



The strangers were taking Winters to one of Coronado's fabulous cities—a city of Cibola!

GOLDEN CITY

Lee Winters Story

by Lon Williams

DEPUTY MARSHAL Lee Winters, skittish, superstitious lawman of Forlorn Gap, rode leisurely down one of that semi-ghost town's dusty, deserted streets. His mind was occupied by fears and misgivings concerning his future. He was about through with being a deputy marshal, about ready to preempt some land and settle down. What he needed was a good quitting-place—an eventuality that seemed never to arrive.

Even now a gunshot echoed distantly. Winters touched his six-gun, ascertained its readiness for a quick draw. According to pattern, some killer should soon be riding hell-bent from town, primed to shoot his way out, if necessary. But no such pattern formed in this instance.

However, a few minutes later he did see a rider approaching, unhurried, unperturbed. Advance was at an amazingly slow trot. There was no perceptible

up-and-down movement, only a rise and fall of hoofs and beating, drum-like sounds. *Thump! Thump! Thump!*

Never before had Winters seen a horse so broad and fat. Yet he must have been tremendously muscular, for earth-tremors attended his hoof beats, and all four hoofs pounded as one. *Thump! Thump! Thump!*

Cannon Ball eased nervously to right, and Winters saw close at hand a smooth, twisted face and round, staring eyes under a small black hat.

Thump! Thump! Thump! “Howdy, Winters.”
Thump! Thump!

“Howdy, Shad.”

Thump! Thump! Thump!

Winters, startled, reined up and looked back. How had he known who that was? Shad! Who was Shad?

Shad, too, looked back. Upon discovery that he was watched, he turned south toward Alkali Flat. *Thump! Thump! Thump!* Seconds later he had disappeared behind deserted houses.

Winters spurred to Doc Bogannon’s saloon.

Inside, he found an awesome sight. Seven or eight men stood in a half-circle; a dead man lay before them, a forty-five nearby.

“Winters!” gasped Doc Bogannon. “Am I glad you’ve come!” Bogie was a large man, with dark hair, distinguished-looking head and face, a friendly, understanding countenance. But just now he was pale and scared.

Winters was puzzled that men should look so horrified at a mere corpse. “What happened?”

Bogannon swabbed his face with a handkerchief. “Winters, we were here; nothing unusual was going on. Men had dropped in for morning drinks.” He glanced down. “Roane Corfeld, that corpse there, had just set his empty glass up when those batwings swung in and stood apart, as if held back by an invisible man. Corfeld screamed, *Shadrach Bogus*, whipped up his gun, fired one shot and fell dead.” As Winters knelt to examine Corfeld, Bogie added, “Yes, he’s dead, Winters. Look at those staring eyes.”

Winters glanced up, puzzled. “No blood, Doc.”

“Heart failure, I figured,” said Doc.

“And he screamed *Shadrach Bogus*?”

Bogannon nodded vigorously. “He did, Winters.” The lawman looked at Doc’s customers; they, too, nodded.

Winters straightened, tugged at his gun belt,

lifted and lowered his gun. “Doc, if there ever was a wanted monkey, Shad Bogus is it. He’s supposed to’ve been killed years ago, but I just saw him with my own eyes.” Winters smacked down a coin. “Wine, Doc.”

Bogie poured a large drink. “Winters, I was never one to meddle too much in your affairs, but this time—”

“Bogus is my man,” declared Winters. “I’m going after him.”

Bogannon followed him out. “Winters!”

But Winters swung up and headed out.

HE HAD NO trouble picking up Shad’s trail. It led onto Alkali Flat; there it stretched away south-westward, a line of hoof prints as plain as an ink mark. At their farther end rode Shad on his fat horse, still at a trot. Overtaking that fat plug would be no job at all for a big, rangy horse like Cannon Ball.

But Winters and Cannon Ball did not overtake Shad and his fat horse; by some inexplicable magic, fugitive horse and rider managed to stay ahead. Beyond Alkali Flat, they passed from sight, but they left tracks, and from hour to hour Winters heard that ghostly sound. *Thump! Thump! Thump!* He was led through wild canyons, across hazy *Terre des Revenantes*—land of ghosts—over high, rugged mountains; along dizzy precipices; down into dark forests of pine; and at last, near sundown, into a land of nowhere, a region of shadow and cliff, where tracks and sounds played out and there was emptiness and great silence.

He realized then what he had done. All day he had pursued something that had no reality. Thinking back to Forlorn Gap, Winters knew now that he had experienced an hallucination. Pursuit of gun-monkeys, deadly shoot-outs with killers had frayed his nerves, so that he saw objects with no existence outside his befuddled mind. It was time to go home and rest. It was time to quit, whether he had come to a good quitting-place or not.

He turned back.

In a lonely canyon, a few miles eastward, there was a creek he knew—or thought he knew. Once there, his horse could find his way home, even though Winters himself was lost.

He came by moonlight and shadow to this creek an hour later. At its edge Cannon Ball stopped, alert and trembling. Opposite them a campfire glow spread upward from a cove. That he was about to

find his wanted monkey after all, was Winters' immediate thought.

Gun-hand ready, he splashed across. "Hands up!"

He saw his mistake and relaxed. What he found was no round-eyed fugitive, but a scrawny, bearded little prospector who squatted by a sizzling fish supper and pot of steaming coffee.

He glanced up pertly. "Howdy, Winters."

Winters started slightly. "Don't believe I remember you, neighbor."

"I be Tuckahoe Jonas, Winters." Jonas rose hospitably. "Get down and have a bite, if you're so minded."

An eeriness was here that Winters did not like; Jonas looked more spooky than human. But Winters swung down. "You've little enough to eat, it seems, but I'll drink with you. Then you might direct me to Elkhorn Road. What creek is this?"

Jonas darted a crafty glance at his visitor. "This is Banshee Creek. To get to Elkhorn Road from here— Well, to be honest, Winters, you oughtn't to come here; this country is full of banshees."

Winters gulped.

"Yes, sir, Winters, they're here."

"Maybe you're one yourself?"

"Now, Winters, let's not get into arguments. To reach Elkhorn Road—" He paused, snapped impatiently, "Are you listening, Winters?"

Winters attempted a dry swallow. "Yeah, I'm listening." In fact, he thought nervously, he was listening in every direction.

"To reach Elkhorn Road, Winters, you go upstream. You take to left, to right, left, right, and right, and you go up that which be knowed as Little Banshee until you hear a waterfall. A sandbar's thereabouts, which used to be an island; it was called Dead Man's Island in them days. It linked up with dry land in time, and its dead men went ashore. You can ride out there and take up a gulch to high ground. After that, if you don't run afoul of banshees, and don't stop or get lost, you'll reach Elkhorn Road in two hours flat."

While he talked, Tuckahoe Jonas had poured coffee and passed it to Winters. He now stopped, waited.

Winters had expected to find his drink unbearably hot; to his surprise, he found it just right. But when he'd downed it, its temperature rose suddenly to what he'd originally expected it to be. Scalding inside, he threw himself face down

and drank a quart of creek water.

He got up, his brain in a whirl. "That was a dirty stinking trick, Jonas; I'll have no more truck with you."

Jonas moved about his cooking. "Suit yourself, Winters."

Winters swung onto Cannon Ball and headed upstream. His brain cooled into a sense of exhilaration; his initial fear of banshees dissipated.

BY FULL moonlight, Banshee Creek was revealed for hundreds of yards whooping and dancing down a wild gorge. Winters came to a tributary stream that leaped into Banshee from his right. Jonas had given directions, but Winters remembered none of them; he kept left.

It was then that excitement filled his surroundings, then that exaggerated noises set in. Sound of each splashing hoof was strangely magnified. Iron shoes striking underwater stones clattered and banged. Certainly this was haunted country, but Winters wiped his face defiantly and rode on.

Other tributaries skipped and tumbled into Banshee, but as trails they were all impossible. He kept to Banshee, at last came to a broad sandbar. Also, he heard a waterfall. Of his own volition, Cannon Ball left Banshee there and trudged into a northward-curving gulch. Guided by his own instincts still—or by a ghost—he swung left onto higher and higher ground. As if he had known it was there, he leveled off onto a well-marked trail. Minutes later he rounded a projecting cliff and halted before a scene that sent Winters' right hand slapping down.

But a friendly, gruff, voice stayed his draw. "Well, well! Howdy, Winters. Light and hitch."

Before Winters stood an old log house made of two cabins joined by a dogtrot porch. Upon this porch, lighted by a hanging lamp, six as odd, rough characters as he'd ever seen sat round a circular table. Apparently they'd just sat down to supper; their table was piled with meats, vegetables and pots of steaming liquids.

Forming a second and concentric circle were a dozen hounds. They sat on their haunches, faced inward, their tails lifted. Those tails formed a third circle.

Winters said, "Howdy, people."

"Aw, Winters," grumbled a blond, mustached giant, "don't act like a stranger; get off that big

horse and have supper.”

Winters’ instincts screamed against it, but he yielded to ravenous, gnawing hunger, swung down and left Cannon Ball ground-hitched. “Don’t mind if I do eat a bite. Looks like I’ll be late getting home anyhow.”

“Sure, and why hurry? It’s been a time since a flesh and blood outsider came our way.”

Winters’ guardian angel warned him to hightail it while he could, but he nerved himself and ascended four creaky steps to a creaky floor. Two men slid apart to make table-room. A spare plate was set.

“Dogs,” said he who acted as host, “put your dang tails down so Winters can find a place to set.”

Down went their tails; they went up again as soon as Winters had straddled over a circular bench and sat down.

Winters glanced round in neighborly fashion. “I reckon I don’t know you men, though you do seem to know me.”

“Sure, we all know you, Winters. You’re famous hereabouts.” Winters’ host pointed with a finger. “That long, leathery one-eared gent over there is One-ear Jenkins; he’s English. His losing that ear caused a war between England and Spain in his time. Next is handsome Marco Polo, gentleman fortune-hunter and traveler of bygone days. Him next, with a nose like a pig’s, is Rufus Hiloe, coachman of King George’s time. That big, long-armed gent with a downspout nose is Sir Craggie Hornsworth of Craggiehorn, a mighty poacher of old Scotland in Shakespeare’s day. This pert and positive little frog-face here is Guy Fawkes, who got mixed up in a gunpowder plot some time back. And I— Well, sir, I am Orion Steepledore, master of horse to Sir Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, at Waterloo. Maybe you wonder what we’re doing here?”

Winters tried a dry swallow. “Yeah, what *are* you doing here?”

“That,” said Steepledore, “is a fair question. But, first, you’d better help yourself to supper. If you don’t pitch in, this food will vanish right before your eyes.”

STEEPLEDORE and his companions pitched in, grabbed hunks of meat and sank their teeth into them. Winters forked a cut and placed it carefully on his plate. He lifted his fork again to spear a baked potato.

At that instant something brushed under his elbow. He looked down, saw a big hound swipe its jaws across his plate; his meat disappeared.

Rufus Hiloe wiggled his piggy nose. “Winters, you’ll have to watch that dog.”

“That’s right,” said Guy Fawkes. “You should kick him if he does that again.”

Winters frowned at their canine robber. “What’s his name?”

Fawkes said emphatically, “His name is Shep!”

Winters drew down his lips. Fawkes seemed to have a chip on his shoulder; Winters didn’t like chips on shoulders. “That dog’s an awful tight-hide to be called Shep; should have a hound-dog name.”

Steepledore angered. “Winters, you wouldn’t find fault with our dog’s name, would you?”

Winters counted hostile noses. “Oh, no,” he said quickly. “Shep’s a nice name.”

“All right then,” said Steepledore. “Have some more food.”

Winters speared a potato. “You didn’t tell what you’re doing here, Steepie.”

“That’s because you got interested in dogs. But I’ll tell you, Winters: we’re here for a mighty good reason.” He paused for emphasis, then said, “Winters, we’ve found it.”

Winters felt something strike his right arm. His baked potato disappeared. He turned in time to see Shep swallow it. “Be-confounded!”

One-ear Jenkins gave Winters a leathery look. “Winters, you ought to kick that dog; there’s no need to put up with such aggravation.”

“That’s my opinion, too,” said Marco Polo. “Why don’t you kick him?”

Winters would have liked to blow Shep’s brains out, but he figured he hadn’t better. “I never liked to kick a dog,” he said.

Sir Craggie Hornsworth nodded gravely. “Winters is right. I never liked to kick a dog myself, but there are times when a dog ought to be kicked.”

“Right,” declared Fawkes. “And there’ll never be a better time than now. Winters, you ought to kick that dog; if he stole my food like that, I’d sure kick him.”

Steepledore looked on expectantly, but was disappointed. “Winters, first thing you know, this food will be gone. Eat while you can.”

It was true enough, Winters discovered. Already hardly anything was left. But maybe it was just as well; he wouldn’t have trusted these monkeys and

their food an inch anyhow. Yet he was hungry; he was sure he'd die if he didn't eat. He reached for a shank of what he thought was antelope. Instantly their eyes bored into him, as if they begrudged him even one morsel.

"You said you'd found it," he reminded Steepleadore. "But you didn't say what you'd found."

At that juncture Shep lunged, snatched Winters' shank of meat and gobbled it down, bone and all.

Diners all around laid down their knives and forks. Looks they beamed upon Winters were immeasurably belittling. Fawkes and Hiloe sighed like disgusted old women.

"Winters," said Steepleadore, "why don't you kick that dog?"

"Sure," said Fawkes. "Give him a kick he'll remember."

Jenkins said dryly, "Winters, any man who's a man at all wouldn't let a dog impose on him like you're doing. You ought to kick his thundering guts out; that's what I'd do. No dog could treat me like that."

Sir Craggie said, "A dog tried something like that on me once. I kicked him clean over Finncastle Mountain."

Winters said tartly, "Shep's your dog; why don't *you* kick him?" He faced Steepleadore. "You said you'd found something, Dorie. What was it?"

"Winters, *something* is right."

"Well, what was it?"

"We've found one of them golden cities."

Winters' chin dropped. "You don't say!"

They all wanted to talk then.

"One of Coronado's cities," said Hiloe.

"A city of Cibola," said Fawkes.

"*Gran Quivira*," shouted Polo.

"One of them that Spaniards looked for and never found," avowed Sir Craggie.

STEEPLEADORE swelled proudly. "Yes, sir, Winters, we've sure found it. Gold enough to make your eyes pop. Not quartz; not nuggets. Pure gold!"

Polo declared gustily, "So much gold it would take a thousand ox-teams to haul it."

"Gold that shines," exulted Hiloe.

"So bright it gives its own light," said Fawkes.

Winters said, "I don't believe it."

"Now, see here, Winters!" stormed Steepleadore.

"Easy! Easy!" said Polo.

Steepleadore remembered his manners. "Sorry, Winters; I forgot you're our guest. But it's right there—in that cave, Winters. Right under that mountain."

Steepleadore's angry flare had irritated Winters. He said sarcastically, "Why don't you brave men go in and get that gold? In my book, you ain't found it until you've got it in your mitts."

Steepleadore tossed an arched glance at his companions. "Did you hear that, men? He says why don't we go in and get that gold?"

Winters said crustily, "Well, why don't you?"

Steepleadore winked at Sir Craggie. "Winters, Injuns are in there, that's why."

Winters continued sarcastic. "I reckon you've got 'em hemmed up in there."

Steepleadore eyed him severely. "That's a way of putting it, sir. It happens we don't know whether we've got them Injuns hemmed in, or they've got us hemmed out. One thing is certain, though; every time we try to get in there for that gold, they give us trouble."

Winters scoffed, "Trouble is a two-handed game."

Their dog Shep darted up and licked Winters' face.

Steepleadore sighed. "Winters, why don't you kick that dog off of you?"

Winters thought it wouldn't be a bad idea; he didn't like having his face licked. Yet he was averse to kicking dogs, this one in particular. He said, "What kind of trouble do those Injuns give you?"

"They chase us out, Winters."

Winters felt a hunger-gnaw, but when he looked for food, nothing was left except one small rib-bone wrapped in lean meat. He reached for that, but before he could get his teeth into it Shep lunged and grabbed it out of his hand.

Sir Craggie said impatiently, "Winters, we thought when you rode up that you might be a real man, but from how you let that dog run over you I'd say our first impression was wrong. Why in thunder don't you kick him?"

"What is more," said Fawkes, "he lets that nasty dog lick his face."

Hiloe said, "A dog would never lick my face but once."

Winters said, "Why don't them Injuns come out and chase you fellers away?"

"Yeah, why don't they?" sneered Polo.

One-ear stuck his leathery lips out. "They've tried it, Winters, but every time a redskin sticks his head out, we give it a whack; they give us trouble, and we give them trouble."

Steepledore said, "But we aim to get that gold, Winters; someday we'll catch them Injuns napping, and before they know what's up, we'll be heaving out of these mountains, loaded down with gold pots and pans. We thought we'd starve 'em, but we've been camped here forty-odd years, and they're as hefty as ever. Must've had a million tons of jerky stowed away in that cave. There's water, too; it spouts up just outside their first big room. May be water farther back, as well. We wouldn't know, because we're never in there far enough to find out."

Polo poured himself coffee.

Winters picked up his own mug. "Pour me some of that."

He reached for a bread-crumble just as his mug brimmed full. Shep lunged for Winters' crumb and splashed hot coffee onto Winters.

There had to be a last straw, and that was it.

WINTERS put down his mug. He swung his legs round and stood up. There was tense silence until Winters sank a boot-toe into Shep's midriff.

Shep flew backward into a mountainside roll. He landed in a gulch, where he raced back and forth, turned, leaped, and went round and round. Meantime he yelped and howled, at last sounded downright human. *Ow! Ow! Oh! Oh! Ow-oh!*

Exhausted, he lay down and moaned.

Orion Steepedore scowled at Winters. "You oughtn't to done that, Winters."

Hiloe snorted, "That was a mean trick, if ever was such."

Fawkes arose. "I'm sorry I sat at table with a dog-kicker."

One-ear got up, lifted his chin haughtily. "I've no respect for a man who'd kick a dog."

Polo said nastily, "It violates hospitality; a man who'd eat at another man's table, then get up and kick his dog, is an ingrate."

Winters cast cold eyes upon them. "There's this about it," he said scornfully. "I've never set at another man's table and et less in my life. Nor have I ever seen anybody with such ill-mannered dogs. Like dog, like master, I've always heard."

He turned to leave, but at sound of sharp

clickings he faced about. Six cocked guns were pointed at his stomach.

"You're not leaving," announced Steepedore; "we've decided to use you."

Winters was calm, but sweaty. "How do you mean?"

Steepledore nodded toward a cave-opening just beyond their dogtrot porch. "We've heard you're right handy with your gun, Winters; here's your chance to prove it. Of course we'll go with you, but you'll lead. That's what kicking our dog is costing you. If a blazing arrow gets anybody, it will be you. Anyhow, it will get you first."

Winters knew now that he'd been tricked by these egging scoundrels. They'd urged him to kick their dog so they'd have a pretext to set him up against Indians. Both mad and scared, he drew a hand across his sweating forehead and considered whether he should go for his gun. He'd never had odds like this against him before. Considering what tough and unscrupulous rascals surrounded him he hesitated, then lifted his right hand away from temptation.

He said quietly, "I reckon you've got a lantern?"

"Fetch it, Marco," said Steepedore, "and let me have it. You others keep your guns ready; we don't aim to be tricked by no fast gunslinger like Lee Winters."

They collected behind Winters, guns cocked and aimed. "Get going," said One-ear.

Winters stepped ahead.

What they first entered was a gloomy anteroom about thirty feet wide, one hundred long. At one point its floor funneled smoothly downward into a pit of undetermined depth. A narrow trail passed round this hazard to where sidewalls and ceiling squeezed into a narrow, arched doorway.

Winters stopped there, stared at an oddly shaped wooden post about four feet high that stood nearby. "What's that?"

"Not so loud, Winters," Steepedore cautioned. "That's a totem post. Look at that loose band of gold dangling round its base. But don't try to get it; that post is a trap."

Winters looked more closely. This was tricky, sure enough. Its top supported rock that needed no support. Its bottom rested upon a circular stone as big as a washtub and set like a cork in a round hole. At one side a stream of water sprayed upward. "Looks like that rock might be a stopper," said Winters. "It's my guess a real stream used to come

through that hole.”

“I told you not to touch it,” snarled Steepleadore. He jabbed Winters with his gun. “Get into that next room.”

“And don’t talk,” said Hiloe.

Winters contained his anger, pending a time when he’d get even with these ruffians. They moved single-file, Winters in front.

WHAT THEY entered next was a cavern with towering stalagmites and long, tapering stalactites. It did not seem possible that one small lantern could illuminate so large a room as this, for it spread away hundreds of feet, a labyrinth of columns and inverted spires. Yet upon their entrance it was filled with light as bright as noonday sun.

Steepleadore whispered, “Everything’s covered with gold leaf, but don’t waste time with that; plenty of heavy stuff ahead.”

Urged by gun-pressure, Winters advanced, but cautiously. Suddenly he stopped. “I hear something.”

From a great distance came sound of hammering, not a ringing kind, but one muffled and dead.

Sir Craggie moved up beside Winters. “They’re hammering out more leaf, using up their precious gold to beautify this horrid cave. We ought to have stopped it long ago; if we hang around here another forty-odd years, that gold will be gone.”

“That’s right,” Steepleadore agreed. “Move, Winters.”

Others crowded close. To Winters this indicated cowardice. When they approached what looked perilous on his right, they eased round to his left, then round to his right when his left seemed dangerously exposed.

Winters led on to a second arched doorway. There he stopped, nerves strained close to their limit of endurance.

“Move,” snarled Steepleadore.

Winters tried vainly to swallow. He stepped through, paused, open-mouthed, breathless. Here was a vast forest of golden pillars. Long avenues led to remote, shining palaces. Arranged upon shelves along walls and around countless columns were vessels of gold, images, and ornaments without number. Red, green, and crystal-clear jewels sparkled from a million points. Wealth of ages! *Gran Quivira!* This was it.

No Indians could be seen, and now no sound could be heard. To Winters this meant presence of himself and of his rascally companions had become known. They looked at one another, fearful, uncertain what to do.

But greed for treasure overcame fear. Marco Polo moved past Winters to a nearby column and reached up for a two-eared vase of gold set with rubies.

Unaccountably he slipped and fell.

Pandemonium let loose. This strangely fascinating world became an inferno of savage yells and blazing, hissing arrows.

Hiloe, instantly afire, turned and fled.

One-ear Jenkins screamed, “I’m hit.” He, too, retreated.

Jenkins was followed by Fawkes, who burned furiously.

Steepleadore alone remained calm. “Winters, they’re “giving us trouble again. We’d better back up.”

Sir Craggie fled, a blazing arrow in his back.

Polo got to his feet and streaked away.

“Come, Winters,” said Steepleadore. “You’ve failed us, as I feared you would.”

Winters gave him little mind. He saw redskins coming, thousands of them, their eyes a-gleam. He backed up, dodged behind pillars of gold. Everywhere now were streaks of flying arrows. Steepleadore had departed.

Crowded closer and closer, Winters whipped up his six-gun. There followed rumble and roar like mountains falling; in an instant not a redskin could be seen.

Winters made tracks, escaped to that gloomy anteroom and near-safety.

HERE WAS that totem post again. He stared at it, and its carved, painted faces leered at him. Behind him, Indians peered from behind shining columns, but none ventured further pursuit.

Winters turned then to make his way out, exalted in spirit by a sense of victory. But he halted before he had completed a step.

“Stay put, Winters.”

That was from Steepleadore. He was not alone. His five companions, badly scorched but determined, sided him. Winters’ exit was blocked. Dogs were there, too, Shep among them, his eyes malignant.

“What’s going on here?” demanded Winters, his

voice distorted by a fresh attack of dry swallows.

"We aim to keep you, Winters," said Steepledore.

"Sure," said Polo. "With a fighter like you to help us, we'll clean up on them redskins."

They began to close in, men, guns, dogs.

"Don't try any tricks, Winters," Steepledore warned him. "We've seen how fast you are with a gun, but you don't have enough loads left to do much harm. You'll oblige us by lifting your hands. If you show fight, I'll sic Shep on you; he'd tear you apart in two seconds."

Winters backed up. For moments fright was uppermost, then anger assumed ascendancy. He was cool when angry.

His right heel struck an upthrust. He glanced down. It was that round rock which served as stopper to an underground stream. His right hand touched wood. That totem post again! He closed his right arm around it, flung back his right leg for a brace.

"No, Winters," Steepledore shouted.

"No, no," screamed Hiloe. "It's a trap; you'll flood us out."

Shep crept close and growled.

"We didn't mean it, Winters," shouted Fawkes. "We'll let you go; turn loose of that post."

Winters tested his strength, felt something give. He had only contempt for these scoundrels now. But Shep was close, his teeth snapping. If Steepledore gave a signal, Shep would tear at his throat. Already he felt Shep's breath on his face.

Winters heaved. That queer post jumped in his arms; its rock stopper banged against ceiling and walls as a torrent shot upward. Lantern, yelps of terror, human screams, all were swallowed in a roaring deluge.

Winters, too, was engulfed. He was carried downward into cold, compressing darkness. In pulling, he had filled his lungs to near bursting. He now kept them filled as he funneled downward, through swirling, pressing cold darkness, down into such watery depths that it seemed his life would be crushed out.

After ages he surfaced, felt warm air, saw stars and fragments of dark, silver-lined clouds. He was swept along on a turbulent stream, to what end he knew not. Indeed, he was not sure that he wasn't dreaming.

IN FORLORN GAP, midnight quiet was near. Streets were deserted, except for a departing stagecoach.

Only one spot indicated that life willed to stay awake. That was Doc Bogannon's saloon. There, Doc, friend of Deputy Marshal Lee Winters, gathered up glasses, washed and polished them. He looked at his watch nervously, for he'd had an uneasy day.

"Sorry, gentlemen, but it's closing time."

There was a crisp authoritativeness in his voice. His few remaining guests got up promptly and left.

Bogannon had reached up to extinguish his bar light when his batwings swung in.

"Winters!"

Deputy Winters strode forward. "Wine, Doc, and don't bother about a table; I'll drink standing up."

Bogie's eyes spread with sudden and extraordinary curiosity. "Winters, what in all horny is that queer thing you're lugging under your arm?"

Winters lifted that *queer thing* and stood it on Bogie's bar. "It's a present for you, Doc."

Doc stared. "Winters, what is it, and where did you get it?"

"It's a totem post," said Winters. "But where I got it, I don't know; you'd better ask Cannon Ball."

Bogie reached for bottle and glasses. He poured wine.

"Winters," said Doc nervously, "don't tell me you've had a run-in with ghosts. I don't believe in ghosts; I don't believe in 'em, I tell you."

Winters downed his wine and backhanded his mustache. "Doc," he said soberly, "there was a time when I didn't believe in ghosts myself."

