPTER VII.

A Faithful Crayon-Point.

Leslie Wrandall came out on the eleven-thirty, Hetty was at the station with the motor, a sullen resentment in her heart, but a welcoming smile on her lips. The sun shone brightly. The sound glared with the white of reflected skies.

"I thought of catching the eight o'clock," he cried enthusiastically, as he dropped his bag beside the motor in order to reach over and shake hands with her. "That would have gotten me here hours earlier. The difficulty was that I didn't think of the eight o'clock until I awoke at nine."

"And then you had the additional task of thinking about breakfast," said Hetty, but without a trace of sarcasm in her manner.

"I never think of breakfast," said he amiably. "I merely eat it. Of course, it's a task to eat it sometimes, but—well, how are you? How do you like it out here?"

He was beside her on the broad seat, his face beaming, his gay little mustache pointing upward at the ends like oblique brown exclamation points, so expansive was his smile.

"I adore it," she replied, her own smile growing in response to his. It was impossible to resist the good nature of him. She could not dislike him, even though she dreaded him deep down in her heart. Her blood was hot and cold by turns when she was with him, as her mind opened and shut to thoughts pleasant and unpleasant with something of the regularity of a fish's gills in breathing.

"When I get to heaven I mean to have a place in the country the year round," he said conclusively.

"And if you don't get to heaven?"

"I suppose I'll take a furnished flat somewhere."

Sara was waiting for them at the bottom of the terrace as they drove up. He leaped out and kissed her hand.

"Much obliged," he murmured, with a slight twist of his head in the direction of Hetty, who was giving orders to the chauffeur.

"You're quite welcome," said Sara, with a smile of understanding. "She's lovely, isn't she?"

"Enchanting!" said he, almost too loudly.

Hetty walked up the long ascent ahead of them. She did not have to look back to know that they were watching her with unfaltering interest. She could feel their gaze.

"Absolutely adorable," he added, enlarging his estimate without really being aware that he voiced it.

Sara shot a look at his rapt face, and turned her own away to hide the queer little smile that flickered briefly and died away.

Hetty, pleading a sudden headache, declined to accompany them later on in the day when they set forth in the car to "pick up" Brandon Booth at the inn. They were to bring him over, bag and baggage, to stay till Tuesday.

"He will be wild to paint her," declared Leslie when they were out of sight around the bend in the road. He had waved his hat to Hetty just before the trees shut off their view of her. She was standing at the top of the steps beside one of the tall Italian vases.

"I've never seen such eyes," he exclaimed.

"She's a darling," said Sara and changed the subject, knowing full well that he would come back to it before long.

"I'm mad about her," he said simply, and then, for some unaccountable reason, gave over being loquacious and lapsed into a state of almost lugubrious quiet.

She glanced at his face, furtively at first, as if uncertain of his mood, then with a prolonged stare that was frankly curious and amused.

"Don't lose your head, Leslie," she said softly, almost purringly.

He started. "Oh, I say, Sara, I'm not likely to—"

"Stranger things have happened," she interrupted, with a shake of her head. "I can't afford to have you making love to her and getting tired of the game, as you always do, dear ... as you find she's ... a dear!

"Enchanting!" Said He, Almost Too Loudly.

of nature, even at that," said he, with a smile. "Boys are pretty close to earth, you know. To be perfectly honest, I did it in order to get away from the eminently beautiful but unnatural things I'm required to paint at home."

"I suppose we will see you at the Wrandall place this summer."

"I'm coming out to paint Leslie's sister in June, I believe. And that reminds me, I came upon an uncommonly pretty girl not far from your place the other day—and yesterday, as well—some one I've met before, unless I'm vastly mistaken. I wonder if you know your neighbors well enough—by sight, at least—to venture a good guess as to who I mean."

She appeared thoughtful.

"Oh, there are dozens of pretty girls in the neighborhood. Can't you remember where you met—" She stopped suddenly, a swift look of apprehension in her eyes.

He failed to note the look or the broken sentence. He was searching in his coat pocket for something. Selecting a letter from the middle of a small pocket, he held it out to her.

"I sketched this from memory. She posed all too briefly for me," he said.

On the back of the envelope was a remarkably good likeness of Hetty Castleton, done broadly, sketchily, with a crayon point, evidently drawn with haste while the impression was fresh, but long after she had passed out of range of his vision.

"I know her," said Sara quietly. "It's very clever, Mr. Booth."

"There is something hauntingly familiar about it," he went on, looking at the sketch with a frown of perplexity. "I've seen her somewhere, but for the life of me I can't place her. Perhaps in a crowded street, or the theater, or a railway train—just a fleeting glimpse, you know. But in any event I got a lasting impression. Queer things like that happen, don't you think so?"

Mrs. Wrandall leaned forward and spoke to Leslie. As he turned, she handed him the envelope, without comment.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed.

"Mr. Booth is a mind reader," she explained. "He has been reading your thoughts, dear boy."

Booth understood, and grinned.

"You don't mean to say—" began the dumfounded Leslie, still staring at the sketch. "Upon my word, it's a wonderful likeness, old chap. I didn't know you'd ever met her."

"Met her?" cried Booth, an amiable conspirator. "I've never met her."

"See here, don't try anything like that on me. How could you do this if you've never seen—"

"He is a mind reader," cried Sara.

"Haven't you been thinking of her steadily for—well, we'll say ten minutes?" demanded Booth.

Leslie reddened. "Nonsense!"

"That's a mental telepathy sketch," said the artist, complacently.

"When did you do that?"

"This instant, you might say. See! Here is the crayon point. I always carry one around with me for just such—"

"All right," said Leslie blandly, at the same time putting the envelope in his own pocket; "we'll let it go at that. If you're so clever at mind pictures you can go to work and make another for yourself. I mean to keep this one."

"I say," began Booth, dismayed.

"One's thoughts are his own," said the happy possessor of the sketch. He turned his back on them.

Sara was contrite. "He will never give it up," she lamented.

"Is he really hard hit?" asked Booth in surprise.

"I wonder," mused Sara.

"Of course he's welcome to the sketch, confound him."

"Would you like to paint her?"

"Is this a commission?"

"Hardly. I know her, that's all. She is a very dear friend."

"My heart is set on painting some one else, Mrs. Wrandall."

"Oh!"

"When I know you better I'll tell you who she is."

"Could you make a sketch of this other one from memory?" she asked lightly.

"I think so. I'll show you one this evening. I have my trusty crayon about me always, as I said before."

Later in the afternoon Booth came face to face with Hetty. He was descending the stairs and met her coming up. The sun streamed in through the tall windows at the turn in the stairs, shining full in her uplifted face as she approached him from below. He could not repress the start of amazement. She was carrying a box of roses in her arms—red roses whose stems protruded far beyond the end of the pasteboard box and reeked of a fragrant dampness.

She gave him a shy, startled smile as she passed. He had stopped to make room for her on the turn. Somewhat dazed, he continued on his way down the steps, to suddenly remember with a twinge of dismay that he had not returned her polite smile, but had stared at her with most unblinking fervor. In no little shame and embarrassment he sent a swift glance over his shoulder. She was walking close to the banister rail on the floor above. As he glanced up their eyes met, for she too had turned to peer.

Leslie Wrandall was standing near the foot of the stairs. There was an eager, exalted look in his face that slowly gave way to well-assumed unconcern as his friend came upon him and grasped his arm.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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"Today guests have telephones in their rooms, whereas several years ago they had anything from a cow bell to a row of brass checks operated with a cord.

"At the old Gobson house, about twelve years ago, we installed a device for lessening labor which was called a teleseme. It was a sort of punch button affair which was supposed to signal for anything from a San Francisco newspaper to a bag of peanuts. You'd push the button so many times and different lights would bob up on the board in the office after the clerk had released the indicator.

"One day I pulled out the indicator on a certain room and the lights flared up. The signal showed a very difficult drink and I hastened to notify the cafe.

"A boy took the drink upstairs, but could find no one. After a little investigation we found the room had ... been occupied for two weeks and ... had been given when ... ched the bed against

"Another device was the old cord in the room at the Grand hotel. A certain number of pulls would release brass checks on which was scheduled the desire of the guest. Whenever a pull came on this indicator it sounded as though some one had dropped a couple of hundred brass checks on a marble floor.

"This affair was a nuisance, for we got to sending ice water to a room every time it worked. Many times a guest would receive three or four pitchers of water.

"Then some one came along and put in the telephone for hotels. The modern day hotel is a wonderful institution compared with that of but a few years ago."—Cincinnati Commercial Tribune.

Legal Tangle.

The day was drawing to a close. Judge, jurors, witnesses and lawyers were growing weary, says the Theosophical Path. Finally the counsel for the prosecution rose to examine the defendant.

"Exactly how far is it between the two towns," asked the lawyer, in a weary voice.

The defendant yawned, and replied: "About four miles as the cry flows."

"No doubt," said the man of law, "you mean as the flow cries."

The judge leaned forward. "No," he remarked, suavely, "he means as the fly crows."

The ... ll three looked at one ... that somethi...

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"They say there is money in running alligator farms in Florida."

"But, of course, a man has to have experience. Take me, now, I don't even know the right time of year to plant alligators."

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"Did you hear about Muggins taking up settlement work?" "Yes; he usually works his creditors for 50 cents on the dollar."—Town Topics.

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