

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 traced to New York in an auto. She is a young woman who killed Wrاندall. Feeling that the girl had done her a service in riding her off the road who thought she loved him deeply, had caused her great sorrow. Mrs. Wrاندall determines to avenge her husband's death. She 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 to tell. She offers Hetty a home, friendship and security from peril on account of the tragedy. Sara Wrاندall, an 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 repairs for the wrongs she suffered at the hands of Challis Wrاندall by marrying his murderer into the family. In company with his friend Brandon Booth, an artist, visits Sara at her country place. Leslie confesses to her that he is madly in love with Hetty. Sara arranges with Booth to paint a picture of Hetty. Booth has a haunting picture before him. He looks through a portfolio of pictures by an unknown English artist. He finds one that declares it must be a picture of Hetty Glyn. An English actor, who resembles her very much. Much to his chagrin Leslie is refused by Hetty. Booth and Hetty confess their love for each other, but the latter declares that she can never marry as long as an insupportable barrier in the way. Hetty admits to Sara that she loves Booth. Sara declares that she will pay her brother's debt to the girl. Hetty again attempts to tell the real story of the tragedy and Sara threatens to string her if she says a word. Sara insists Hetty by revealing that all this time she has been waiting for her. Sara tells her that she has been waiting for her in her relations with Challis Wrاندall. Later she realizes that Hetty is innocent. She remains no longer. Hetty is 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 will be waiting for her on the other side. Booth meets her and accompanies her from him. Hetty starts for Paris, but finds Booth on the same boat. She persuades him to tell her the secret which keeps them apart. She declares that Sara alone can tell him. Booth leaves for America determined to get the story from Sara.

CHAPTER XVII.—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 a bit before the entire colony of which they were a part had begun to "fisc" a Sara and Booth with a relish which 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. Ledmond Wrاندall had Booth in for "inner." I think she said in familiar tone, Sara was not asked, which is proof enough that she was at on making it a family affair.

After dinner, Booth sat in the seated upper balcony with Vivian. He liked her. She was a keen-witted, n-spoken young woman, with few ideals and no subtlety. She was snobbish than arrogant. Of all Wrاندalls, she was the least self-reliant. Leslie never quite understood her thoroughly understood him.

"You know, Brandon," she said,

"Good heavens, Viv!" he cried un-

comfortably. "I—I had no idea you

care!"

"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!"

"Falling 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 I ain'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 loving "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—"

He checked himself sharply. "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 stily. "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?"

"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 to-night."

He was at a loss for words. It was positively uncanny. As he stood there,

"I say, Sara, what does all this mean? You—"

"And if you should follow me there, Vivian's estimate of us will not be so far out of the way as we'd like to make it."

True to her word, she was gone when he drove over later on in the day. Somehow, he experienced a queer feeling of relief. Not that he was oppressed by the rather vivacious opinions of Vivian and her ilk, but because something told him that Sara was wavering in her determination to withhold the secret from him and fed for perfectly obvious reasons.

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Booth waited until Sara came out to superintend the closing of her house for the winter. He called at South-look on the day of her arrival. He was struck at once by the curious change in her appearance and manner. There was something bleak and desolate in the vividly brilliant face: the tired, listless, harassed look of one who had begun to quail and yet fights on.

"Will you go out with me tomorrow, Brandon, for an all-day trip in the car?" she asked, as they stood together before the open fireplace on this late November afternoon. Her eyes were moody, her voice rather lifeless.

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With a single exception the bodies all rest on one side, with the knees drawn up, and it is assumed that the dead were placed in this position to give them the attitude of prayer in their death chamber, for it has been established that the custom of praying on one's knees was already in existence in the Stone Age in Egypt.

In one of the cabins, almost in the center of the group, there are no bodies, but a big circular hearth, around which it is assumed, from the fragments of broken earthenware pots around it, the funeral banquets were held.

The objects found in the cabins with the bodies have remarkable importance from the archeological point of view, as they prove the existence of a degree of civilization, especially as regards vases and such utensils, never hitherto observed in the Neolithic age.

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"A pickpocket," she said, "should have a long fingered red hand grasping a purse tattooed on the cheek. A 'Black Hand' should have a black heart pierced with a red dagger, a gunman should be marked with a red hand grasping a gun, grafters with a hand grasping the long green thug marked with a blue hand grasping a blackjack, burglars marked with a doorlock and pick.

"Please give this system a trial," she asked. "It is humane and will not require any extra expense. See how many gunmen, pickpockets, murderers and thieves the police can tattoo in the next 12 months, and you will realize the old axiom of 'catching before hanging.'"

"This system would lower the cost of living, reduce the cost of maintaining prisons and make all the poor and criminals self-supporting, taxpaying citizens."

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