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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—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. 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 Challis Wrاندall at the home of his parents. Sara had always been treated as an interloper by the aristocratic 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 Challis, 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 intention possibility for revenge on the Wrاندalls and reparation for the wrongs she suffered at the hands of Challis 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—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.

CHAPTER IX—Leslie Wrاندall becomes impatient and loquacious over the picture painting and declares he is going to propose to Hetty at the first opportunity and have it over with.

CHAPTER X—Much to his chagrin Leslie is refused by Hetty. Sara, between whom and Hetty a strong mutual affection has grown up, tries to persuade the girl that she should not let the tragedy prevent her from marrying.

CHAPTER XI—Booth 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. She promises that some day she will tell her secret and that then Booth will not want to marry her.

CHAPTER XII.

Sara Wrاندall Finds the Truth. Sara had kept the three Wrاندalls over for luncheon.

"My dear," said Mrs. Redmond Wrاندall, as she stood before Hetty's portrait at the end of the long living-room, "I must say that Brandon has succeeded in catching that lovely little something that makes her so—what shall I say?—so mysterious? Is that what I want? The word is as elusive as the expression."

"Subtle is the word you want, mother," said Vivian, standing beside Leslie, tall, slim and aristocratic, her hands behind her back, her manner one of absolute indifference. Vivian was more than handsome; she was striking.

"There isn't anything subtle about Hetty," said Sara, with a laugh. "She's quite ingenuous."

Leslie was pulling at his mustache, and frowning slightly. The sunburn on his nose and forehead had begun to peel off in chappy little flakes.

"Ripping likeness, though," was his comment.

"Oh, perfect," said his mother. "Really wonderful. It will make Brandon famous."

"She's so healthy-looking," said Vivian.

"English," remarked Leslie, as if that covered everything.

"Nonsense," cried the elder Mrs. Wrاندall, lifting her lorgnette again. "Pure, honest, unmix'd blood, that's what it is. There is birth in that girl's face."

"You're always talking about birth, mother," said her son sourly, as he turned away.

"It's a good thing to have," said his mother with conviction.

"It's an easy thing to get in America," said he, pulling out his cigarette case.

It was then that Sara prevailed upon them to stop for luncheon. "Hetty always takes these long walks in the morning, and she will be disappointed if she finds you haven't waited—"

"Oh, as for that—" began Leslie and stopped, but he could not have been more lucid if he had uttered the sentence in full.

"Why didn't you pick her up and bring her home with you?" asked Sara, as they moved off in the direction of the porch.

"She seemed to be taking Brandy out for his morning exercise," said he surlily. "Far be it from me to—Umph!"

Sara repressed the start of surprise. She thought Hetty was alone.

"She will bring him in for luncheon, I suppose," she said carelessly, although there was a slight contraction of the eyelids. "He is a privileged character."

It was long past the luncheon hour when Hetty came in, flushed and warm. She was alone, and she had been walking rapidly.

"Oh, I'm sorry to be so late," she apologized, darting a look of anxiety at Sara. "We grew careless with time. Am I shockingly late?"

She was shaking hands with Mrs. Redmond Wrاندall as she spoke. Leslie and Vivian stood by, rigidly awaiting their turn. Neither appeared to be especially cordial.

"What is the passing of an hour, my dear," said the old lady, "to one who is young and can spare it?"

"I did not expect you—I mean to say, nothing was said about luncheon, was there, Sara?" She was in a pretty state of confusion.

"No," said Leslie, breaking in; "we butted in, that's all. How are you?" He clasped her hand and bent over it. She was regarding him with slightly dilated eyes. He misinterpreted the steady scrutiny. "Oh, it will all peel off in a day or two," he explained, going a shade redder.

"When did you return?" she asked. "I thought tomorrow was—"

"Leslie never has any tomorrows, Miss Castleton," explained Vivian. "He always does tomorrow's work today. That's why he never has any troubles ahead of him."

"What rot!" exclaimed Leslie. "Where is Mr. Booth?" Inquired Sara. "Wouldn't he come in, Hetty?"

"I—I didn't think to ask him to stop for luncheon," she replied, and then hurried off to her room to make herself presentable.

Hetty was in a state of nervous excitement during the luncheon. The encounter with Booth had not resulted at all as she had fancied it would. She had betrayed herself in a most disconcerting manner, and now was more deeply involved than ever before. She had been determined at the outset, she had failed, and now he had a claim—an incontestable claim against her. She found it difficult to meet Sara's steady, questioning gaze. She wanted to be alone.

After luncheon, Leslie drew Sara aside.

"I must say she doesn't seem especially overjoyed to see me," he growled. "She's as cool as ice."

"What do you expect, Leslie?" she demanded with some asperity.

"I can't stand this much longer, Sara," he said. "Don't you see how things are going? She's losing her heart to Booth."

"I don't see how we can prevent it."

"By gad, I'll have another try at it—tonight. I say, has she said—anything?"

"She pities you," she said, a malicious joy in her soul. "That's akin to something else, you know."

"Confound it all, I don't want to be pitied!"

"Then I'd advise you to defer your 'try' at it," she remarked.

"I'm mad about her, Sara. I can't sleep, I can't think, I can't—yes, I can eat, but it doesn't taste right to me. I've just got to have it settled. Why, people are beginning to notice the change in me. They say all sorts of things. About my liver, and all that sort of thing. I'm going to settle it tonight. It's been nearly three weeks now. She's surely had time to think it over; how much better everything will be for her, and all that. She's no fool, Sara. And do you know what Vivian's doing this very instant over there in the corner? She's inviting her to spend a fortnight over at our place. If she comes—well, that means the engagement will be announced at once."

Sara did not marvel at his assurance in the face of what had gone before. She knew him too well. In spite of the original rebuff, he was thoroughly satisfied in his own mind that Hetty Castleton would not be such a fool as to refuse him the second time.

"It is barely possible, Leslie," she said, "that she may consider Brandon Booth quite as good a catch as you, and infinitely better looking at the present moment."

"It's this beastly sunburn," he lamented, rubbing his nose gently, thinking first of his person. An instant later he was thinking of the other half of the declaration. "That's just what I've been afraid of," he said. "I told you what would happen if that portrait nonsense went on forever. It's your fault, Sara."

"But I have reason to believe she will not accept him, if it goes so far as that. You are quite safe in that direction."

"Gad, I'd hate to risk it," he muttered. "I have a feeling she's in love with him."

Vivian approached. "Sara, you must

let me have Miss Castleton for the first two weeks in July," she said serenely.

"I can't do it, Vivian," said the other promptly. "I can't bear the thought of being alone in this big old barn



"She Doesn't Seem Especially Overjoyed to See Me."

of a place. Nice of you to want her, but—"

"Oh, don't be selfish, Sara," cried Vivian.

"You don't know how much I depend on her," said Sara.

"I'd ask you over, too, dear, if there weren't so many others coming. I don't know where we're going to put them. You understand, don't you?"

"Perfectly," said her sister-in-law, smiling.

"But I've been counting on—Hetty."

"I say, Sara," broke in Leslie, "you could go up to Bar Harbor with the Williamsons at that time. Tell her about the invitation, Vivie."

"It isn't necessary," said Sara coldly. "I scarcely know the Williamsons." She hesitated an instant and then went on with sardonic dismay: "They're in trade, you know."

"That's nothing against 'em," protested he. "Awfully jolly people—really ripping. Ain't they, Viv?"

"I don't know them well enough to say," said Vivian, turning away. "I only know we're all snobs of the worst sort."

"Just a minute, Viv," he called out. "What does Miss Castleton say about coming?" It was an eager question. Much depended on the reply.

"I haven't asked her," said his sister succinctly. "How could I, without first consulting Sara?"

"Then you don't intend to ask her?"

"Certainly not."

After the Wrاندalls had departed, Sara took Hetty off to her room. The girl knew what was coming.

"Hetty," said the older woman, facing her after she had closed the door of her boudoir, "what is going on between you and Brandon Booth? I must have the truth. Are you doing anything foolish?"

"Foolish? Heaven help me, no! It—it is a tragedy," cried Hetty, meeting her gaze with one of utter despair.

"What has happened? Tell me!"

"What am I to do, Sara darling? He—he has told me that he—he—"

"Loves you?"

"Yes."

"And you have told him that his love is returned?"

"I couldn't help it. I was carried away. I did not mean to let him see that I—"

"You are such a novice in the business of love," said Sara sneeringly. "You are in the habit of being carried away, I fear."

"Oh, Sara!"

"You must put a stop to all this at once. How can you think of marrying him, Hetty Glynn? Send him—"

"I do not intend to marry him," said the girl, suddenly calm and dignified.

"I am to draw but one conclusion, I suppose," said the other, regarding the girl intently.

"What do you mean?"

"Is it necessary to ask that question?"

The puzzled expression remained in the girl's eyes for a time, and then slowly gave way to one of absolute horror.

"How dare you suggest such a thing?" she cried, turning pale, then crimson. "How dare you?"

Sara laughed shortly. "Isn't the inference a natural one? You are forgetting yourself."

"I understand," said the girl, through pallid lips. Her eyes were dark with pain and misery. "You think I am altogether bad." She drooped perceptibly.

"You went to Burton's Inn," sententially.

"But, Sara, you must believe me. I did not know he was—married. For God's sake, do me the justice to—"

"But you went there with him," insisted the other, her eyes hard as steel. "It doesn't matter whether he was married—or free. You went."

Hetty threw herself upon her companion's breast and wound her strong arms about her.

"Sara, Sara, you must let me explain—you must let me tell you everything. Don't stop me! You have refused to hear my plea—"

"And I still refuse," cried Sara, throwing her off angrily. "Good God, do you think I will listen to you? If you utter another word, I will strangle you!"

Hetty shrank back, terrified. Slowly she moved backward in the direction of the door, never taking her eyes from the impassioned face of her protector.

"Don't, Sara, please don't!" she begged. "Don't look at me like that! I promise—I promise. Forgive me! I would not give you an instant's pain"

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