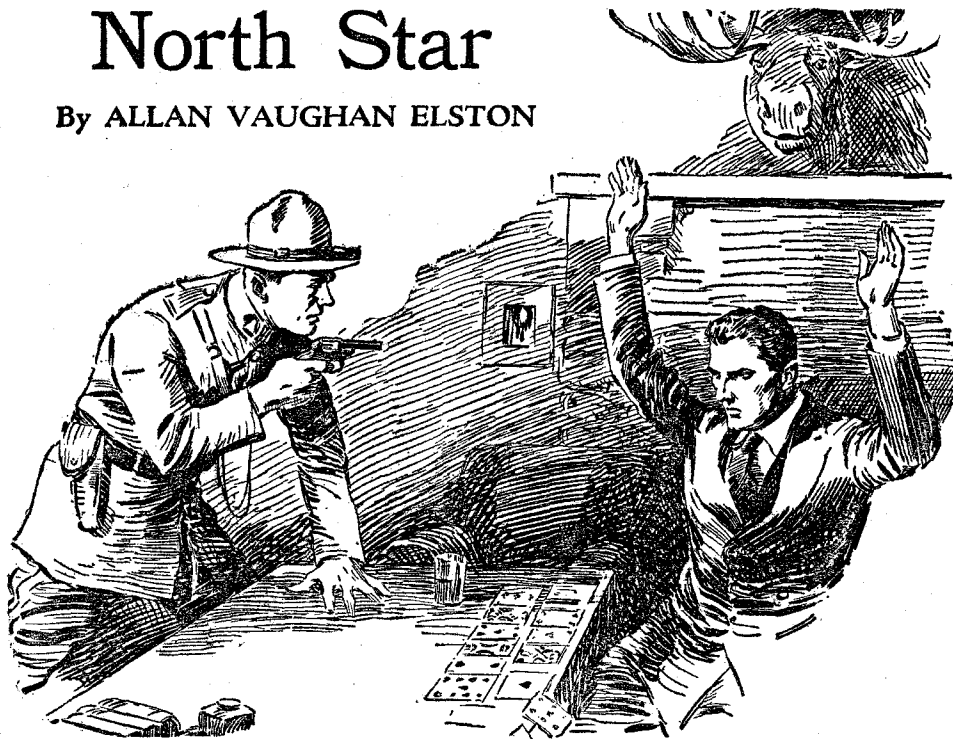


North Star

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON



It was Terrance's first arrest of a murderer

One of the strangest clues ever used leads Mountie Terrance Shawn on the trail of a murder suspect

SIGHTING the house through a vista of aspens, Terrance Shawn dismounted. He led his roan a little way into the trees, removed the saddle, staked the horse to graze in a swale of grass. Afoot and cautiously he moved on, and at the edge of the wood he again caught sight of the house.

It was a low, log house with a stone chimney, the remote hunting lodge of a Toronto sportsman. The owner, Terrance knew, only used it during July and August. This was September. The man using it now had no right to be here at all.

A trapper had brought the tip to Ruppert's Lake barracks—that a felon named Carsters was tucked away at this lodge.

"You got no experience, Shawn," waspish Inspector Grand had barked out. "Confound it, young man, you're just a half-baked rookie with a pleasant disposition, nice table manners and a collar ad face. But with every seasoned constable out on the trail, and me laid up with lumbago, who the hell else can I send?"

Fifty miles north of the barracks, the most youthful member of his troop now moved forward into the open. He loosened his holster flap, squared his jaw grimly. Half-baked, was he? Well, he'd show that red-nosed old rooster, Grand! And all those other wise-cracking vets at the barracks. When he brought his man in, maybe

they'd quit riding him. They'd hazed him unmercifully since the time when, after some prankster had stolen Terrance Shawn's razor for thirty-six hours, Inspector Grand at inspection had failed to note any sartorial imperfections.

Now, six feet in his boots, with his brass buttons catching the noon sun, with his shoulder strap looping upward from his belt in an oblique ribbon of sheen, with his smooth cheeks barely less scarlet than the blouse of his uniform, Terrance Shawn moved on toward the house. Smoke sifted from the stone chimney, so he knew his man was here.

He arrived under a window. Peering in, he saw Carsters. To make sure it was Carsters, Terrance drew out a warrant and a description.

ALEX CARSTERS: wanted for the murder of a tourist at Windsor, and robbery of six thousand dollars. Age, 30; height, five feet ten; weight, 160 lbs; eyes, brown; hair, brown and curly; slight cleft in chin; dresses neatly; was once a shipping clerk at Ottawa.

Below were photographs, both a frontal view and a profile. Immediately it was clear to Shawn that here was the man he wanted.

Carsters was seated at a table, playing solitaire. The room in which he sat was furnished to the taste of the wealthy sportsman who owned it. There were deep, leathered chairs, a divan, thick rugs and a radio. A moose head was mounted above the hearth. A saddle on the hearth's apron suggested that the fugitive had a horse.

TERRANCE drew his revolver, made sure of the loads. Then, stooping, he moved along the wall to the door. Abruptly he pushed the door open and stepped in.

"Crown's warrant, Mr. Carsters."

Carsters, with all color draining from his face, looked up. He blinked at the red-coated intruder, and at the level gun.

His protest came in a shrill whine. "Carsters? My name isn't Carsters."

"Put 'em up." Terrance advanced a step. This was the first time he had ever arrested a murderer. His fingers seemed all thumbs as he brought out the handcuffs. Carsters' hands were up now. Terrance managed to click a cuff on each wrist.

He disarmed the man. Then he stood back, with a flushed and almost sheepish smile. He had expected a gunfight. Instead, the business was absurdly simple. These murderers weren't so tough, after all.

This one had a weak, sensitive face and shifty eyes. His whine came again, "I tell you you got the wrong man!"

But when Terrance held up the illustrated description, Carsters wilted. He drooped for a while on his manacled hands. When he looked up, he tried frantically to bribe his captor.

"Let me go, kid, and I'll slip you a thousand!"

Terrance shook his head. But the offer proved to him that the man's loot was hidden near by.

"Two thousand."

"Not for all six thousand," Terrance said. "By the way, where is it?"

Carsters dropped forward on the table in complete dejection. His shoulders shook. The case against him was clear, for his crime had been well witnessed. A capital verdict was certain.

Terrance found no loot on his person. He now removed the cuff from the left wrist and snapped it to a round of the heavy oak divan. After securing the man's ankles with a rope, he searched the house.

Then he searched outside, in out-buildings and in a score of likely places. Finding no loot, he realized that the possible sites for a cache were too many to be covered by one searcher in a single day. The thing to do was to take Carsters in. Inspector Grand, at his convenience, could then send a detail to hunt everywhere near his lodge.

It was now 2.00 P.M. At a distance through the woods Terrance could see Carsters' horse picketed by a spring of water. Starting now, he calculated, by midnight he should get his man as far as the Frenchman's. Tomorrow they could press on to Ruppert's Lake.

"We're riding," Terrance announced briskly when he re-entered the lodge living room. "Sure you don't want to tip me to where the money is? You might as well. Grand'll send the whole troop back here, if he has to. They'll dig it out of some stump, sooner or later."

Carsters, in deep despond, appeared not to hear him. "This'll kill her!" Terrance heard him moan.

"Kill who?"

Carsters looked up. "My wife."

"Married man, are you?"

"Ten years to a day," the man admitted.

"You mean today happens to be your tenth wedding anniversary?"

"It doesn't just happen. It is, and that's why I'm here. I'm sticking around just to hear her voice, at six o'clock." Carsters gave a jerk of his head toward the radio.

"The radio?" Terrance puzzled.

"But it's dead, isn't it?"

"It works. I tried it."

CROSSING to the radio, Terrance turned on the switch. The response was a faint sound of music from some far away station. Then

Terrance noted a row of storage batteries in a box beneath. Evidently the sportsman owner had brought them here at his recent seasonal visit, and the batteries still had power enough to operate the tubes.

"Your wife," Terrance prompted, "was going to talk to you over the air at six this evening?"

"No. She doesn't know I'm here. Hasn't seen me for years. But she's a good kid. We were married just ten years ago tonight, and so I wanted to hear her sing."

"An entertainer, is she?"

"A star," Carsters said. "Lucille LaSalle. Haven't you heard her?"

"But your name's Carsters!"

"She sings as Lucille LaSalle."

"At six tonight?"

"Always from six to six-thirty on Fridays," Carsters asserted, "over KPK from Quebec."

"Sorry," Terrance sympathized, "but you won't hear her this time. Because at six o'clock we'll be in the woods about half way to the Frenchman's." He released his prisoner's ankles, took the handcuff from the divan round and snapped it back on the man's left wrist.

Carsters whined: "Listen, kid. Why can't we start at six-thirty? If I hadn't stuck around here to hear her sing, you wouldn't 've got me. We were married just ten year—"

"Hold on. I think you're just stalling for time. Stringing me along. Because a star singer wouldn't hook up with a bird like you."

"But I wasn't always like this," Carsters argued. "Never was in any trouble till two years ago. Then Lucille left me, and hasn't seen me since. Every chance I get, I listen in when she sings."

His show of sentiment almost con-

vinced Shawn. Yet it must not be permitted to influence him. "Sorry. Like to oblige you, Carsters, but it's two-ten by my watch, and we got to be riding."

"Listen. You'd like to take in the cash too, wouldn't you?"

"The loot? Sure."

"All right." Carsters spread his linked hands resignedly. "If I tell where it is, can I hear her from six to six-thirty?"

Terrance eyed him suspiciously. Could this renegade want to hear his wife sing as badly as all that?

"That's why I holed up here," the man wheedled.

"But," Terrance objected, "you've been here at least five days."

"That trapper tipped you?"

"He did."

The culprit grimaced wryly. "And I thought he swallowed it when I said I was only the caretaker!"

"You didn't fool him. He recognized you from a poster, then tipped us at the barracks."

"Soon as he was gone," Carsters admitted miserably, "I should have lammed out. But I wanted to stick till Friday. Lucille only goes on the air once a week, and so—"

"Do I understand," Terrance cut in impatiently, "that you'll tip me to your cache if I let you sit here four hours longer?"

"Sure. That's it," the prisoner promised eagerly.

WELL, why not? If the fellow was dippy enough to make a trade like that, why not profit by it? Grand would be bowled over, Terrance knew, if his rookie brought in both the felon and the loot.

"It's a deal," he decided finally. "Now where is it?"

"I'll tell you at six-thirty."

"You'll tell me right now, or we start riding."

"How do I know you'll keep your bargain?"

"You'll have to take my word for it."

"You swear you won't cross me up?"

"Sure. Cough up that money and we'll stand pat till sundown."

Carsters surprised him by motioning with his manacled hands toward the hearth apron. "Count four stones from the left, kid."

Terrance went to the hearth, found the fourth stone from the left loose. Upturning it, he discovered a flat package. Money was in the package. The count of it was six thousand dollars.

"You gave your word," Carsters shrilled.

"And it's good," Terrance said.

At half past five he went to the kitchen and brewed tea. A few tins of salmon were in the larder there, and some crackers. With these, in the living room, the Mountie and his prisoner, made supper. The shadows of the forest were now long outside.

Terrance lighted an oil lamp. Promptly at six he went to the radio and turned it on. A schedule of wave lengths was on the wall there, and from this Terrance was able to tune in on KPK at Quebec. Mellow words filled the room:

"This is KPK, Voice of the North, broadcasting the regular Friday evening program of Turkblend cigarettes. Once again we are pleased to present Lucille LaSalle in a selection of melodies, new and old."

Carsters sat in a tension of eagerness. The sweetly appealing voice, when it presently came, seemed to hold him in a spell. And Shawn himself

felt distinctly relieved. There could be no hoax about this, he thought. For here indeed was the singer predicted by Carsters at six o'clock.

As night came now to these northern woods, Lucille LaSalle sang "In the Gloaming." Carsters, when she finished, was sobbing. The man was a rank sentimentalist, Terrance thought. Or was he sincere? Was it all a racket? Was the fellow trying to get under his skin?

"Keep the Home Fires Burning" came to them now, across half a thousand miles of dark forest. In spite of himself, Terrance Shawn was lured into an absorbed attention. The voice enchained his sympathies, filled him with pains of regret. Three were here, it seemed: himself; a felon; and the felon's bride of ten years ago tonight.

Bunkum! This wouldn't do at all. Terrance arose impatiently. He mustn't listen. He was a policeman and he had his man; in fifteen minutes he must start him on the trail to—

"The Long, Long Trail" came seductively now to intrude upon the sensibilities of Terrance Shawn. He paced sternly to the far end of the room, stood with his back to the radio, looked at his watch. One more number and the beastly business would be over.

And then to Ruppert's Lake with both his man and the loot. A double triumph! Inspector Grand, the blustering old bellows, would have to pipe down after this.

THEN, with a chill, Terrance Shawn felt a shiver of flesh at the nape of his neck. A cold, round circle pressed there. Almost instantly he knew it was the muzzle of a gun.

Back of his ears came a click. The gun was cocked, now.

"Up high, pretty boy." The voice

was not Carsters'. "Don't make me blow your head off, pretty boy."

Terrance raised his hands. Then slowly he turned to face a heavy-set, bearded man in a coonskin cap. The bore of a big gun touched Shawn's chin. Beyond, Carsters sat grinning on the divan.

"Unlock them handcuffs," the bearded man said. He took Shawn's revolver, drove him with a cocked gun at his back to Carsters.

When he was released, Carsters' first move was to shut off the radio. "Right off the bat, Pete," he laughed, "I saw he wasn't dry behind the ears yet. So I kidded him along."

"Got a horse, has he?" Pete asked.

"Sure he has, tied off in the woods somewhere. Round it up, Pete, and mine too." Carsters took the money from Shawn's pocket.

Pete gave him one of the guns. Carsters made Terrance sit on the divan with his arms raised. Then Pete went for the two horses.

"Pete was out," Carsters explained, "when that trapper stopped in here the other day. Pete walked in on us blind. But the trapper was dozin' by the fire and didn't see him. So Pete ducked out of sight."

The humiliated eyes of Terrance asked questions, and Carsters explained further:

"Pete said, 'Next time be more careful. Don't let me walk in on no party.' So I said, 'Next time you're due to show up, Pete, if there's anyone here, I'll be playin' the radio. That'll put you wise.'"

"Well?" Terrance inquired miserably.

"Well, Pete was due at sundown tonight; so all I had to do was kid you into a four hour wait and then be playin' the radio."

"You mean that singer isn't your—?"

"My wife? Hell, no. Never saw the dame, and she never heard of me."

"And Pete?"

"He steered me here, and we holed up together. But the natives know him pretty well, so he keeps to the woods all day. Fishing in a slough, mostly. Sundown, he comes in."

A cocked gun was still at Shawn's chin, and Carsters looked as though he might shoot it. Terrance Shawn almost hoped he would. Sudden death, anything was preferable to facing stern old Inspector Grand back at the barracks. Grand, if he ever saw Grand again, would break over him like a Hudson Bay hurricane.

Terrance shivered. Yes, Carsters might as well shoot and have it over.

Carsters did not shoot. When Pete announced that the horses were ready, he merely crashed his gun down on Terrance Shawn's head.

Terrance came to his senses with a headache, at 9 P.M. He was alone with a lighted lamp. He was afoot and fifty-six miles from the barracks. And Carsters and Pete, mounted, would now be two hours away. A derisive note from Carsters lay on the table:

"So long, handsome. Next time maybe they won't send a boy on a man's chore."

INSPECTOR GRAND indeed broke like a hurricane over Terrance Shawn. Yet the teeth of his blast was ridicule. Amongst men in barracks, he knew, no lash stings like ridicule. Grand himself, a fat man of fifty with a red nose and a shrewish wife, had at times felt the scorch of it. So now, while he tongue-lashed Terrance, he allowed his office door to stand open. Thus insuring that the

story would soon be all over the post, and nature, in the form of a hazing, would take its manly course.

"Kept you sitting right there till his pal came, did he? Got you to play 'In the Gloaming' on the radio? Did he? So while you waited in the gloaming, his pal came along and tickled you with his gun!"

"Yes sir," Terrance admitted wretchedly.

"Well, young man, don't you ever go out and lie down in the woods. Because if you do, you're so damned sweet and green the caribou 'd eat you."

"Yes sir."

Grand's exasperation then broke all bounds. He came from behind his desk with roars and blaspheming bel-lows.

"Now get out of my sight!" he finished in a blaze. "Go find some nice old lady and pinch her for playing with loaded tiddledy-winks. Go anywhere. Just keep out of my sight for a week."

Terrance withdrew in bitterness. In the courtyard, a quartette of redcoats stood with heads together singing in effeminate falsettos, "Keep the Home Fires Burning."

With his feet dragging in the dregs of a hopeless humiliation, Terrance Shawn got as far out of hearing as he could. Then he remembered one small and unimportant item which he had omitted from his report to Inspector Grand. Now he brought it from his pocket. It was the derisive line of writing from Carsters. "So long, handsome—"

It was no good to him, Terrance thought, and was about to tear it up. Then he realized that it furnished a sample of Carsters' handwriting. But what good was that? Terrance's brow puckered thoughtfully.

The ghost of a thought became an idea. In a little while the idea became a resolution. He veered his aimless direction and made for the depot at the end of the Ruppert's Lake branch.

AT a door in the city of Quebec, and on the tenth floor of an exclusive apartment, Terrance knocked. A French maid admitted him. Then, after a brief wait, Lucille LaSalle came tripping in.

Sight of brass buttons and polished leathers brought her to a shocked halt. "Goodness! Am I in a jam, or something?"

"No, miss," Terrance assured her. "But I am."

He saw that she couldn't be a day older than twenty-one. Which made Carsters' claim that she had been his wife for ten years all the more absurd.

"What a relief!" She appraised her tall, red-coated caller with a brisk interest. "For a minute I thought I might have parked overtime, or forgot to put out a campfire, or something."

She'd think he was crazy, Terrance worried, when he told her why he was here. He himself admitted that it was a long shot. Not one chance in a hundred. But it was the only idea he had and so he was resolved to see it through.

Lucille LaSalle glanced at the card brought her by the maid. "You mean you're in trouble, Mr. Shawn?" Her pencilled brows arched sympathetically. She was a golden blonde, Terrance saw, slight and exquisite. Seated now, she had one knee folded under her like a schoolgirl. Terrance quite failed to understand how a person so young could already have become a star.

"Up to my neck in it, Miss LaSalle," he said.

Then Terrance told her in detail about the hoax worked on him by Carsters. "So, you see, I rate about knee high to a prime chump with old man Grand," he finished wryly.

She was shocked. "You poor boy! And it wasn't your fault at all. What a perfect bear your inspector must be!"

Terrance flushed. His idea, now that he came to the point of expressing it, seemed more forlorn than ever. "It's this way," he began embarrassedly. "This crook said you'd been his wife for ten years, which is a laugh. But the fact remains that he knew you sing at a certain hour each week over KPK."

"But lots of people know that," she pointed out. "They can read it on the radio page of any paper."

"Carsters, holed up in the woods, couldn't have read any papers lately," Terrance said. "Which means he'd been keeping pretty well up with you. You're his favorite number, I take it. Listen, Miss LaSalle. How long have they been featuring you in radio?"

She made a face. "You're not very complimentary, Mr. Shawn. Don't you have a radio at your barracks? But if you must know, I've been on the air about two years, first for one sponsor and then another."

"I was talking to an old stager once," Terrance said. "He told me that stars of the stage and the screen and the air get a lot of what he called fan mail. Is that right?"

Her eyes widened. "Fan mail? Why, yes."

"Then *you* must have a bale of it."

"I imagine I have," she admitted.

"Do you read those letters?"

"Not all of them, I'm afraid. But I keep them, so that if I have to, I can prove to my sponsors that I'm making good."

"That's just fine. Then if you've got a whole trunkful of this fan mail, maybe we could pick out a letter from our man Carsters."

"How perfectly absurd!" she objected. "Surely a man like that, a murderer, wouldn't—"

"Wait a minute, miss. He's not a regular crook. Just a shipping clerk gone wrong. Sentimental and human, I think. And we know he's followed your programs. So if you've accumulated a thousand odd of those mush letters, why couldn't one of them be from him?"

"And if one is?"

"I could spot it, maybe, by the handwriting." Terrance displayed his sample of Carsters' handwriting.

MISS LASALLE rang for her maid. The maid brought a box of old letters. "These are only a few," the singer explained. "There's a lot more down at the studio."

"You'll let me compare the handwritings?"

"Of course. And I'll help you. I think it's thrilling, Mr. Shawn."

When the letters were dumped on a table, Terrance and his hostess put their heads together like conspirators.

Terrance had no faint expectation of finding one signed with the name, Alex Carsters. Carsters would most likely use some other name. But if he wanted an answer or a photograph, he would give an address.

The afternoon was futile, though. In no case did the writing of a letter compare with the sample.

"Come again tomorrow," Miss LaSalle invited. "I'll have a lot more of this sort of mail brought over from the studio."

Not only the next day, but the next and the next, the discredited rookie

from Ruppert's Lake huddled over a heap of handwritings with KPK's most popular entertainer. The supply of letters, accumulated over a two-year career, seemed endless.

"It was just a brainstorm," Terrance admitted sadly when, after four days of research, it developed that Alex Carsters had never written a letter to Miss LaSalle. "It was one of those long shots where, if you guess right, you're a wiz, and if you guess wrong, you're a chump."

"It was heaps of fun, though, don't you think?" Miss LaSalle tucked her arm cozily under Terrance Shawn's and they went out to a restaurant. This made the third time they had been there.

Later, dancing between courses, she permitted her head to rest snugly against the shoulder of his red coat. And next morning, in her roadster, she drove him to the station.

"Listen, Terry," she coaxed at the gate, "can't you get a furlough the first week in October?"

"A furlough? Not a chance. But why?"

"My aunt's giving a house party at her place up the river. I may invite any guests I want, so I'm inviting you."

Terrance sighed. "Wished I could. But there's not a chance. After this, I'll be in worse than ever with Inspector Grand."

Yet on the five hundred mile train ride back to Ruppert's Lake, he decided to ask for the furlough anyway. "Can't get in any worse with the old man than I am already," he thought.

IN the barracks office he saluted. "Sir, I'd like a furlough the first week in October."

Inspector Paul Grand looked up from his work. Seeing his truant

rookie standing there, he exploded in a righteous wrath. "What? *You* want a furlough? Of all the infernal nerve!"

"Yes sir. May I have one, please?"

"No," roared Grand. An indignant fire lighted him, his cheeks puffed; one of his huge fists banged down on the desk. "A furlough? Why, you half-baked young whelp, I'll give you a furlough in the kitchen, peeling potatoes."

He glared furiously from under lowering brows. "And if it's no secret, young man," he demanded, "where you been keeping yourself this past week?"

"You instructed me to keep out of your sight, sir."

"Answer my question," bellowed Grand.

"I've been in Quebec, sir, trying to dig up a clew on Carsters."

"Oh, you have, eh?" A biting irony sharpened the inspector's voice. "And just what sort of a clew, young man?"

"I thought," Terrance explained humbly, "that he might have written a fan letter to his favorite singer. But he hadn't."

Grand stared. For a moment the exposure of this far-fetched ruse of detection quite robbed him of retorts. "Well of all the damnfool ideas! Fan letter, eh? I've heard of catching snipes with a sack, and I've even heard of putting salt on a bird's tail. But catching a murderer with his fan letter—ye gods and mackerels!"

"He's a man and human," Terrance defended, "so he might have written one."

"He might have but he didn't!" The inspector roared his derision. "That's rich! The boys 'll get a big laugh out of that, young man. Now fan yourself along to the kitchen and start peel—"

Inspector Grand was interrupted by the entrance of a fur-capped courier of the woods. The man came darting in, excitedly, evidently with some urgent report.

"Theese fellah Carster," he chanted.

"By gar I see him with my own eye."

Grand turned sharply. "What's that, Jacques? You've seen Carsters? Where?"

"He ees hide in a cabin at Fond du Bois," Jacques announced. "I see 'nother fellah with him. They are hide there, where I cache my fur, and I see them, *monsieur*."

"At Fond du Bois!" Grand, forgetting the presence of Shawn, reached across the desk and rang a bell. "Why, that's only thirty miles from here. I know that cabin. Hang it, I'll go after those birds myself. Orderly!"

An orderly came running in.

"Orderly, get my horse and rifle. And tell Sergeant Wolfe to report at once. Hurry."

Terrance stepped forward with an eager plea. "Sir, let *me* go after Carssters."

Grand whirled angrily. "You? Send *you*? Do you think I'm crazy? I'd as soon send a pet puppy. Out of my way."

Grand, forgetful of his recent lumbago, came roaring like a dynamo out from behind his desk. He strapped on a belt and pistol, snatched his spurs from a hook on the wall.

Terrance was white-lipped, yet strangely persistent. "Please sir, if you *must* go yourself, take me with you."

"I'm taking Sergeant Wolfe with me," Grand shouted. "Out of my way."

Having shattered all other precedents of his troop, Terrance Shawn now crashed one more. He stepped

closer. He whispered half a dozen brief words into his chief's ear.

And Grand reeled back as from a blow. He stared with bulging eyes at his rookie, yet made no retort. When Sergeant Wolfe, hardest riding veteran of the post, came in a moment later and saluted, Grand was still in a pose of petrefaction.

"You sent for me, sir? Boots and saddles, is it?"

Grand, still staring at Terrance Shawn, sat down heavily. Without turning his head he answered in a strained voice: "Never mind, sergeant. Report back to your post."

Wolfe withdrew. And Grand said, "I'm taking *you* with me after all, Shawn."

H E had not during the past year been much in the saddle. Thus after twenty miles of the ride Inspector Grand's legs began paining him. Five miles farther he was in torture. The lumbago crept up his back. Two miles short of Fond du Bois the man's ailment dragged him to the ground.

He was unable to stand. A drizzle of cold rain made it worse. Terrance Shawn got Grand's back against a tree, wrapped him in blankets, built a shelter over his head, made a fire.

Terrance then took the warrants and rode on. It was dark when he reached the cabin at Fond du Bois. He peered in, saw Alex Carsters seated against the candle light there. The man Pete was with him. With his own pistol in one hand and Inspector Grand's in the other, Terrance kicked open the door.

A bullet grazed his neck as he stepped inside. He heard Carsters yell, saw the man dive for a rear exit. Pete stood his ground, growling like a bear

at bay, shooting. Terrance, side-stepping, fired twice at Pete and once at Carsters. More shots and shouts; something knocked Terrance to his knees. He fired again. He heard a body thump down on the hearth. Then the candle was out and everything was still.

In a little while Terrance staggered dizzily to his feet. His elbow mopped a warm streak from his cheek. When he relighted the candle he saw that both of his men were down. Carsters was groaning. Pete was dead. All of the six thousand dollars was on Carsters.

Terrance paddled a canoe out into the moonlight. It was the first week in October, on the river below Quebec. His companion, framed in cushions there, said: "But I can't understand, Terry. Why did he take you with him? And why did he give you the furlough, after all?"

Terrance grinned joyously. "Inspector Grand," he explained, "is like a lot of other folks. He can hand it out, but he can't take it."

"Can't take what?"

"Listen, Lucy darlin'. You remember we looked through all those mushy fan letters, hunting for one from Carsters. But we didn't find it."

"No, Terry," she agreed, "we didn't find it."

"I said we might, though, because after all Carsters is a man and human."

"Well?"

"Well, not one of those fan letters was from Carsters, but one of them was from—"

"No!"

"Yes, so help me! One was from that blistered old bull o' the woods—Inspector Paul Grand."

THE END



"Okay, off to jail she goes!"

Hot Water

By CORNELL WOOLRICH

Here was a kidnaping that left the Hollywood movie colony aghast—a kidnaping with a sensational double-cross attached to it

HOT water is two things. In slang it means getting into trouble, in geography it means a gambling joint just across the California state-line in Mexico. Agua Caliente means hot water in Spanish. It means both kinds to yours truly, after what happened that time. I never want to hear the name again.

Ten o'clock Friday night, and all is quiet in Fay North's forty rooms and swimming pool, out in Beverly Hills.

Fay has just finished a picture that afternoon and has said something about going to bed early and sleeping until next Tuesday. I have been all around, upstairs and down, seeing that the doors and windows are all locked and that the electric burglar-alarm is in working order, and I am in my own room just off the main entrance, peeling to pajamas and ready to pound the ear, when there is a knock at my door. It is the butler.

"Miss North has changed her mind," he announces; "she is spending the week-end at Agua Caliente. Please be ready in ten minutes."

I am not asked to go, you notice, I am told I *am* going. That is part of my job. Miss North parts with a generous helping of her salary each week, in my direction, and it is up to me to stick close and see that no bodily harm comes to her. It really isn't an unpleasant job for this reason: on the screen Miss North has become famous for playing tough, rowdy characters,