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The Hollow of Her Hand



by **George Barr McCutcheon**
Author of "Graustark," "Truxton King," etc.

ILLUSTRATIONS by ELLSWORTH YOUNG

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Chellis Wrاندall is found murdered in a road house near New York. Mrs. Wrاندall is summoned from the city and identifies the body of a young woman who accompanied Wrاندall to the inn and subsequently disappeared is suspected. Wrاندall, it appears, had led a gay life and neglected his wife. Mrs. Wrاندall starts back for New York in an auto during a blinding snow storm.

CHAPTER II.—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, though she loved him deeply, had caused her great sorrow, Mrs. Wrاندall determines to shield her and takes her to her own home.

CHAPTER III.—Mrs. Wrاندall hears the story of Hetty Castleton's life, except that portion that relates to Wrاندall. The story of the tragedy she forbids the girl ever to tell her. She offers Hetty a home, friendship and security from peril on account of the tragedy.

CHAPTER IV.—Mrs. Sara Wrاندall and Hetty attend the funeral of Chellis Wrاندall at the home of his parents. Sara had always been treated as an interloper by the snobbish Wrاندall family, but the tragedy seems to draw them closer together.

CHAPTER V.—Sara Wrاندall and Hetty return to New York after an absence of a year in Europe. Leslie Wrاندall, brother of Chellis, makes himself useful to Sara and becomes greatly interested in Hetty.

CHAPTER VI.—Hetty is greatly pained at Sara's evident desire to encourage Leslie's attentions. Sara sees in Leslie's infatuation possibility for revenge on the Wrاندalls and repatriation for the wrongs she suffered at the hands of Chellis Wrاندall by marrying his murderers into the family.

CHAPTER VII.—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.

CHAPTER VIII.

In Which Hetty is Weighed.

Booth and Leslie returned to the city on Tuesday. The artist left behind him a "memory sketch" of Sara Wrاندall, done in the solitude of his room long after the rest of the house was wrapped in slumber on the first night of his stay at Southlook. It was



He Was as Deeply Perplexed as Ever.

as sketchily drawn as the one he had made of Hetty, and quite as wonderful in the matter of faithfulness, but utterly without the subtle something that made the other notable. The craftiness of the artist was there, but the touch of inspiration was lacking.

Sara was delighted. She was flattered, and made no pretense of disguising the fact.

The discussion which followed the exhibition of the sketch at luncheon, was very animated. It served to excite Leslie to such a degree that he brought forth from his pocket the treasured sketch of Hetty, for the purpose of comparison.

The girl who had been genuinely enthusiastic over the picture of Sara, and who had not been by way of knowing that the first sketch existed, was covered with confusion. Embarrassment and a shy sense of gratification were succeeded almost at once by a feeling of keen annoyance. The fact that the sketch was in Leslie's possession—and evidently a thing to be cherished—took away all the pleasure she may have experienced during the first few moments of interest.

Booth caught the angry flash in her eyes, preceding the flush and unaccountable pallor that followed almost immediately. He felt guilty, and at the same time deeply annoyed with Leslie. Later on he tried to explain, but the attempt was a lamentable failure. She laughed, not unkindly, in his face.

Leslie had refused to allow the sketch to leave his hand. If she could have gained possession of it, even for an instant, the thing would have been torn to bits. But it went back into his commodious pocketbook, and she was too proud to demand it of him.

She became oddly sensitive to Booth's persistent though inoffensive scrutiny as time wore on. More than once she had caught him looking at her with a fixedness that betrayed perplexity so plainly that she could not

fail to recognize an underlying motive. He was vainly striving to refresh his memory; that was clear to her. There is no mistaking that look in a person's eyes. It cannot be disguised.

He was as deeply perplexed as ever when the time came for him to depart with Leslie. He asked her point blank on the last evening of his stay if they had ever met before, and she frankly confessed to a short memory for faces. It was not unlikely, she said, that he had seen her in London or in Paris, but she had not the faintest recollection of having seen him before their meeting in the road.

Urged by Sara, she had reluctantly consented to sit to him for a portrait during the month of June. He put the request in such terms that it did not sound like a proposition. It was not surprising that he should want her for a subject; in fact, he put it in such a way that she could not but feel that she would be doing him a great and enduring favor. She imposed but one condition: The picture was never to be exhibited. He met that, with bland magnanimity, by proffering the canvas to Mrs. Wrاندall, as the subject's "next best friend," to "have and to hold so long as she might live," "free gratis," with the artist's compliments, and so on and so forth, in airy good humor.

Leslie's aid had been solicited by both Sara and the painter in the final effort to overcome the girl's objections. He was rather bored about it, but added his voice to the general clamor. With half an eye one could see that he did not relish the idea of Hetty posing for days to the handsome, agreeable painter. Moreover, it meant that Booth, who could afford to gratify his own whims, would be obliged to spend a month or more in the neighborhood, so that he could devote himself almost entirely to the consummation of this particular undertaking. Moreover, it meant that Vivian's portrait was to be temporarily disregarded.

Sara Wrاندall was quick to recognize the first symptoms of jealousy on the part of her brother-in-law. The new idol of the Wrاندalls was in love, selfishly, insufferably in love as things went with all the Wrاندalls. They hated selfishly, and so they loved. Her husband had been their king. But their king was dead, long live the king! Leslie had put on the family crown—a little jauntily, perhaps—cocked over the eye a bit, so to speak—but it was there just the same, annoyingly plain to view.

Sara had tried to like him. He had been her friend, the only one she could claim among them all. And yet, beneath his genial allegiance, she could detect the air of condescension, the bland attitude of a superior who defends another's cause for the reason that it gratifies Nero. She experienced a thrill of malicious joy in contemplating the fall of Nero. He would bring down his house about his head, and there would be no Rome to pay the fiddler.

Brandon Booth took a small cottage on the upper road, half way between the village and the home of Sara Wrاندall, and not far from the abhorred "back gate" that swung in the teeth of her connections by marriage. He set up his establishment in half a day and, being settled, betook himself off to dine with Sara and Hetty. All his household cares, like the world, rested snugly on the shoulders of an Atlas named Pat, than whom there was no more faithful servitor in all the earth, nor in the heavens, for that matter, if we are to accept his own estimate of himself. In any event, he was a treasure. Booth's house was always in order. Try as he would, he couldn't get it out of order. Pat's wife saw to that.

As he swung jauntily down the tree-lined road that led to Sara's portals, Booth was full of the joy of living. Sara was at the bottom of the terrace, moving among the flower beds in the formal garden.

At the sound of his footsteps on the gravel, Sara looked up and instantly smiled her welcome.

"It is so nice to see you again," she said, giving him her hand.

"My heart's in the highlands," he quoted, waving a vague tribute to the heavens. "And it's nice of you to see me," he added gracefully. Then he pointed up the terrace. "Isn't she a picture? 'Gad, it's lovely—the whole effect. That picture against the sky—"

He stopped short, and the sentence was never finished, although she waited for him to complete it before remarking:

"Her heart is not in the highlands."

"You mean—something's gone wrong—"

"Oh, no," she said, still smiling; "nothing like that. Her heart is in the lowlands. You would consider Washington square to be in the lowlands, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, I see," he said slowly. "You mean she's thinking of Leslie."

"Who knows? It was a venture on my part, that's all. She may be thinking of you, Mr. Booth."

"Or some chap in old England, that's more like it," he retorted. "She can't be thinking of me, you know. No one ever thinks of me when I'm out of view. Out of sight, out of mind. No; she's thinking of something a long way off—or some one, if you choose to have it that way."

She smiled upon him with half-closed, shadowy eyes, and shook her head. Then she arose.

"Let us go in. Hetty is eager to see you again."

They started up the terrace. His face clouded.

"I have had a feeling all along that she'd rather not have this portrait painted, Mrs. Wrاندall. A queer sort of feeling that she doesn't just like the idea of being put on canvas."

"Nonsense," she said, without looking at him.

Hetty met them at the top of the steps. The electric porch lights had just been turned on by the butler. The girl stood in the path of the light. Booth was never to forget the loveliness of her in that moment. He carried the image with him on the long walk home through the black night. (He declined Sara's offer to send him over in the car for the very reason that he wanted the half-hour of solitude in which to concentrate all the impressions she had made on his fancy.)

The three of them stood there for a few minutes, awaiting the butler's announcement. Sara's arm was about Hetty's shoulders. He was so taken up with the picture they presented that he scarcely heard their light chatter. They were types of loveliness so full of contrast that he marveled at the power of nature to create women in the same mold and yet to model so differently.

As they entered the vestibule, a servant came up with the word that Miss Castleton was wanted at the telephone, "long distance from New York."

The girl stopped in her tracks. Booth looked at her in mild surprise, a condition which gave way an instant later to perplexity. The look of annoyance in her eyes could not be disguised or mistaken.

"Ask him to call me up later, Watson," she said quietly.

"This is the third time he has called, Miss Castleton," said the man. "You were dressing, if you please, ma'am, the first time—"

"I will come," she interrupted sharply, with a curious glance at Sara, who for some reason avoided meeting Booth's gaze.

"Tell him we shall expect him on Friday," said Mrs. Wrاندall.

"By George!" thought Booth, as she left them. "I wonder if it can be Leslie. If it is—well, he wouldn't be flattered if he could have seen the look in her eyes."

Later on, he had no trouble in gathering that it was Leslie Wrاندall who called, but he was very much in the dark as to the meaning of that expressive look. He only knew that she was in the telephone room for ten minutes or longer, and that all trace of emotion was gone from her face when she rejoined them with a brief apology for keeping them waiting.

He left at ten-thirty, saying good night to them on the terrace. Sara walked to the steps with him.

"Don't you think her voice is lovely?" she asked. Hetty had sung for them.

"I dare say," he responded absently. "Give you my word, though, I wasn't thinking of her voice. She is lovely."

He walked home as if in a dream. The spell was on him.

Far in the night, he started up from the easy chair in which he had been smoking and dreaming and racking his brain by turns.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed aloud. "I remember! I've got it! And tomorrow I'll prove it."

Then he went to bed, with the storm from the sea pounding about the house, and slept serenely until Pat and Mary wondered whether he meant to get up at all.

"Pat," said he at breakfast, "I want you to go to the city this morning and fetch out all of the Studios you can find about the place. The old ones are in that Italian hall seat and the late ones are in the studio. Bring all of them."

"There's a divvyl of a bunch of 'em," said Pat ruefully.

He was not to begin sketching the figure until the following day. After luncheon, however, he had an appointment to inspect Hetty's wardrobe, ostensibly for the purpose of picking out a gown for the picture. As a matter of fact, he had decided the point to his own satisfaction the night before. She should pose for him in the dainty white dress she had worn on that occasion.

While they were going over the extensive assortment of gowns, with Sara as the judge from whom there seemed to be no appeal, he casually inquired if she had ever posed before.

He watched her closely as he put the question. She was holding up a beautiful point lace creation for his inspection, and there was a pleading smile on her lips. It must have been her favorite gown. The smile faded away. The hand that dangled the garment before his eyes suddenly became motionless, as if paralyzed. In the next instant, she recovered herself, and, giving the lace a quick flip that sent its odor of sachet leaping to his nostrils, responded with perfect composure.

"Isn't there a distinction between posing for an artist, and sitting for one's portrait?" she asked.

He was silent. The fact that he did

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