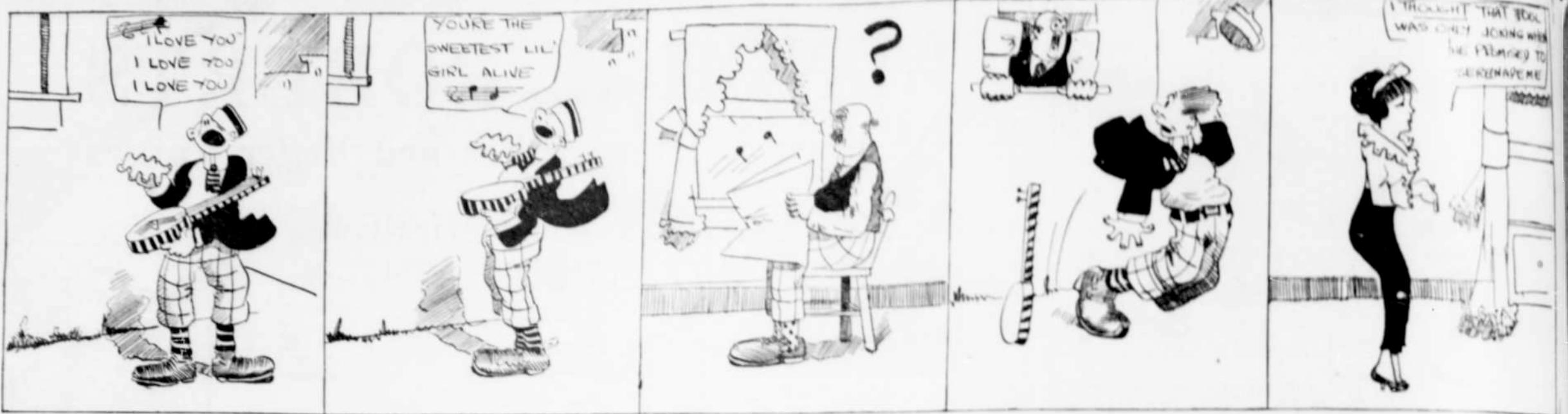


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REDMOND, OREGON

Hollow of Her Hand

Continued from page 4

"I thought that possibly you'd been making a chump of yourself up in the Maine woods."

"Piffle! Don't be an ass. What's the sense pretending you don't know who she is?"

"I suppose it's Hetty Castleton," said Booth, puffing away at his pipe. "Who else?"

"Think she'll have you, old man?" asked Booth, after a moment.

"I don't know," replied the other, a bit dashed. "You might wish me luck, though."

Booth knocked the burnt tobacco from the bowl of his pipe. A serious line appeared between his eyes. He was a fair-minded fellow, without guile, without a single treacherous instinct.

"I can't wish you luck, Les," he said slowly. "You see I'm—I'm in love with her myself."

"The devil!" Leslie sat bolt upright and glared at him. "I might have known! And—and is she in love with you?"

"My dear fellow, you reveal considerable lack of tact in asking that question."

"What I want to know is this," exclaimed Wrاندall, very pale but very hot: "is she going to marry you?"

Booth smiled. "I'll be perfectly frank with you. She says she won't," Leslie gulped. "So you've asked her?"

"Obviously."

"And she said she wouldn't? She refused you? Turned you down?" His little mustache shot up at the ends and a joyous, triumphant laugh broke from his lips. "Oh, this is rich! Ha, ha! Turned you down, eh? Poor old Brandy! You're my best friend, and dammit I'm sorry. I mean to say," he went on in some embarrassment, "I'm sorry for you. Of course, you can hardly expect me to—"

"Certainly not," accepted Booth amiably. "I quite understand."

"Then, since she's refused you, you might wish me better luck."

"That would mean giving up hope."

"Hope?" exclaimed Leslie quickly. "You don't mean to say you'll annoy her with your—"

"No, I shall not annoy her," replied his friend, shaking his head.



"Tell Me—Tell Me, Now—on Your Soul, Hetty—"

Well, I should hope not," said Leslie with a scowl. "Turned you down, eh? 'Pon my soul!" He appeared to be relishing the idea of it. "Sorry, old chap, but I suppose you understand just what that means."

Booth's lips hardened for an instant, then relaxed into a queer, almost pitying smile.

"And you want me to be your best man?" he said reflectively.

Leslie arose. His chest seemed to swell a little; assuredly he was breathing much easier. He assumed an air of compassion.

"I shan't insist, old fellow, if you feel you'd rather not—er— See what I mean?" It then occurred to him to utter a word or two of kindly advice. "I shouldn't go on moping if I were you, Brandy. 'Pon my soul, I shouldn't. Take it like a man. I know it hurts, but— Pooh! What's the use aggravating the pain by butting against a stone wall?"

His companion looked out over the tree tops, his hands in his trousers pockets, and it must be confessed that his manner was not that of one who is oppressed by despair.

"I think I'm taking it like a man, Les," he said. "I only hope you'll take it as nicely if she says nay to you."

An uneasy look leaped into Leslie's face. He seemed noticeably less content about the chest. He wondered

if Booth knew anything about his initial venture. A question rose to his lips, but he thought quickly and held it back. Instead, he glanced at his watch.

"I must be off. See you tomorrow, I hope."

"So long," said Booth, stopping at the top of the steps while his visitor slipped down to the gate with a nimbleness that suggested the formation of a sudden resolve.

Leslie did not waste time in parting inanities; he strode off briskly in the direction of home, but not without a furtive glance out of the tail of his eye as he disappeared beyond the hedgerow at the end of Booth's garden. That gentleman was standing where he had left him, and was filling his pipe once more.

The day was warm, and Leslie was in a dripping perspiration when he reached home. He did not enter the house but made his way direct to the garage.

"Get out the car at once, Brown," was his order.

Three minutes later he was being driven over the lower road toward Southlook, taking good care to avoid Booth's place by the matter of a mile or more. He was in a fever of hope and eagerness. It was very plain to him why she had refused Booth. The iron was hot. He didn't intend to lose any time in striking.

And now we know why he came again to Sara's in the middle of a blazing afternoon, instead of waiting until the more seductive shades of night had fallen, when the moon sat serene in the seat of the Mighty.

He didn't have to wait long for Hetty. Up to the instant of her appearance in the door, he had reveled in the thought that the way was now paved with roses. But with her entrance, he felt his confidence and courage slipping. Perhaps that may explain the abruptness with which he proceeded to go about the business in hand.

"I couldn't wait till tonight," he explained as she came slowly across the room toward him. She was halfway to him before he awoke to the fact that he was standing perfectly still. Then he started forward, somehow impelled to meet her at least halfway. "You'll forgive me, Hetty, if I have disturbed you."

"I was not lying down, Mr. Wrاندall," she said quietly. There was

nothing ominous in the words, but he experienced a sudden sensation of cold. "Won't you sit down? Or would you rather go out to the terrace?"

"It's much more comfortable here, if you don't mind. I—I suppose you know what it is I want to say to you. You—"

"Yes," she interrupted wearily; "and knowing as much, Mr. Wrاندall, it would not be fair of me to let you go on."

"Not fair?" he said, in honest amazement. "But, my dear, I—"

"Please, Mr. Wrاندall," she exclaimed, with a pleading little smile that would have touched the heart of anyone but Leslie. "Please don't go on. It is quite as impossible now as it was before. I have not changed."

He could only say, mechanically: "You haven't?"

"No. I am sorry if you have thought that I might come to—"

"Think, for heaven's sake, think what you are doing!" he cried, feeling for the edge of the table with a support-seeking hand. "I—I had Sara's word that you were not—"

"Unfortunately Sara cannot speak for me in a matter of this kind. Thank you for the honor you would—"

"Honor be hanged!" he blurted out, losing his temper. "I love you! It's a purely selfish thing with me, and I'm blown if I consider it an honor to be refused by any woman. I—"

"Mr. Wrاندall!" she cried, fixing him with her flashing, indignant eyes. "You are forgetting yourself." She was standing very straight and slim and imperious before him.

He quailed. "I—I beg your pardon, I—"

"There is nothing more to be said," she went on icily. "Goodby."

"Would you mind telling me whether there is anyone else?" he asked, as he turned toward the door.

"Do you really feel that you have the right to ask that question, Mr. Wrاندall?"

He wet his lips with his tongue. "Then, there is some one!" he cried, rapping the table with his knuckles. He didn't realize till afterward how vigorously he rapped. "Some confounded English nobody, I suppose."

She smiled, not unkindly. "There is no English nobody, if that answers your question."

"Then, will you be kind enough to offer a reason for not giving me a fair chance in a clear field? I think it's due—"

"Can't you see how you are distressing me? Must I again go through that horrid scene in the garden? Can't you take a plain no for an answer?"

"Good Lord!" he gasped, and in those two words he revealed the complete overturning of a lifelong estimate of himself. It seemed to take more than his breath away.

"Goodby," she said with finality.

He stared at the door through which she disappeared, his hope, his conceit, his self-regard trailing after her with shameless disloyalty to the standards he had set for them, and then, with a rather ghastly smile of self-commiseration on his lips, he slipped out of the house, jumped into the motor car, and gave a brief but explicit command to the chauffeur, who lost no time in assisting his master.



Leslie Sat Bolt Upright and Glared at Him.

Sara entered her room. They regarded each other steadily, questioningly for a short space of time.

"Leslie has just called up to ask 'what the devil' I meant by letting him make a fool of himself," said Sara, with a peculiar little twisted smile on her lips.

Hetty offered no comment, but after a moment gravely and rather wistfully called attention to her present occupation by a significant frown of her hand and a saddened smile.

"I see," said Sara, without emotion. "If you choose to go, Hetty, I shall not oppose you."

"My position here is a false one, Sara. I prefer to go."

"This morning I should have held a sword over your head."

"It is very difficult for me to realize all that has happened."

"You are free to depart. You are free in every sense of the word. Your future rests with yourself, my dear."

"It hurts me more than I can tell to feel that you have been hating me all these months."

"It hurts me—now."

Hetty walked to the window and looked out.

"What are your plans?" Sara inquired, after an interval.

"I shall seek employment—and wait for you to act."

"I? You mean?"

"I shall not run away, Sara. Nor do I intend to reveal myself to the authorities. I am not morally guilty of crime. A year ago I feared the consequences of my deed, but I have learned much since then. I was a stranger in a new world. In England we have been led to believe that you lynch women here as readily as you lynch men. I now know better than that. From you alone I learned my greatest lesson. You revealed to me the true meaning of human kindness. You shielded me who should not. Even now I believe that your first impulse was a tender one. I shall not forget it, Sara. You will live to regret the baser thought that came later on. I have loved you—yes, almost as a good dog loves his master. It is not for me to tell the story of that night and all these months to the world. I would not be betraying myself, but you. You would be called upon to explain, not I. And you would be the one to suffer. When you met me on the road that night I was on my way back to the inn to give myself into custody. You have made it impossible for me to do so now. My lips are sealed. It rests with you, Sara."

Sara joined her in the broad window. There was a strangely exalted look in her face. A gilded birdcage hung suspended in the casement. Without a word, she threw open the window screen. The gay little canary in the gilded cage cocked his head and watched her with alert eyes. Then she reached up and gently removed the cage from its fastenings. Putting it down upon the window sill, she opened the tiny door. The bird hopped about his prison in a state of great excitement.

Hetty looked on, fascinated.

At last a yellow streak shot out through the open door and an instant later resolved itself into the bobbing, fluttering dicky-bird that had lived in a cage all its life without an hour of freedom. For a few seconds it circled over the tree tops and then alighted on one of the branches. One might well have imagined that he could hear its tiny heart beating with terror. Its wings were half-raised and fluttering, its head jerking from side to side in wild perturbation. Taking courage, Master Dicky hopped timorously to a nearby twig, and then ventured a flight to a tree top nearer the window casement. Perched in its topmost branches he cheeped shrilly, as if there was fear in his little breast.

In silence the two women in the window watched the agitated movements of the bird. The same thought was in the mind of each, the same question, the same intense wish.

A brown thrush sped through the air, close by the timid canary. Like a flash it dropped to the twigs lower down, its wings palpitating in violent alarm.

"Dicky!" called Sara Wrاندall, and then cheeped between her teeth.

A moment later Dicky was fluttering about the eaves; his circles grew smaller, his winging less rhythmical, till at last with a nervous little flutter he perched on the top of the window shutter, so near that they might have

reached to him with their hands. He sat there with his head cocked to one side.

"Dicky!" called Sara again. The time she held out her finger. For some time she regarded it with indifference, not to say disfavor. Then he took no more flight, but much shorter than the first, bringing up again at the shutter top. A second later he hopped down and his little talons gripped Sara's finger with an earnestness that left no room for doubt.

She lowered her hand until it was even with the open door of the gilded cage. He shot inside with a whir that suggested a scramble. With his wings folded, he sat on his little trap and cheeped. She closed and fastened the door, and then turned to Hetty.

"My symbol," she said softly. There were tears in Hetty's eyes.

Leslie did not turn up at his father's place in the High street that night until Booth was safely out of the way. He spent a dismal evening at the bar club.

His father and mother were in the library when he came home at half past ten. From a dark corner of the garden he had witnessed Booth's early departure. Vivian had gone down the gate in the low-lying hedge with her visitor. She came in a moment after Leslie's entrance.

"Hello, Les," she said, bending an inquiring eye upon him. "Isn't she early for you?"

Her brother was standing near the fireplace.

"There's a heavy dew falling, sister," he said gruffly. "Shan't I look a match to the kindling?"

His mother came over to him quickly, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Your coat is damp," she said anxiously. "Yes, light the fire."

"It's very warm in this room," said Mr. Wrاندall, looking up from his book. They were always doing something for Leslie's comfort.

No one seemed to notice him. Leslie knelt and struck a match.

"Well!" said Vivian.

"Well what?" he demanded without looking up.

His sister took a moment for thought. "Is Hetty coming to stay with us in July?"

He stood erect, first rubbing his knee to dislodge the dust—then his palms.

"No, she isn't coming," he said. He drew a very long breath—the first in several hours—and then expelled it vocally. "She has refused to marry me."

Mr. Wrاندall turned a leaf in his book; it sounded like the crack of doom, so still had the room become.

Vivian had the forethought to push a chair toward her mother. It was a most timely act on her part, for Mr. Wrاندall sat down very abruptly and very limply.

"She—what?" gasped Leslie's mother.

"Turned me down—cold," said Leslie briefly.

Mr. Wrاندall laid his book on the table without thinking to put the book mark in place. Then he arose and removed his glasses, fumbling for the case.

"She—she—what?" he demanded.

"Barked me," replied his son.

"Please do not just with me, Leslie," said his mother, trying to smile.

"He isn't joking, mother," said Vivian, with a shrug of her fine shoulders.

"He—he must be," cried Mrs. Wrاندall impatiently. "What did she really say, Leslie?"

"The only thing I remember was 'goodby,'" said he, and then blew his nose violently.

"Poor old Les!" said Vivian, with real feeling.

"It was Sara Gooch's doing!" exclaimed Mrs. Wrاندall, getting her breath at last.

"Nonsense," said Mr. Wrاندall, picking up his book once more and turning to the place where the bookmark lay, after which he proceeded to re-read four or five pages before discovering his error.

No one spoke for a matter of five minutes or more. Then Mrs. Wrاندall got up, went over to the library table and closed with a snap the bulky blue book with the limp leather cover, saying as she held it up to let him see that it was the privately printed history of the Murgatroyd family:

"It came by post this evening from London. She is merely a fourth cousin, my son."

He looked up with a gleam of interest in his eye.

(To be continued.)