

*Ladderman Donovan knew the perils of fighting flames and smoke  
—but fighting a murder charge was a danger he'd never faced before*



"Watch out for gas!"

## Ladders Up!

By KARL DETZER

### LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

**W**HEN Lieutenant Michael Donovan, stalwart commander of Ladder Truck No. 9, used his fists effectively on Alderman Fraley because the latter had propositioned him in regard to a scheme for graft, the young fireman realized that he was in store for trouble. And sure enough trouble was not long in coming.

Soon after Fraley had sworn "toget" Donovan, a serious fire broke out in the Ridgefield Building. Donovan goes up the ladder to rescue a man leaning from a flaming window—only to find that the man has disappeared and that Fraley is inside—sitting dead at a desk. Suddenly Donovan

finds himself being ordered at pistol-point to stand back, and a third, mysterious fellow with a foreign accent escapes from the building.

Not long after Senior Ladderman Hogan goes to rescue Donovan. And when Donovan, overcome by smoke and flames, is brought to the street, he is found with a revolver in his hand. He is booked on a first degree murder charge.

### CHAPTER V.

#### ATTEMPTED MURDER.

**I**T was three weeks to the day between the Ridgefield building fire, with all its smoky horror, and that other blaze, which flared up mysteriously and swept in a single hour through John Langman's warehouse. They were weeks of doubt and pain,

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of uncertainty and suspense and danger to Michael Donovan, and twice in those twenty-one days he again looked death in the eye.

The Langman fire, for all its strange behavior, was not immediately linked by Donovan or anyone else into that string of circumstances which began in the lieutenant's office above the apparatus room of Truck 9, that night Alderman Fraley called and offered him a bribe.

Now, with Fraley dead, Donovan lay on his back in the hospital with a cracked head, smoke-torn lungs, and worse by far, the charge of murder hanging over him. He lost ten pounds, and most of his color, and nearly all hope, that first week, flat on his back, with Sergeant Sullivan and two other officers sitting by, guarding him.

The charge against him was clear enough, even in the legal language of the warrant. It was murder, and first degree murder at that. Waking and sleeping, Donovan could not pry its accusation from his feverish, troubled thoughts.

He had shot Alderman Fraley, so the warrant charged; shot him with a deadly weapon, to wit, a .32 caliber revolver, of ownership unknown, and Alderman Fraley therefrom had died. There was a lot more to it, of course, about the deed being wilful and felonious, with malice aforethought, and unprovoked.

Hour after hour, the words burned into Donovan's mind. He would awaken, sweating cold, reliving the horror of that moment, far up in the smoky building, with the crazy man, lisping in his curious accent, and Fraley sitting dead, and the heat pounding up through the floor.

The policemen sat beside his bed, on their eight hour shifts of duty, and

chewed gum, and read the newspapers, and kept a wary eye upon Donovan between the lines of print.

On the third day, when his fever had begun to subside, Donovan was permitted his first visitor. It was Ladderman Hogan, in his best dress uniform, as carefully brushed and pressed as if he were attending a funeral. All he lacked, in fact, was a pair of white gloves and a sprig of forget-me-nots fastened to his badge. Even his expression was funereal as he walked slowly and silently into the room.

He stood silent a moment beside Donovan's bed, his long horsey face drawn even longer, his wide mouth pressed tight, and twiddled his blue cap in his fingers. At last he glanced at Sergeant Sullivan, of the State's attorney's office, who had leaned forward and was watching him with suspicious, unblinking eyes.

Hogan jabbed in the policeman's direction an angular thumb.

"Who's that comical looking guy?" he asked, his voice clear enough to be heard in the corridor.

Donovan answered, "It's my nursery maid. You've no idea, Hogan, how he looks after me."

"I don't like cops," said Ladderman Hogan. "I don't like the unpleasant odor of 'em."

"Nuts," said Sergeant Sullivan, and leaned back against the wall, still watching, but pretending not to listen.

Hogan turned his back on him. "I bring the respects of all the boys in the company, sir," he said to Donovan. "They all feel bad about what happened. They know what a habit cops have of picking up the wrong man."

"Picked up the right one this time?" Sullivan retorted, and began to chew gum rapidly.

"The boys on the truck company,

sir, they'd like nothing better than to burn down the police station and all the vermin in it."

Sullivan's face turned purple.

"What a fine and dandy bunch of communists must of got into the fire department," he remarked. "I'll have to make a report on this."

THEREAFTER, Hogan ignored him, and talked to Donovan as if the sergeant were only another piece of white hospital furniture. He had brought news, both good and bad. The papers were making a great deal of the murder, for one thing, and not one of them had taken the trouble to state that there was no proof, yet, that Donovan was the killer.

They'd got hold of the news, somehow, that Fraley and Donovan had quarreled bitterly when last they met, and that Donovan had threatened the alderman, and they made a great deal of that. Nothing was said, of course, of the reason for the quarrel; there was no mention of motion picture censorship, or a committee of aldermen's wives.

"The other news was less discouraging.

"The boys have took up a collection, sir, from the whole battalion," Hogan said.

"A collection for what?" Donovan asked.

"To buy you a lawyer with," the ladderman replied. "The best lawyer in the law business, sir. One of those lawyers who can make a fat-headed cop look even sillier than nature intended."

Sergeant Sullivan snorted, but held his tongue, and Donovan said:

"That's very decent of them, Hogan. Give 'em my thanks."

"The boss led off the list himself,

old Stonesifer did. With ten bucks. And it was him that picked the lawyer for you. Young fellow named Kelly, that's a relative of the Hanigans in the Eighth Ward. He'll be to see you this afternoon."

The floor supervisor came to the door, and said, "Your five minutes is up, sir," and Hogan left reluctantly, but not without a final jab at Sullivan.

"You'll never get better with that comic valentine looking at you," he said to Donovan. "I hope they put somebody in his place that isn't so disturbin' to a man's peace of mind."

The lawyer, Kelly, proved to be a pleasant enough young man and very earnest. He listened to Donovan's story from beginning to end, and remarked that it should not be difficult to secure bail, or even better, to have Donovan released to the custody of the chief of battalion.

"I'll look into the matter," he promised, and departed briskly.

Donovan did not feel like supper, and left his tray untouched. The interne came on his evening rounds at eight o'clock, and at nine Sergeant Sullivan was relieved from duty, and his place taken by a silent, middle-aged officer named Peck. For some reason, Donovan found him less objectionable than Sullivan.

He would say, "Good evening," when he entered the room, and when he left he would say, "See you later," and that was all. Each evening he pulled his chair across the floor, and sat just inside the door, where he could watch the corridor as well as the room. And he always shaded the lamp, instead of leaving it to glare brightly all the long night, to plague Donovan's smoke burned eyes.

The lieutenant's room was on the

second floor of an old wing of the big hospital, not far from the ambulance entrance, and whenever he wakened in the night he could hear the whir of rubber tires on concrete and the squeal of brakes and the slamming of ambulance doors, and the low, calm voices of the orderlies as they went about their tasks.

ON this night he did not sleep. Did not even drop into tormented cat naps. There was unusual activity in the courtyard. Once, far across roofs, he made out the scream of fire department sirens. Again, a woman, who sounded drunk, shrieked wildly as she was removed from an ambulance.

Donovan lay motionless, watching the oblong of dim light which was his window, with the railing of the fire-escape across it, ominously like the bars of a prison. The detective had shaded the lamp as usual, and pulled it into a corner, so that the room was indistinct in brown and yellow shadows.

Already Donovan was beginning to understand the routine of the hospital. At two o'clock a group of nurses, walking silently on rubber heels, passed along the corridor, talking in low voices. They were going downstairs for their midduty bowls of hot soup.

Donovan did not envy them. The evening was too warm for soup. He was beginning once more to feel sleepy when some sound caused his eyes to pop open. Detective Peck still sat back in his chair inside the door. His head was tipped against the wall and he did not stir, so Donovan thought that he might be asleep.

The sound was repeated. It came from the direction of the window. Yes, Donovan recognized it. That was

the creak of a fire-escape ground fly, being pulled down. Often enough, when he'd tested fire-escapes, he'd heard that metallic whine as he pulled the final section of iron ladder down to the ground.

Still the detective did not move, and Donovan said nothing. There was a period of silence, perhaps a minute, maybe two. Then, without warning, a man bulked in the window.

Donovan could make out nothing but his silhouette, from the knees upward. He was a heavy man, and he wore a soft hat, and his face was indistinct. Suddenly Donovan knew why. He wore a mask of some kind, of dark cloth that dropped from his hat to his chin.

He paused a moment on the fire-escape outside of the window, as if making sure of his position, then lifted one foot to the sill. At the same time his arm lifted and against the gray night background Donovan saw a pistol in it.

Donovan shouted, "Who's that? Get out o' here!"

Detective Peck upset his chair as he leaped up. The man had a foot on the window sill. His arm with the pistol was pointing toward the bed. But it swung, as Peck leaped into action.

Donovan, propped on his elbows, yelled again. Peck dropped his right hand to his coat pocket.

"Stick 'em up, you!" he bade.

Instead, the intruder fired. Peck spun around like a top. But even as he spun, there was a flash of flame from his coat, in front of the pocket. The two shots, in this confined space, roared back and forth in fearful echoes.

Peck staggered against the wall. The man in the window paused for a moment, and then fell into the room. But

he was on his feet instantly, crawling out over the sill. Peck fired a second time, too late. The man was gone.

Orderlies and watchmen ran noisily along the corridors. Patients everywhere were shouting in weak, scared voices, calling their nurses. Bells began to ring.

The detective sagged against the wall, his service revolver clutched in his hand. Donovan could hear his heavy breathing, could see his knees, bending slowly, and his head drooping forward.

A nurse hurried in. "What on earth?" she demanded petulantly. "Wake up the whole wing!"

**S**HE snatched the shade off the light and as she did so the first of the watchmen plunged through the door, his time clock swinging from his shoulder by a strap. At the same time Detective Peck's knees buckled, his revolver clattered to the floor, and he pitched forward and lay still.

The watchman said amiably, "Well, well! They come right in and make themselves at home!" Then his voice changed, and he added quickly, "Here, this guy's shot!"

Donovan still was propped on his elbows. He tried to speak, to tell them what had happened, to send them out through the window on the trail of the fleeing gunman. But as he opened his mouth, his head gave a violent twist, his tongue seemed to swell up, and he dropped back, too tired to remember anything.

When he awakened this time, daylight poured into the window. Three large men were leaning over the sill, examining it closely. Detectives, of course. And Sergeant Sullivan, with a shotgun across his knees, sat with his usual expression of superiority.

Donovan turned to him, moistened his lips, and asked, "How's Peck?"

"Okay," Sullivan answered. He was pleasanter than usual. "In the next room. The slug just creased his chest and nicked his arm."

One of the men at the window turned. He was younger than the others, no older than Donovan himself.

"Oh, hello, Lieutenant," he said, cordially enough. "Sorry we waked you. I'm Inspector O'Malley, from the bureau. It was a close shave you had, Lieutenant. Have you any idea who it was took a pot at you?"

Donovan answered, "Why, yes, sir. It was Fraley. I mean..." He paused, trying to bring his thoughts into focus. "No, not Fraley. It was... well, somebody I'd seen before somewhere."

But that was as much as he could tell. It had been so dark, and he had seen the man so briefly, that only an impression was left on his feverish mind. Besides, the fellow wore a mask, didn't he?

O'Malley questioned him, not unkindly. The inspector took himself less seriously than Sergeant Sullivan.

Donovan said at last: "I can't remember. That's all. I just can't."

O'Malley looked thoughtfully at him for a moment, and said, "I believe you, Donovan," and he turned back to the window.

"It's blood, all right," one of the policemen told him then. "Peck nicked this hood, whoever he was," and he pointed to the sill.

Donovan watched them unexcitedly. So much had happened to him that it took more than another shooting, more or less, to stir his interest. What did it matter whether they caught the man who tried to kill him? If it hadn't been Fraley, then it was someone else. The

whole thing was too intricate for his hazy mind, and he slept again, in spite of himself.

## CHAPTER VI.

### NEW EVIDENCE.

INSPECTOR O'MALLEY returned to the hospital later in the morning and walked cheerfully into Donovan's room. He acknowledged Sullivan's salute with a careless wave of his hand toward his forehead, pulled up a chair and sat down beside the bed.

Donovan, watching him closely, realized that in spite of his affable voice, the inspector was more than a little troubled.

"Sorry to bother you again, Lieutenant," he began, "but I've got to get to the bottom of this whole business." He spoke without rancor, and Sergeant Sullivan glanced up at him and scowled, and continued to chew gum. "There's some connection," the inspector went on, "between this business last night and several other things."

"Meaning what?" Donovan asked.

"There's a hook-up between this attempt to shoot you and the fire at the Ridgefield building and Fraley's death. They all hang together. Things like that don't just happen."

Donovan said, "You bet they don't."

"If you'll talk..."

"I'll talk, all right!" Donovan said. "Plenty. But before I open my face, you got to get rid of this ape." He jabbed a thumb toward Sullivan, who glowered at him and turned wrathfully to the inspector.

"The prisoner's a radical red communist," the sergeant charged. "I've listened to the talk between him and

his crew. Talk about burning down station houses, and..."

"Okay, sergeant," O'Malley nodded, unruffled. "I'll investigate that angle, too. Meanwhile, you'd best take a walk in the corridor and give your hands and face a rest. I'll call you when you're needed."

He closed the door after the sergeant, pulled his chair closer to the bed and sat down. He leaned forward with a confidential air. "It takes all kinds to make a police department, Lieutenant," he said, and added, "Mind if I smoke?"

"I'll have one myself, till that blasted nurse sticks her head in," Donovan answered. "She's ruined more'n one smoke for me." O'Malley pulled out a silver cigarette case, and when Donovan had taken a cigarette from it, snapped open a silver lighter and held it for the lieutenant.

"How about telling the whole story, Donovan?" O'Malley began, his voice still friendly. "I don't mind saying that hell's popping plenty around the city hall. And when the reporters get hold of what happened at the hospital last night—as they're bound to—it will start popping in the newspapers too. There's several people that don't seem too well satisfied with the results of our investigation, so far, Donovan..."

"And I'm one, if you're asking me."

O'Malley grinned. "Of course," he agreed. "These others, too, seem to think there's some important facts which we haven't uncovered yet."

Donovan answered, "If I was to be as bunglin' as you cops, the town would burn down overnight."

"We may have muffed it, Donovan," the inspector said. "However..." He broke off shortly.

The door to the room had swung open. Donovan glared at it, ready to bark at Sergeant Sullivan. Instead, entering, were his own attorney, Kelly, and Ladderman Hogan. Kelly's face, as he saw O'Malley, flushed.

"What's the idea?" he demanded. "You can't talk to my client without me present! You know that, Inspector!"

"Why not?" the inspector demanded. Annoyance crept into his voice. "I'm just trying to find out about last night..."

"Last night?" Kelly repeated. "What do you mean, last night?"

O'Malley's upper lip twitched, and Donovan saw him start to smile. "I happen to be the second party," the inspector said, "that's tried to get at your client, Mr. Kelly, without benefit of counsel."

**B**RIEFLY he told what had happened, here at the window, in the dark. As he finished, Hogan turned angrily.

"You cops!" he charged. "I would not put it past you! You haven't nothing on him, so you try to knock him off!"

O'Malley demanded, "Who the hell you think you're talking to?"

"Oh, I know who! Know the whole kit and caboodle of you cops! Crookeder than a dog's hind leg."

"Shut up, Hogan," Donovan interrupted. The inspector had been decent enough, he thought. There was no use in letting Hogan turn loose his spleen just because the man wore a police badge. But Hogan opened his mouth again, and this time O'Malley said:

"You heard the lieutenant, didn't you?"

"So what?" Hogan shouted.

"So I don't have to push your teeth

down your throat, tough guy." The inspector still kept his voice low, but it cracked like a charge of static.

"This won't get us anywhere, gentlemen," the attorney said. "I've applied for a writ, Inspector. I'm going to have my client released. The hearing's this afternoon."

"I'll fight it," O'Malley replied.

Kelly went on, unruffled, "We're prepared to furnish bond. Cash bond, Inspector. As much as the court requires. Nothing could be fairer than that. For, you see, we've some evidence that you just happened to miss. Want to hear it?"

"I've an open mind," O'Malley replied.

"Open?" Hogan put in. "So wide open the wind blows through it without slowing down!"

O'Malley chose to ignore him. "What is the new evidence, Mr. Kelly?"

"My client's fire hat, Inspector. It was picked up by Captain Tom Harris of Engine 98, in the presence of three of his men, on the third floor of the Ridgefield building, while they were giving the job its final wash-up."

It was Donovan's own turn to exclaim. "Third floor!"

"Which proves several things," the attorney continued, speaking to Donovan himself this time. "You found Fraley's body on the fifth floor and an armed man in the room. There was so much fire in the corridor on fifth he couldn't get out that way. So he hit you on the head, took your slicker and fire hat as a disguise, and went out the window..."

"And the boys seen him, plenty of 'em," Hogan cut in. "Feelin' his way down the ladder!"

"Precisely," the attorney agreed. "I've gone into this pretty thoroughly,

Inspector. They saw a man climb out of the window, in the lieutenant's hat and coat. Then smoke concealed him. He didn't reach the street, but when they were able to see the ladder again, he was gone. What do you make of that?"

"Don't ask *me* riddles, Kelly," the inspector bade. He was not smiling now.

"I'm telling you answers," Kelly said. "That ladder passed less than six feet above the third floor fire-escape. It would have been very simple to get to it from the ladder. The killer jumped to the fire-escape, went in a window, dropped the fire hat, thereby getting rid of his disguise, and ran downstairs. I've an engine crew who will swear that he passed them."

O'Malley lighted a cigarette. "Why did he go to the trouble of climbing around on any ladder? Why didn't he go all the way down the stairs?"

"Because he wasn't made out of asbestos!" Hogan thundered. "Can't you get it in your head? Up above third floor, the stairs was full of fire!"

"I see," O'Malley said. "And you'll base your plea on that? Well, I'll fight you, Kelly. It's a pretty story, of course. But where's the slicker?"

"I haven't it," Kelly admitted. "It burned, for all I know."

"How would *it* happen to burn, and the hat not?"

Kelly countered, "How'd half the third floor happen to burn and the rest of it not? I'll meet your arguments, Inspector. We'll let the court decide."

"You forget that I've witnesses who will swear they heard your client threaten Fraley," the inspector said. "Who saw him attack Fraley in a brutal manner only a few days ago. Showing both resentment and premeditation, see? No, I'm for keeping the lieu-

tenant on ice. What time's the hearing? Three o'clock? Okay." He stood up and took his hat from the table. "No hard feelings, Lieutenant Donovan." He spoke affably, as if this had been a social call. "I'll be seeing you."

"Me, too," Hogan added, glowering. "You'll be seein' me!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### FAILURE OF DUTY.

THERE had been cause for Hogan's temper. He did not tell Donovan... why bother the lieutenant with more troubles than he had already? But matters, since the Ridgefield fire, had been far from happy in the quarters of Ladder Truck 9.

Because it covered a high-value district, jammed with hazardous occupancies; because the buildings in that district were, for the most part, Class-B insurance risks or worse; because here fire made a habit of bursting out violently and spreading relentlessly, Truck 9 must keep, always, its full complement of men.

Other companies might struggle along with not enough men to lay a double line of hose, in deference to the taxpayers, who immediately made up in insurance rates for their lower taxes. But economy or no, Truck 9 rolled out to alarms with a full crew. It requires an officer and at least eight laddermen to handle an eighty-five-foot aerial, to go aloft and open a big roof properly in three minutes, to carry up second lines for engine companies already at work, to rescue a dozen persons at once, with perhaps only ten seconds to spare.

So on each shift, Truck 9 carried its full quota. Until Donovan was hurt, that is. Then Hogan took over, with

seven men instead of eight, to give him a hand. Not enough, but it would do.

Then, on the third day that Donovan lay in the hospital, the even-numbered platoon—Donovan commanded the odd-numbered—while fighting a stubborn, smoky jobbing house fire, was blown out through a manhole, and three of its members were sent home for a week to nurse their bruises.

Battalion Chief Stonesifer at once shifted Ladderman Shumski from the second platoon temporarily to the first. That left Hogan only six men, and a bad disposition. But he hitched up his suspenders and promised the chief, without much enthusiasm, that he'd try to get along.

But today, even before he met Inspector O'Malley in Lieutenant Donovan's room at the hospital, things had started badly. At eight o'clock, while Hogan as on-coming officer was clumsily signing the watch log for the preceding night, Battalion Chief Stonesifer arrived stormily at the quarters.

"Have you got a young loud-talkin' upstart named Kearney on this outfit?" the old man inquired.

Hogan nodded. "A pet pig. He's on the roll, but I wouldn't say he was a fireman, chief."

"I'd like a few choice words with him, Hogan," the battalion commander said. He knitted his bushy gray eyebrows and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, a signal to anyone that knew him that trouble was on the way.

Hogan shouted for Kearney. The recruit came at once from the kitchen at the rear of the apparatus room, where he had gone to help himself to coffee.

"Um. Yes, yes, of course!" Stonesifer said upon seeing him. "I remem-

ber him now by his dumb and stupid looks. So you're Kearney, are you? Um. Well, well!" He wiped his mouth again.

Kearney answered, unabashed, "Yes, sir. That's me. What can I do for you?"

"Um." The chief searched for words, coughed twice, and glared. "I happened to see a bit of the record of the coroner's jury, Kearney. On the inquest into Alderman Fraley. It was very informin'. I happened to have a look at your testimony."

"Well, I told the truth."

HOGAN, listening, stepped closer, his long face streaked with curiosity. The other men, at their morning chore of rubbing down the sleek body of the truck, paused with rags motionless and listened too, attentively.

"It wasn't enough for you to go passing over the gun to the police," Stonesifer went on. "It wasn't enough for you to holler out for all the world and a couple of hundred politicians to hear, that the gun was in your commanding officer's hand."

"That's where it was," Kearney retorted. "Even Hogan don't deny that. Donovan's hand, that's where I took it from!"

"Lieutenant Donovan, you say, Kearney," Stonesifer bellowed. "You speak of your officers by their title! But this gun...it had dropped there, Kearney, and you know it! Or it was put there. But that ain't enough. You go blabbing now to the coroner's jury about Lieutenant Donovan having trouble with Fraley..."

"He did," Kearney again retorted. "I heard 'em. So did Hogan. They all heard it. All these men"—he motioned toward the truck.

"And bein' men, and not pet pigs, they kept their damn mouths shut about it, like you'd of done if you'd had a single ounce of respect for yourself and the department."

Hogan put in, unbelievably, "You mean he *told*...you mean he run off...made it look more like the lieutenant killed Fraley?"

Stonesifer answered, "It was on this recruit's evidence the jury made its findings."

"Nuts!" Kearney cried. "I had to tell the truth. I suppose you wanted me to commit perjury, eh? Try to put me out the department for tellin' the truth, will you? Just try!"

Stonesifer rubbed his mouth violently. "No," he admitted, "I can't put you out of the department for that. You've had your little day, gettin' your betters in trouble. But another day's coming. One step across the line, Kearney, just one, and watch out! One break in discipline...one rule broken, and... You keep your eyes on him, Hogan!"

"I'll sit up nights watching," the senior ladderman promised. "Don't have no fear, sir. I'll not go underhanded on him, oh, no! Not me. I'll be as fair and square as he is, sir. I'll remember to act just as he did when he talked to the police."

The men on the floor by the truck looked at one another. Like Hogan, they had no love for Kearney, nor for any other pet pig who entered the fire department by pulling political strings. It wouldn't be long, they told themselves, before there would be something to put down in writing.

The chief drove away in his little red buggy and the crew continued to wash the paintwork on the apparatus and to polish the brass. And Hogan, with permission from headquarters,

turned the company over to Driver Ahearn, who now, in Donovan's absence, was second in command, and Hogan himself went off to visit Donovan at the hospital.

He had been gone an hour, and the short-handed crew had finished the rest of its morning clean-up, when an alarm tapped in over the joker wire.

**K**EARNEY, untroubled by the chief's warning, and by the attitude of the men, had gone back to the kitchen to pour his interrupted cup of coffee. By either chance or design, Ahearn was sitting in the driver's seat when the alarm sounded, and Tillerman Kurtz was leaning against the right rear wheel of the truck. Murphy and Leffingwell were idling on the footboard, and Cohen was bent over the alarm stand.

He snatched the location of the fire from the telephone and glanced back at the kitchen. There Kearney was singing confidently and loudly.

Ahearn jammed his foot on the starter and the motor caught instantly. At once the wheels began to turn. Kurtz was in place at the tiller, Leffingwell and Murphy had their helmets on and were gripping the elbow rail, when Cohen leaped to the rear end of the step.

The truck plunged out through the doors and was thundering on its way, before Kearney could set down his coffee cup. He ran out to the driveway after it. But the great truck was rolling fast, picking up speed. It screamed and dodged through traffic. None of its crew took time to glance back.

The fire was unimportant; in twenty minutes Ahearn was backing into the broad doors of the truck house again. Kearney stood by the alarm stand, scowling.

"A put-up job, eh?" he asked. "Well, smart boys, see where it gets you."

"It got us to the fire," Ahearn answered evenly. His temper was not as violent as Hogan's and he had a leash on his tongue. "And it gets you right into the little book, under failure of duty"; that's where it gets you, Mr. Kearney."

"You'll not get away with it," the recruit predicted. "There's ways and ways of handlin' such things!"

"Okay." Ahearn turned, picked up the telephone, and reported the company once more in service.

When Hogan returned he heard the story, and immediately began to write his official report on it, bearing down hard on his pen, while Kearney openly scoffed. He still was scoffing, after the hearty noon dinner, when he went out to the rear door of the quarters, to talk to a man from the taxi barn across the alley.

He was there, when for the second time that day, Truck 9 rolled out to duty without him. This time a real fire called it, and the job took forty minutes. When Hogan returned he hurriedly completed his report and wrote out a set of charges. In his capacity of acting commander, he then suspended Kearney from duty until such time as the trial board would meet, ordered him out of the house, and hurried to the lieutenant's hearing in criminal court.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### KEARNEY'S VISIT.

**W**HEN Ladderman Hogan entered Donovan's room at the hospital that afternoon his long face was less lugubrious than it had been in a week.

"You're free on bail," he told the lieutenant, and observing Sergeant Sullivan in the room, added triumphantly, "This ape that's guardin' you will be walkin' out any time now. It'll be a relief to your stummick not havin' to look at him."

Battalion Chief Stonesifer and sixty decent men of the battalion had dipped into their pockets and gone Donovan's bond, Hogan explained. Inspector O'Malley had promised new evidence, if only a day or two more were given to him, but the judge had listened to Attorney Kelly's arguments and released his client.

So much Hogan told; he refrained from mentioning Kearney. That situation, he figured, was well in hand and Donovan had enough to worry about for the present.

Therefore, on the eighth day after the Ridgefield building fire, Lieutenant Donovan limped down the steps of the hospital, his head still bandaged, his lungs still sore from the overdose of smoke, the color of his cheeks several shades paler than usual, but no handcuffs on his wrists.

The newspapers at last were screaming the story of the mysterious man who had watched Fraley that evening across from the quarters of Truck 9, the same shabby fellow Donovan saw in the room with the alderman's body.

Without freeing Donovan wholly from suspicion, they seized upon the other suspect avidly. They used up barrels of ink on huge headlines, they dubbed the fellow a "ghost killer," for some reason, and they made a holiday of Fraley's death and Donovan's split head.

Alderman Fraley had been buried in style. Hogan, on his afternoon off duty, had gone to the funeral, and dodging his hated police, found a van-

tage point in an apartment doorway across the street. There, sniffing with indignation, he watched the spectacular proceedings.

Marching men from clubs in half a dozen wards put on white gloves and their best suits and paraded; a band played sonorously; and admirers and politicians did their bit with seven carloads of flowers.

Hogan's eyes missed none of it, but they were unable in the crowd to pick out the man who had spied upon Fraley that first night.

"But if I ever do see him," he promised Donovan that afternoon, "he'll think that a wall has fell on him."

The lieutenant went home from the hospital next morning, his mind still deeply uneasy. He sensed that he had not yet heard the last of this dreadful business. Trouble never left a man that quickly; it still was hanging on, waiting to take a rap at him, when he least expected it. But what would happen next? And when?

At least, he'd look in on the quarters of Truck 9 tomorrow. It would do him good to get back to the apparatus room and hear the cheerful arguments of the men, and smell the rich, mingled odors of brass polish and gasoline and oil. Visitors had been limited at the hospital; Ladderman Hogan was the only member of the crew he had seen.

But on that first evening out of the hospital two events occurred which threw his plans into confusion. He had eaten heartily at a small neighborhood restaurant, enjoying the solidity of the food after eight days of nicely balanced hospital fare. As he came out of the place, a purple September twilight had fallen upon the city, but the sidewalks still were bustling with home-going workers.

OUTSIDE the door he noticed a little short man in a black derby hat, who stood reading the bill of fare, pasted on the window. The man looked up at him without interest, and Donovan, equally incurious, went on. But when he had walked two blocks and discovered the same little man behind him still, the lieutenant quickened his pace and crossed the street.

The man, also, followed. Donovan reduced his speed, and the other slowed down too. There could be little doubt that the fellow was following him. Yet Donovan hated to believe it. It would not do for him to get the jitters. He blamed it on his imagination and turned in to his own house.

His room was on the first floor. This was one of those old gray stone dwellings on a quiet side street, where the roar of boulevard traffic drifted as faintly as the rumble of distant seas. The hallway always smelled of cooking from the landlady's quarters in the basement.

Donovan stepped into the familiar dimness of the hall. His door was first on the right, and as he turned toward it he became aware, as he had not been on the street, that a light was burning in his room.

He opened the door quickly. It was unlocked; he left it so always. But this time someone had entered. A man was sitting at his table, looking at a newspaper. He spoke as Donovan came through the door, and Donovan recognized the voice.

"Lieutenant, I wanted to talk to you," the voice said, its tone wheedling, and Donovan let his clenched fist drop.

"Oh, hello, Kearney," he answered. He could feel his heart thumping against his ribs and was ashamed. But why should Kearney, of all the mem-

bers of the crew, be the first to visit him? Kearney didn't like him, and Heaven knew he didn't like Kearney.

He didn't like any pet pig who got into the fire department by pulling political strings. While he lay in the hospital he'd planned to ask Battalion Chief Stonesifer to have the young upstart transferred away from the outfit to some company that didn't mind pet pigs. "You gave me a surprise, Kearney," he added. "Didn't expect you."

The ladderman got up from the chair. He was in civilian clothes, Donovan noticed, and seemed ill at ease, as if he knew that perhaps he had no right to be here.

"Sit down again," Donovan bade, cheerfully enough. "This isn't your day off, is it?"

Kearney laughed. Donovan never did like his laugh, it was so superior, yet a little out of the side of his mouth. Not quite an honest laugh.

"Every day's my day off, from now on, lieutenant," he said; "every day for a little while, that is. Hogan did not tell you. Well, he's to blame."

"For what, Kearney?" Donovan inquired, his back stiffening.

"For a hell of a lot. He's been laying for me. Trying to get something on me to file charges about ever since you ki . . ." he paused, and went on lamely, "ever since you been away."

Donovan answered, "So he's filed charges?"

"Yeh, and it's a put-up job. That's what I come to see you about. If you or Hogan know what's good for you, you'll pull 'em back. Hogan planned it out with the rest of the men. So when I missed the rig twice in one day..."

"Miss it twice in a day? Miss it twice when it's rolling to alarms?"

"I TELL you they framed me. The rest of the outfit was all just sitting beside the truck waiting, and before I could run in from the kitchen it's gone. On its way. And me left behind. Oh, you don't need to think I don't understand!"

"But you missed the rig!" Donovan reminded him.

"That's got nothing to do with it. Just because I testified 'fore the coroner's jury..."

"Because you *what*?" Donovan asked, incredulously. He realized suddenly what was behind the complaint. "Because you did *what*?"

"I saw you layin' there with the gun in your hand, didn't I? I took the gun, away from you, didn't I? Turned it over to the cops. So when Cohen goes before the jury and says he didn't see no gun, hell, I tell 'em the truth. Just because you're an officer isn't any reason..."

"Listen, Kearney," Donovan said. He felt the bandages tighten on his head and he braced his feet. "So it was *you* got me in this, was it? You blabbing a lot of false testimony to the police and that jury? Well, I understand what Hogan's been doing! Understand plain. It was you, rattin' on me, that—"

"Nuts!" Kearney interrupted. "Don't pull that! I still got friends, even if you did...even if Fraley is dead. He was a friend of mine, sure, but he wasn't the only politician in the ward!"

Donovan moved forward a step and spoke deliberately.

"If you don't start walking out that door this minute, Kearney, I'll kick you out! So help me..."

Kearney, seeing the expression on his face, backed quickly toward the door. He snatched it open, stepped into the hallway, and spoke tauntingly.

"Okay, big shot," he cried derisively. "You asked for it! You got it coming to you!"

With that he was gone.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SHADOWED.

DONOVAN stood a long time motionless after the man departed.

His rage slowly boiled away. What could he expect of a pet pig, after all? And Hogan... wasn't it like old Hogan, backing his chief when he couldn't defend himself? And keeping his big mouth shut about it afterward, for fear of worrying a fellow?

Hogan would be sitting in front of the alarm stand right now, waiting for his nine o'clock bedtime. It was only half a dozen blocks to the truck house. Right down this street, a block on the boulevard, and then into Washington. Donovan remembered that the doctor had been fussy when he left the hospital, had told him to take it easy for a few days.

Easy, hell! He was going to walk to the quarters of Truck 9 tonight if he never walked again! Going to see Hogan and the boys. The rest of them weren't like Kearney. They were firemen, by the holy hydrants! Firemen! That's what they were.

He let himself out of his room, locked the door after him this time, and stood a moment in the hallway, while his better judgment struggled against his desires. Then he finally opened the front door and walked slowly down the five worn stone steps to the sidewalk.

Carlights, like showers of meteors, swept up the boulevard. Night had fallen completely now, absorbing the purple twilight, and its darkness,

brushed by the city lights, took on the color of old brown velvet. No stars were visible, but the long arm of an airplane beacon swung slowly and untiringly around its orbit, above the housetops.

Donovan breathed deeply. It was good to be free again, good to be able to walk, without the suspicious round eyes of Sergeant Sullivan following him. He wondered how Detective Peck was feeling. Better, he hoped. Peck would be out of the hospital Sunday, he had heard. He'd have to look him up, thank him for quick work.

He walked slowly. He had forgotten the man who apparently followed him from the restaurant, an hour ago. His rage at Ladderman Kearney had washed his memory clear of the other incident. He turned at the brightly lighted Boulevard and, staying on the inside of the broad walk, continued slowly toward the truck house.

Early evening promenaders, well-dressed and self-contained, walked singly and in small groups, paying no attention to Donovan. He wore his soft dark felt hat on the side of his head, to conceal the bandages as much as possible. Occasionally he paused, to rest and to glance into shop windows.

Once, as he did so, he looked back. The short little man in the derby hat who had followed him early in the evening was just turning to look into the window of the next shop behind him. Donovan felt a sudden swift surge of anger and insecurity. He knew then that he was being trailed.

His first thought was that this was the man he had seen that other night in the hospital window, against the background of the fire-escape bars.

But he knew at once that it could not be the same; this fellow was leaner and he held his head straighter. But

no matter who he was, he was following, slipping along secretly. Donovan thought of the two remaining dark blocks before he reached the truck house, once he turned off the boulevard.

He swung around and started deliberately toward the man, but when the fellow continued to peer calmly into the window, Donovan paused. At last he turned back and went on his way.

He walked faster than his strength permitted. And next time, when he looked over his shoulder again, the little man was gone. He decided to lie in wait for him, so he turned into the first convenient doorway. It was a stair entrance, between two shops. But as he stepped into it he was conscious suddenly that someone was there ahead of him.

A voice said, "Excuse!"

**T**HE tone was familiar to him. It stirred his memory so that he could hardly prevent himself from crying out. His eyes, taking in the darkness of the entry, made out the man's features.

He was standing face to face with the stranger he first had seen lurking by a billboard that night when Alderman Fraley called with his offer of graft, the one who had cried for help from a high window in the Ridgefield building, and had hit Donovan with the fire ax and escaped.

Donovan took a step closer. He might be mistaken...no, it was the same one. And he saw him better this time. The face had been shaven clean before, but this time it needed a razor, and his hair, Donovan could see now, was almost white...more than gray, at least...almost white in this light, and long around the ears.

The fellow was speaking in a low

mumble. "Excuse!" he repeated. "Please, mister, I am most sorry. I must do it that day, or else I do not escape. Excuse!"

Donovan lunged at him. He caught him by his neck, which was short, for the size of the rest of him, and his fingers closed in. The man shouted once, unintelligibly, and began to pummel Donovan with his bare hands. He was powerful. Donovan was wincing from the blows when the other lifted his foot and kicked vigorously at the lieutenant's shins, and Donovan released his grip.

Before he realized it he was standing alone, panting, and the man was gone. At the same instant the other little man who had been trailing him along the street ran up.

"Lieutenant Donovan!" he was calling. "Oh, there you are! What happened? Are you hurt?"

Donovan started to back away from him, too, but the man was tipping down his lapel with his left hand, disclosing his nickel-plated police badge.

"I'm Rogers. From the bureau, Mr. Donovan. Assigned to guard you. What's happened?"

Donovan panted, "Get that man! There he goes! Through traffic, there, across the street!"

The detective started toward the curb, but swung back.

"Did he—attack you?"

"Get him!" Donovan bade.

The other plunged recklessly into the swirl of traffic, dodged cars, and disappeared in the crowd on the other side of the boulevard. Donovan still was leaning, his knees weak, against the building front, when Rogers returned empty handed.

"Who was it?" he demanded. "What did he try to do?"

But Donovan was angry now. He

had been thinking...what was this dick doing, trailing him? "What *you* doing?" he demanded of him. "Shadowing me?"

"Yes and no. Oh, not to keep you from running out on us! Your bond takes care of that."

"What for, then?" Donovan spoke sharply, his anger churning like a thousand gallon pumper inside him.

"To keep just this kind of thing from happening. To protect you. Somebody tried to get you in the hospital, didn't they? Who was *this* party? I heard you holler, I saw him run, but I can't tell what happened. Inspector O'Malley will want to know..."

"Take a message to O'Malley," Donovan said.

"Surest thing."

"Tell him from me to go to hell."

HE turned on his heel and started toward the corner. He was in no mood to reason...he turned on Rogers again and told him to leave him alone. Now that he was out on bond, was there any excuse for O'Malley putting another cop on his trail?

Rogers, attempting to be inconspicuous, trotted along after him, but not too closely. Donovan, giving him divided thought, thinking first of him and then of the man who had fled, stopped again finally and let Rogers gain upon him.

"I told you not to follow me!" Donovan said.

The detective answered, "Like to accommodate you, but I can't. I get my orders from headquarters."

Donovan hesitated, trying to make up his mind what to do next. And as he stood, his decision was made for him. Across the roofs, down the dark canyon of Washington street, a familiar sound was rising, the shrill, an-

guished wail of the siren on Ladder Truck 9. Donovan began walking forward at once, his ears alert.

For an instant the siren's shriek seemed to be receding. Where was it going? In the other direction? Then it burst out again, full lunged, not a block away.

As he arrived at Washington Street, he could see its blinking crimson lights, high on the frame, flashing their warning.

The truck would have to slow down for the boulevard, he knew. And if he could only get Ahearn's attention, or Hogan's... He stepped down quickly into the street. Men and women were scurrying to the curbs, and the traffic officer on duty at the intersection was dancing up and down, trying to halt the stream of heedless cars from both directions.

He succeeded only in causing a minor jam, and Donovan, as the truck approached, heard its tires grunting against the pavement as the brakes caught and its rear end swung perilously left and right. Tillerman Kurtz, above the rear axle, was fighting the big wheel, and Ahearn, on the driver's seat, was braced back stiffly, his foot on the brake.

Donovan glanced back over his shoulder. Detective Rogers was watching the apparatus, too. Watching it, rather than Donovan. It would take good timing to accomplish what he wanted to do...Donovan knew that. He waited. The tractor front of the ladder truck came up alongside, but neither Hogan nor Ahearn had chance to notice a single obscure pedestrian in a black felt hat, standing below the curb.

Traffic opened ahead; Ahearn gave the motor the gun, and the big truck leaped forward. The tractor started to

swing to the right. That meant that Kurtz would pull the rear end around to this side, almost to the curb, to avoid the farther corner.

**D**ONOVAN stepped back. The detective was less than half a dozen paces from him. Hogan, at the left of the driver's seat, was twisting the siren crank and slashing at the lanyard of the brass bell. Up on his perch, above the rear trailer wheels, Tillerman Kurtz spread his feet and braced them on the rungs of the recumbent aerial ladder. He swung the wheel mightily. The rear trucks started to pull to the left. Donovan glanced again at Detective Rogers. Rogers was still engrossed in the apparatus. So Donovan leaped.

He caught the hand grip above the long running board and pulled himself up. Ladderman Cohen, hanging just ahead of him, turned about with a scowl that was wiped from his face by a look of astonishment.

"You!" he shouted. "Loot!"

Donovan grinned. He glanced back. The detective had not been quick enough. He was tearing through the crowd, running backward and forward like a dog inside a picket fence. He hadn't seen that quick leap and had lost his quarry. Donovan continued to grin.

"Hello, Cohen," he shouted. "Where's the fire at?"

## CHAPTER X.

### INVISIBLE GAS.

**T**HE fire proved to be one of those unspectacular smudges that firemen hate worst. It was confined to the bargain basement of a small and shoddy department store, and was a

great disappointment to those several hundred citizens who, knowing nothing about what was happening inside, considered a fire that failed to light the heavens a very dull and uninteresting event.

Engine 13, first in at this location, already was running out its line as Truck 9 rolled to the curb with Donovan still aboard. Squad 1, swinging the corner on two wheels, careened drunkenly and brought up with a sharp cry of brakes in the car tracks. Somewhere from the direction of Adams street the Insurance Patrol was yelling its way through traffic.

There was no smoke visible. No flame. No heat. No excitement. Passers-by halted momentarily, and then, disappointed, went on about their affairs. Policemen, arriving, did not see fit even to put up their lines, and street cars continued to rumble past, their passengers looking out with scant interest at the apparatus.

Donovan slid down from the running board, grabbed an ax, and hurried forward. He reached into the gear box, under the ladders, where he knew the extra helmet was kept for emergencies, put his felt hat in its place, slid into the extra rubber slicker, which was too narrow across the shoulders, and shouted to Hogan:

"Ladderman Donovan reports, sir!"

He grinned at Hogan's astounded expression and turned toward the store entrance. The captain of Engine 13 was running out.

"Bring that line in!" he yelled at his crew. "Basement!"

Hogan shouted at Donovan, "Set down, lieutenant! Don't you come in!"

"I'm okay," Donovan answered. "I'll go with you. Just take a look." To the engine company commander he called, "What you got?"

"Quite a smudge. Can't tell yet. Stock room. Thicker'n gravy down there."

"Down there? Basement? Hogan, you best break out a coupla false faces."

Hogan again started to protest Donovan's participation. Then he turned obediently and snapped up the lid of the gas mask container on the running board. He dragged out the masks, and clutching one in each hand, ran back toward the door. Donovan already had gone into the building. All the lights were on, in straight, unimaginative rows along the drab ceiling. Donovan was limping, Hogan noticed.

"Hey, Loot! You gotta get out!" the senior ladderman shouted, and ran up again to Donovan. "You're not on duty yet. If you'd get hurt..."

"I know. No compensation," Donovan said, but he went on deliberately.

He could see the broad wooden stairs, their treads painted in an imitation of marble which would not fool a child. The aisles were too narrow, exactly seven feet, the minimum under the building code. Bargain squares were heaped with cheap merchandise, toilet articles, flashy jewelry, notions. He saw bolts of cloth upon shelves; flimsy hosiery, sweatshop dresses, and the festoons of paper flowers above the corset counter. It all stood out bold and uninviting in the uncompromising brilliance of the lights.

But Donovan smelled no smoke. Felt no heat. Saw no blaze. Caught no whiff of chemicals or gases in his throat. He was tired already, breathing rapidly, and his knees were weak. As he started down the stair he discovered that the fire ax in his hand felt astoundingly heavy and he realized that he was foolish to try to fight any blaze in this half-groggy condition.

Nevertheless he went on stubbornly, holding his knees stiff to keep them from buckling as he went down the stair. Even in the basement there was no sign of smoke. He could hear the pounding heels of the crew of Engine 13 on the floor above him, and the thump of brass couplings dragged along the old sagging floors as the hosemen laid line. Somewhere Hogan was yelling at Cohen to bring a ceiling hook and a claw tool. Somewhere else glass crashed. That would be the squad company, breaking in from the rear.

**S**TILL no flame. No smoke. No fumes that he could smell. If the stock on the first floor had been shoddy, Donovan thought as he walked between tables in even narrower aisles than above, this in the basement was worse than junk. And to his professional eyes, it was the most villainous junk in the world.

He could see it piled all around him. There were imitation ivory toilet articles, dresser sets of cellulose, combs, candlesticks, cheap desk sets, hair ornaments, toys...in all colors and shapes and sizes, but all with one thing in common. Nitro-cellulose.

Of course Donovan hated the stuff. What fireman doesn't? He'd often wondered why civilized governments permitted it. All cheap stores were full of it. And burning nitro-cellulose, he knew, as every fireman knows, is more deadly than gunpowder, once fire gets into it.

It burns less spectacularly, of course. Burns fast, with a small creeping white smoke. But he knew it wasn't the smoke that made it dangerous, any more than the flame. It was the invisible gases it gave off, gases which no human nose could detect, gases which often acted hours after they

were inhaled, filling a fireman's lungs with torment, knocking him so completely out that members of the other platoon must put on white gloves and carry him solemnly to his grave.

Donovan sniffed. Still nothing to smell. It was certainly a good thing that the fire wasn't on these tables here. A man in overalls shouted to him:

"Hey, you! You with the ax! Back this way. I've got the door closed, to keep drafts out. Yes, sir. In this stockroom."

"What you got stored in there?" Donovan demanded.

The man answered, "Woolen blankets, mostly, and yard goods."

Not cellulose, then. But wool could be bad enough. Donovan glanced back. Hogan was running toward him, He carried an ax and a grappling claw. Cohen, behind him, dragged the ceiling hook, and wore his gas mask, strapped to his shoulders, but hanging loose, flapping on his chest. Leffingwell and Kurtz were at the foot of the stair, and Murphy, on their heels, was strapping the second gas mask as he ran.

Behind them the members of Engine 13 were dragging their hose. The big brass nozzle like a sparkling cannon thrust itself forward in their midst. There'd be plenty of water in a couple of minutes. Donovan opened the door the man indicated and stepped cautiously through it.

This was a stockroom. Oh, there was fire, all right. Smoke curled along the ceiling, and the place was hot. The dim electric lights were haloed in yellow circles. Boxes and cases stood ceiling deep everywhere. Somewhere among them the fire was nibbling.

"We can't seem to find it," the man in overalls said. "Looked for it twenty minutes before we called you."

Donovan realized suddenly that his

head ached from this unaccustomed exertion. Panting, he began to move cases. They were heavy and stacked in confusion.

"Think it's in here?" he asked.

**D**ONOVAN saved his breath. He merely nodded, but even that made his head ache. Hogan and Murphy were spilling other boxes in a corner, and Cohen, with his ceiling hook, was poking experimentally into dark corners.

"Ready for water?" the commander of Engine 13 demanded from the door.

"In a minute," Donovan answered.

The engine company officer yelled, "Charge line! Engine 13, charge your line! Water...water...charge line!"

Other voices on the stairway and on the first floor picked up the words and flung them like echoes back through the doorway from the street.

"Here comes the pressure," a pipe-man warned.

The men around the nozzle gripped it expectantly, even though the shut-off was closed and no stream could pound out of its tip.

"Knock over that pile of boxes," Donovan ordered.

He saw Hogan start toward a heap of cardboard containers in the corner, and at the same instant Leffingwell said, "Sir, I got to get out!"

When Donovan glanced into his face he saw agony there. The man's eyes were popping, his skin was clammy. He swung on one foot in a ridiculous kind of waltz step, and his knees bent. Donovan caught him as he fell.

"Heads up, men!" he warned. "Watch out for the gas!"

Funny it hadn't caught him first! Just out of the hospital, and with a broken head in the bargain. And ten

years older than Leffingwell on top of that. He let the younger man down as gently as he could. Hogan was poking at the same pile of boxes. The others of the crew had halted and looked, with fear stamped plainly on their faces, at Leffingwell sprawled there on the dirty floor.

"Hand, Murphy!" Donovan gasped. "Give hand. Put on your mask...you too, Cohen. Masks."

The men of Engine 13 still stood in the doorway, their hose nozzles poised, like gunners on a fire step. Donovan said, "Well, get a move on, Cohen!"

But the recruit was standing awkwardly, as if his fingers were paralyzed trying to find the elastic headstraps of the mask. Then, without warning he, too, stiffened and dropped backward to the floor. Donovan peered down unbelievably at him.

"Murphy!" he shouted. But he couldn't see Murphy. Couldn't see Hogan, even. Was he going blind? He blinked. No, he could see the smoke. Could see the dim electric lights. Could see a pair of feet protruding from behind a stack of boxes.

Another voice said, "Got to get out, too!"

This was Kurtz, staggering toward the door. The engine crew caught him and carried him. Donovan tried to reason things out. Everybody was down. Even Hogan. Alone of his crew, he still was standing. His mind was shaky as his knees, however. He felt a sudden, unreasonable fury at the men who had fallen.

He bent over Murphy and picked him up, and dragged him to the air. Then he went back, while the captain of the engine company shouted at him to stay out. He hit the engine captain

across the mouth, without provocation, and waded back into the room.

The captain yelled, "Rescue squad! Get rescue squad! Gas masks! Monoxide!"

**H**E knew the symptoms. Carbon monoxide makes a man fight.

Makes even a gentle soul unreasonable and wild and violent, and within six or seven minutes leaves him dead.

Donovan was leaning over Cohen now. He was swearing to himself in a blurred voice. Cursing his crew. Calling them unpardonable things. Charging them with cowardice and with not being men. He could stand a little smoke himself! These laddermen acted like civilians! They weren't laddermen any more. Just pet pigs. *He* could take a little gas...

He was dragging Cohen toward the door now. A heap of boxes obscured the view of the engine crew there. But he'd take Cohen out and come back for more.

But he did not get Cohen out. Without warning something seemed to strike him across the back of his neck, and he dropped. As he fell, a heap of boxes tumbled on top of him. He lay still.

Squadmen in masks, two minutes later, searching the room through heavier smoke, found the other members of his crew. But they did not find Donovan.

"I guess he got out," one of the engine company said. "Must of. Can't see him."

The squadmen backed cautiously away. At the same time a flame flicked over the top of a packing case and ran along the ceiling. Donovan lay just beneath it, hidden from view.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

*Rufus Sayville, entering the Adirondack wilderness of 1820, finds  
that other men have a curious, even a deadly,  
interest in his mission*



*Novelette—  
Complete*

# The Wolf of Cobble Hill

By **WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE**

Author of "Strange Brethren,"  
"Mountain Murder," etc.

## CHAPTER I.

### FOUR AGAINST ONE.

**H**OW sweet the breeze! How fair  
the mountains, rich green near  
at hand and in the far distance  
of a blue that made the soul ache with

its beauty. If it had not been for the  
two horsemen behind who kept pace  
with him, Rufus Sayville would have  
had a better nose for that air and a  
less disturbed eye for the mountains.  
He looked to the priming of his pis-  
tols and resolved to try again to shake  
the strangers off.

All the way up from Lake Cham-  
plain into the high country they had  
followed him, at first without being