

Shadow of Doubt

By Arthur Somers Roche

ILLUSTRATED BY MARIO COOPER

XII



There was a brittleness about him that could belong only to extreme age. "I'm standing old," he said

The Story Thus Far:

IN LOVE with Trenna Plaine, motion-picture actress, who is engaged to New York's wealthiest playboy, Len Haworth, Sim Sturdevant goes to the Merrygoround, a night club. While he chats with the star of the revue, Inez Johnson, Haworth (accompanied by Lisa Bellwood, a noted debutante) enters, insults him. Whereupon, Sturdevant knocks the man down, leaves the place, and goes home. A few hours later, Haworth is murdered—shot to death with a .38-caliber revolver, in his apartment.

The police, directed by the clever Sergeant Wilcox, swing into action at once. They question Sturdevant and two other suspects: Trenna Plaine and Lisa Bellwood, both of whom had been in Haworth's suite a short time before the tragedy. They learn nothing which would justify an arrest. . . . To Sturdevant, Trenna Plaine confides that she had once owned a revolver—a .38, which (she is emphatic on this point) had been stolen from her in Los Angeles. Within a few hours, Haworth's butler (who knows something of the tragedy which he has not revealed) is shot to death on the street—with a revolver which is found, later, near the scene of the tragedy. Trenna Plaine's revolver!

But the actress is exonerated. Police investigation discloses that her butler had

pawned the revolver in Los Angeles; and that the pawnbroker had, long afterward, sold the weapon to some man.

Who is that man? Hoping to find the answer, Sturdevant does some quiet sleuthing on his own. From Inez Johnson (who is secretly in love with one of Sturdevant's friends, Reed Ryan, a brilliant reporter who is covering the case for his paper) he learns that, following the knock-down episode at the Merrygoround, she had followed Haworth, trailed him in a taxicab. She had feared, she says, that Haworth might try to kill Sturdevant; she had followed him to prevent another tragedy. While on the trail, someone, she insists, had made frantic efforts to get in touch with her taxi-man!

That "someone"—a man—Sturdevant feels sure is the murderer. But, try though he may, he can learn little about him. He does, however, secure a vague description. Then, preparing to call on Trenna Plaine (who has told him that she loves him), he receives two unexpected visitors: Sergeant Wilcox and a man he has never seen before. Wilcox points to Sturdevant. "Is this the man?" The man shakes his head. Wilcox laughs. "Mr. Sturdevant," he chuckles, "I want you to meet Mr. Arnheim. Mr. Arnheim is the pawnbroker who sold that gun to someone in Los Angeles."

STURDEVANT shook his head reproachfully at Wilcox.

"Some day I'll just lose my temper, Sergeant, and refuse to play any more. Then what will you do for a suspect?"

Wilcox grinned at him.

"It will be terrible when this case is finished. I won't know where to go for my laughs." He turned to Arnheim. "Tell Mr. Sturdevant what the man looked like."

The sallow man spread his expressive hands.

"Like I told you, like I told the police in Los Angeles, my description of people ain't so good. Should I see him, the young man that bought the revolver, I would know him. I could pick him out of a crowd. But to tell what he looked like—that is very difficult."

"Sit down and take it easy, Arnheim," said the sergeant. He looked at Sturdevant. "Tough time Arnheim has had. Never in a plane before and been traveling all day and all night."

Arnheim sat stiffly down in a chair. He was a fragile little man, whose short slenderness made Wilcox seem almost bulky.

"How about some coffee?" suggested Sturdevant.

The big eyes of the pawnbroker were grateful. Sturdevant walked to the pantry door and told Dexter to brew fresh coffee. But Dexter never needed time in which to prepare coffee. A pot was always on the back of the stove. The coffee was served in two minutes. The pawnbroker sipped the hot fluid.

"No hurry, take your time," said Wilcox.

"Time isn't what I need; it's how to describe that I ain't got," said Arnheim. "Nice things you got here, Mr. Sturdevant." He looked appreciatively at a desk, at an etching on the wall.

"FORGET business, Arnheim," chuckled Wilcox. "Mr. Sturdevant isn't going to hock anything."

The pale lips of Arnheim parted in the faintest of smiles.

"You'd be surprised where it comes from, business, Mr. Wilcox," he said. He settled back more comfortably in his chair. Like a fat man whose clothing hampered his breathing, he unbuttoned his waistcoat and relaxed. His eyes half closed and he shook his head slowly. "I don't know how to begin."

"Well, a minute ago you referred to him as a young man. What made you think he was young?" asked Wilcox.

"He just was. Maybe twenty-eight, maybe thirty. But no more. He walked young and he stood young and he looked young."

"Stood young?" Sturdevant repeated the odd phrase. "How does a man stand young?"

Arnheim slid from the chair. Middle-aged, at least, he stood there looking ninety. There was a brittleness about his limbs, a set quality to his shoulders and neck that could belong only to extreme age.

"I'm standing old," he said. "Now I'll stand young."

Elasticity seemed not only in his muscles but in his very veins.

"That's as swell a bit of acting as I ever saw," said Wilcox. "I get what you mean."

"So do I," said Sturdevant. "I'd never thought of it before, but you're right. The way people stand indicates age. You're a good mimic."

"You're telling me? I did five years burlesque on the Northwestern Wheel. Every Tuesday I pawned something; every Saturday I took it out. I worked for pawnbrokers. So I decided to become one and let people work for me."

"What else can you tell us about him? How big was he?"

Arnheim looked at the speaker.

"Bigger than you, Mr. Wilcox." Seated again, he looked up at Sturdevant. "About your size," he said.

"What was his complexion? Was he red-faced or pale?"

"Kind of in between. He didn't look unhealthy, but he didn't have a high color. He had a kind of tired look. Not old-tired, but young-tired. Like he'd not had too much sleep."

"DISSIPATED?"

"I wouldn't say that. Just tired." "Did he have a square chin?"

Arnheim shook his head.

"I wouldn't know. I didn't particularly notice his chin. But now I remember that his nose was thin. The bridge was high. It made his eyes seem kind of sunken."

"What color were his eyes?"

"I couldn't tell, except that I think they were light. He smiled kind of easy; I remember that."

"Good teeth?" asked Wilcox.

"I guess so. I didn't notice them."

"How was he dressed?" Sturdevant asked this question.

"Just a summer suit, lightish gray. He wore a straw hat, a panama."

"What shape was the panama?" asked Wilcox.

"Well, like panamas are usually shaped." Arnheim looked at Sturdevant's hat, which its owner had placed on a chair. "Shaped about like that felt," he said.

"And you couldn't give us any better description than that?" asked Wilcox.

"Three times already this morning I have told you what he looked like. I couldn't do any better."

Wilcox smiled amiably at him.

"You added something this time. You mentioned that he smiled easily. You hadn't said that before. Telling about him makes you remember more details." He looked at Sturdevant. "Does the description fit any of your friends—friends that might have known Haworth?"

"I can't say that it does. It's pretty vague, you know. Thousands of people could be described that way."

"But it doesn't cause anyone to jump into your mind?"

"Sorry, but it doesn't," said Sturdevant.

Wilcox sighed. For the first time he seemed to lose that buoyancy that was one of his most characteristic features. For the first time Sturdevant realized that the little detective had been under a strain. Sturdevant had thought that only Trenna and himself—and possibly Lisa—had been undergoing an ordeal, but now he realized that Wilcox had not been having too pleasant a time. For the first time he understood that a detective may be more than a machine; he may be a per-

son honestly animated by a desire to rid society of a menace.

"Well, I won't keep you any longer, Mr. Sturdevant," said Wilcox. "I'm going to take Arnheim to see Miss Plaice and Miss Bellwood and Haworth's cook and a few other people. Maybe his description will mean something to somebody."

"I surely hope it does," said Sturdevant.

He walked downstairs with the two men and left them at the curb. They stepped into a police car and Sturdevant entered a taxi. He wondered idly if he was being followed today. But neither on the way uptown nor when he alighted at his office building was he aware of being followed.

Miss Maley greeted him with a smile. "They've taken that nasty thing off the front page, Mr. Sturdevant. Pretty soon they'll drop it altogether."

"I hope they'll print they've found the murderer before they do," said Sturdevant.

He entered his office and went through the mail. He was about to summon Miss Maley to take some letters when she knocked on the door and told him that a Mr. Farranza wished to see him. Sturdevant frowned. He knew no Farranza. Nevertheless, he told his secretary to send the man in, and a moment later she ushered Manoel, the headwaiter of the Merrygoround, into the office.

"Well, what can I do for you, Manoel?" asked Sturdevant.

The plump headwaiter sat down on the edge of a chair. He pulled up the razor-creased trousers that squeezed his fat legs, exposing the cloth tops of his pointed patent-leather shoes. He balanced a derby hat precariously on his knee.

"I WANT some advice, Mr. Sturdevant. You asked me a question last night and I didn't answer it quite right. You wanted to know if I knew anyone who had it in for Mr. Haworth."

Sturdevant looked curiously at the swarthy Portuguese. Perspiration stood on the man's forehead. His black eyes held alarm.

"How should you have answered the question, Manoel?" he asked.

"Well, it's like this, Mr. Sturdevant. You live on Broadway and you learn to keep your mouth shut. I've seen a lot of people get in trouble because they talked out of turn. Me, I never see anything and never hear anything. It's better business that way."

"A pretty good policy most of the time," agreed Sturdevant. "But sometimes it isn't so good."

"That's what I've been thinking. I wouldn't go to the police, Mr. Sturdevant, without you told me to. I've known you a long time. I mean, I've been headwaiter in several restaurants, and you've always seemed a pretty fine gentleman to me. You're Park Avenue, but you know your way around Broadway. You'd know how to advise me. You see, I don't want to get anyone in trouble. If I go to the police I get someone in bad, maybe, when there's nothing to it. And I get the reputation of being a squealer, and that ain't so good. You wouldn't tell what I say to you to the police unless it was necessary, would you?"

Sturdevant shook his head.

"Certainly not, Manoel," he replied.

"Well, it's like this," said the Portuguese. "Mr. Haworth was quite a spender, and like lots of spenders he thought he could get anything if he bid high enough. You know what I mean." Sturdevant nodded.

"I know, Manoel."

"Well, he was never satisfied with one girl. He was always on the make for a bunch of them. He was trying to

get Miss Johnson, and at the same time he was going for two or three girls in the chorus. One of them happens to be married. Now, she's a nice girl. She's all right. But you know what it is, working in a night club. Sometimes a girl just gets the idea she'd like to see a little life. Nothing wrong, but just wants a good time. This married girl is like that.

"YOU see, her husband is crippled, and he's out of work. A good, honest fellow. He used to be cashier in a restaurant where I worked. He hurt his leg in a taxi accident and had a tough time of it. When he got out of the hospital he was lame. And he'd lost his job. That was last August. What little money they had went to doctors. They were broke when this show opened up at the Merrygoround in September. She's been supporting him all this time. You know how a hard-working man feels when he has to live off his wife's dough. It's not so good. And as I've told you, this girl is a little flighty. I happen to know that her husband has raised hell two or three times because she went out after the show with Haworth. I heard him bawling her out one night, talking awful wild, threatening Haworth."

"When was that?" asked Sturdevant.

"Last Saturday night," replied Manoel.

"What's her name?"

"Polly Penfield. That's what she calls herself. I don't think it's her real name. Anyway, it ain't her husband's name. He's called Harry Waters. Now, you know how men talk when they're jealous. Maybe it don't mean a thing, but I honestly thought you ought to know. You've been suspected of killing Haworth. It ain't fair that you should carry that load when somebody else, maybe, ought to."

"Know where they live?" asked Sturdevant eagerly.

"Just a couple of blocks from here. A sort of theatrical rooming-house on Forty-seventh Street, just off Sixth Avenue."

Sturdevant rose from his chair.

"They ought to be there now," he said.

"You going to see them?"

"Well, what do you think, Manoel?" The headwaiter followed him to the elevator.

"Ain't you going to take a cop with you?"

Sturdevant shook his head.

"I feel the way you do. Maybe there's nothing to it, and if there isn't why get them into a jam?"

"He might be tough," said Manoel.

Sturdevant grinned.

"A cripple?"

"Cripples can shoot."

"He won't shoot. I won't give him a chance," said Sturdevant.

"And you won't mention that I've told you anything?"

"Don't you fret, Manoel."

HE WAS in the lobby of the rooming-house within five minutes. It was a semi-hotel; a pasty-faced youth stood behind a desk. He eyed Sturdevant suspiciously.

"Mr. and Mrs. Harry Waters live here?" asked Sturdevant.

"If you're trying to collect a bill, you might as well save your time," said the clerk. "They haven't paid here for two weeks, so you know what your chances are."

"I'm not a collector," said Sturdevant. "Can I see them?"

"If you can wake them up. Back room one flight up, left-hand side."

Sturdevant climbed the dusty stairs. He walked down a dimly lighted corridor and knocked on the Waters' door. A sleepy voice answered.

"I'd like to see Mr. and Mrs. Waters," said Sturdevant.

The door opened slightly. A pretty blonde, eyes heavy with sleep, stared at him.

"Why, it's Mr. Sturdevant," she cried. "Wait a second until I get something on. Hey, Harry," she called, "pull that screen around the bed and get into some clothes."

She closed the door and Sturdevant heard indistinguishable grumbling. Then the door opened and Polly Waters invited him to enter. He found himself in a fair-sized room, in which pathetic attempts at decoration had been made. A screen obviously hid a bed. The room was neat and clean. The girl's husband sat in a comfortable chair.

"Excuse my not getting up; this damp weather bothers my bum leg."

"Don't tell me you're stuck on my singing and going to put me on the air, Mr. Sturdevant," said the girl.

Sturdevant sat down in the chair to which she pointed.

"Sorry, but it's not that. But any time you want an audition I'll arrange it for you."

"On the level?" The girl turned to her husband. "Do you hear that, Harry? Maybe we're getting a break at last."

"Maybe," said her husband. He looked at Sturdevant. "What do you want?" he asked.

Vague as Arnheim's description had been, it couldn't possibly fit Harry Waters. Nor could Harry Waters have been the man that Lisa saw outside Haworth's apartment, any more than he could have been the man who asked Bob Mackey where Peters was. Of less than medium height and crippled, he answered no description. But there was no proof as yet that Mackey's man, or Lisa's man, or Arnheim's man, had killed Haworth.

"I WANT to talk to you about Haworth," he said. Manoel's warning was fresh in his mind and he watched the cripple closely.

"You do? It's a wonder the police haven't talked to me about him," said Waters. "I've been expecting them every minute. Just because a man blows up and has a row with his wife about some guy, and the guy's bumped off, I suppose he's got to answer questions. But only questions asked by the police. You're not a copper, Mr. Sturdevant."

"Be nice, Harry, be nice," pleaded the blonde. "Didn't you hear Mr. Sturdevant say he'd give me a break?"



"What do you want to know?" asked Waters.

"Anything you can tell me about Haworth. Did you see him Monday night?"

"I did not," said Waters flatly. "I was in the hall outside the room where the chorus dresses, all night, except when I went out to get a glass of water or some cigarettes. Once in a while they let big spenders drop into the girls' dressing-room. I was going to be dead sure that Haworth didn't come there that night."

"You can prove you were there?"

"From seven-thirty until two-thirty. Plenty of people saw me. All the girls know I was there and a lot of the waiters. And a newspaper-man, that fellow that writes for the Crier. Reed Ryan. He came down the hall about twelve looking for Inez Johnson. She wasn't in her dressing-room. He can swear I was there then. Oh, there must be twenty people can prove I was there until I took Polly home. So you can't pin Haworth's killing on me. At that, I kind of wish you could. A rat if I ever knew one."

"There, there, Harry," said his wife placatingly. "He was nothing to me."

"But he wanted to be, plenty," said Waters.

The girl looked apologetically at Sturdevant. She walked over to her husband and sat down on the arm of his chair, throwing an arm protectively, almost maternally, about his shoulders. Apology left her eyes, replaced by defiance, as she looked at Sturdevant.

"I've been a baddie and Harry's had a rotten break," she said. "I'm not so old and we've had hard times, and every so often I get sort of goofy when I hear the other girls talking about their Johns. I get the idea that maybe I'm missing a lot and I let someone take me out to supper. But that's all I do and Harry knows it. But he's kind of proud and feels ashamed because he isn't making any dough, and then he blows up and bawls me out." She kissed her husband fondly. "What he ought to do is slug me around a little."

WATERS grinned sheepishly.

"She ought to slug me around," he said. "But you know how it is, Mr. Sturdevant. A guy gets feeling that he's a flop, and that his wife is tied to him when she'd like to be free—"

His wife placed her hand over his mouth.

"Everybody knows that you've got the goods, Harry," she said. "As soon as

that bum leg is fixed up, you'll get going again. And if Mr. Sturdevant gets me on the air—"

"You can have an audition whenever you like. Call at my office some day next week. We'll fix it up." He looked at the young couple closely. "Haworth was a man of many interests. Tell me, were there any other men who felt as you did, Mr. Waters? Perhaps some of them had real reason to hate him."

"If I knew the guy that killed him, you wouldn't get a peep out of me," said Waters. "I don't know who tipped you off that I did some talking about him, and I don't care. But pin a rose on this: I'm no squealer!"

"But if innocent people are suspected, if they're under a nasty shadow of doubt, don't you think it's your duty to tell anything you know?"

"If some guy was headed for the chair, and I knew some other man was guilty, I'd talk all right. But I don't know anybody that would have bumped Haworth off. That's on the level."

"That's true, Mr. Sturdevant," said the girl. "Harry and I have been wondering who gave him the works."

"All right," said Sturdevant.

The girl followed him to the door.

"You really mean it, about the audition?"

"Some day next week," said Sturdevant.

Glumly he walked back to his office. No progress had been made. He wondered if progress ever would be made. Arnheim, the Los Angeles pawnbroker, seemed to be the only person who could recognize the purchaser of Trenna's revolver, but out of seven million people it would be quite a job for Arnheim to pick the right man. Arnheim might stay in New York a lifetime and never run across the man he sought.

"Miss Plaipe telephoned five minutes ago," said his secretary.

FROM his inner office Sturdevant called up Trenna.

"Sergeant Wilcox came to see me with a funny little man called Arnheim," she told him.

"He brought him to see me," said Sturdevant. "Well, did his description mean anything to you?"

"Not a thing in the world. It makes me feel pretty hopeless."

"Then you need my cheering society. Where would you like to lunch?"

"Your aunt called up and insisted that we lunch with her. Will you meet me there, and will you, this time, be good enough not to twist your ankle or step on a banana peel?"

"I'll walk softly and with great care," he laughed. "What time did she suggest?"

"One o'clock. Will you meet me there?"

"I could even call for you."

"No, I've some shopping to do."

"Do you always shop?"

"A girl about to be married buys lots of things," she told him.

"About to be? What day does that mean?"

"It doesn't mean a day; it means a year. Or maybe a month."

"Or perhaps a week?" he asked eagerly.

"I'm as eager as you, Sim," she said. "But until this dreadful thing is settled—let's not make a date."

"I'll debate that matter with you later on," he said.

STURDEVANT never remembered so pleasant a luncheon at his Aunt Melissa's home. He'd always liked Mrs. Pillson, but today he felt real affection for her. She was sweet to Trenna, and gay about her new interest in matters criminal. And as the young people prepared to depart, her manner became wistful.

"Young married people should always have their own home," she said. "But this is a great big barn of a place and I get pretty lonesome in it. I won't ask you to live with me, because I don't want you to feel sorry for me and hate to refuse. But will you see a lot of me?"

"We'll save money by eating all our meals with you," laughed Trenna.

"You have work to do, Sim Sturdevant," said Trenna on the sidewalk. "You may not know it, but I'm an expensive little trick. The man that supports me has to make lots of money. Do you make lots of money?"

He grinned at her.

"I don't make a lot—yet; but I'm on my way. I really have a pretty enormous income aside from my alleged profession."

"I'm very glad to hear it," said Trenna, "but I'm quite sure your private income isn't nearly enough. So I don't want you to neglect your work. Will you be

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Laughing Boys

"Football isn't a very serious thing." Heresy? Lunacy? Or a combination of both? Well, perhaps. But that's what the Stanford coach says. And he has turned out a pretty good team—with the same idea

By Quentin Reynolds

