

THE DEADLY SLOWPOKE

Lee Winters Story

by Lon Williams

Why should a man be running around on all fours and growling like a dog? Lee Winters found out when he encountered Dr. Mesmer Ludwig. . . .

D EPUTY MARSHAL Lee Winters, his thoughts on supper with his beautiful wife Myra, rode into one of those lonely, half-deserted northside streets of ghostly Forlorn Gap. He congratulated himself on having returned without a run-in with death or, of comparable terror, some character out of Myra's books of myths and horrors. But that pleasant state of mind departed suddenly as his big horse Cannon Ball reared, made a half-turn and headed back north.

He gave Winters a hard time for several jumps. Then Winters gave him a hard time by sawing his bit and giggling with his spurs. He was under control though skittish, as he reversed direction.

To Lee, a dog's growl was not unusual. It was something else when a man moved about an unfenced yard on hands and feet and growled like a dog. That was exactly what he found when he'd got back to where Cannon Ball had made his first turn. They were before a small, unpainted cottage with a porch. A woman in its doorway blocked off part of its lamplight with her slim body.

Lee pulled his horse to uneasy anchorage. "Is that you, Liza Wilkerson?"

"Winters! Yes, I'm Liza Wilkerson."

"What's going on here?"

"Oh, Winters, something dreadful has happened to my husband."

"I figured as much," said Winters. He stared down at Wilkerson. "Jim, what's wrong with you?"

"Gr-r-r!" responded Jim. "Bowwow!"

Winters had a nervous chill. "Say, now, you stop that. Why are you acting like a dog?"

"I am a dog," Jim replied.

"What kind of dog do you figure you are?"

"I'm a great big mastiff. Gr-r-r!"

Winters was puzzled, his resources limited. He studied, then said curtly, "Some dogs are smart and some ain't; which kind are you?"

"I'm smart," replied Wilkerson.

Winters scolded angrily, "A smart dog can stand up like a man. Didn't you know that?"

"No," said Jim. He walked round on all fours in a circle, snarling meanwhile.

"All right, Liza," said Winters. "Since he's a dog, there's just one thing to do. Get your dog chain and fasten him to a post. Here, I'll help you."

Winters swung down and ground-hitched his horse.

"Winters, we've got no dog chain," said Liza. "Besides, I don't aim for Jim to sleep outdoors."

Lee disregarded her sudden hostility. "How long's he been like this?"

"If you want to know for other than being curious, I'll tell you. It's since last night. He almost scared me to death when he came home growling, barking and walking around like this."

"Well, I'm not just curious," said Winters. He grabbed Jim and yanked him up. "You're a mighty small dog to be thinking you're a mastiff. But big dog or little dog, it's time for all dogs to be in bed. Now get in that house or I'll take you to town and lock you up." He gave Jim a shove, which landed him sprawling inside.

Be-confound if he'd ever heard of such nonsense. "Liza, treat him like a dog, if he insists on being one."

FARTHER along his ride, however, he decided that Jim Wilkerson was not acting nonsense but had gone cuckoo. A thing like that gave him creeps, made him want to pull his head down inside his clothes.

Forlorn Gap's one remaining saloon had its lights going. Its early guests were in fine spirits, except for two or three, who wept over their sorrows.

Doc Bogannon, barkeep and saloon owner, observed his customers nonchalantly. He was big, handsome, with dark hair and fine, impressive features. Privately, he lived contentedly with his half-breed Shoshone wife; publicly, he watched men come and go with detached, tolerant understanding.

Sojourners here were as varied as creation, men who wept, laughed, cursed, or roared in anger. No man, thought Bogie, had enough sympathy in his soul to be sorry for all who had miseries. Nor had

Bogie himself enough curiosity to spread over every queer character who came in to drink or otherwise amuse himself. It was enough that he viewed them charitably, without trying to reform them or to separate sheep from goats.

While he meditated, his batwings swung inward and the slim, wiry, weather-beaten deputy marshal strode in. "Winters!" Bogie exclaimed.

Lee strode forward and planked down a coin. "Wine, Doc."

"Wine it is, Winters." Bogie filled a glass. "You're in town early, Winters. This latest wanted monkey you were after, did you catch him?"

Winters glanced at Bogie's guests and lifted his glass. "Caught him at Pedigo Ranch, Doc. Turned him over to Deputy Tipton of Pangborn Gulch." He drank, backhanded his mustache, gave his head a sidewise nod toward something which had caught his eye. "Who's he, Doc?"

A little man in small round hat and dark, dirty suit occupied a corner stool at Bogie's bar. Bogie flicked him a careless glance. "In some ways, he's an old friend, Winters. For two months now he's been coming in every evening at exactly eight o'clock. On his first visit, he announced his name and what he wanted. He has not spoken from that time until now."

"Do tell!" exclaimed Winters. "Man of few words, eh?"

Bogie crisscrossed his brow with wrinkles. "Winters, he's truly a man of silence."

"What's his name?"

"Poley B. Delong or, I surmise, Napoleon Bonaparte Delong."

Delong could hardly have avoided overhearing their conversation, yet he gave no sign of having heard at all. His drink was beer; his food, pretzels.

Winters leaned on an elbow. "Doc, did you say you had conversation with him?"

"Incredible as it may seem, Winters, I did."

"What did you talk about?"

"It's a story soon told," said Bogie. "Delong came in and sat where you see him now. He sat there until I was free to ascertain his wants. When I approached and said, 'What will you have, my good friend?' he replied. 'Sir, my name is Poley B. Delong. I shall tell you this once, and I trust it will not be necessary for me to repeat it. Furthermore,' he added, 'I shall be coming in at this same time each evening, and this is what I shall want on each occasion: One mug of beer and two pretzels.' My

response was, 'With pleasure, sir.' So began and so ended our first and only conversation."

Winters turned his back and hoisted his elbows. "Reminds me of when I was a yearling calf down in Trinity Valley, Texas. Neighbor of ours named Oslo Carver who lived twenty miles across Trinity Bottoms went out to feed his horse one winter morning. His horse said, 'Howdy, Oslo.' And Os, without thinking, said, 'Howdy, Whizzer.' So far as anybody knowed, Whizzer never said another word as long as he lived."

Bogie wrinkled his forehead soberly. "Winters, it's distressing how people can let you down sometimes, especially when so much is promised and so little given."

"Yeah," drawled Winters, "life in general is pretty much just another horse on Oslo." He put down a second coin. "Doc, if you can do so without stirring up talk, give our friend Delong some wine—with my compliments. Good-night."

WINTERS had been gone but a moment when a picture of cool, exquisite villainy came to life at a nearby table and swung easily forward. He was tall, straight, with thin mustache, scholarly face, black, center-parted hair, black suit, and black stovepipe hat which he held under his left arm. He went round, leaned against Bogie's bar and faced Poley Delong.

"Permit me, sir," he said in soft, musically beguiling tones, "your remarkable poise under difficulty struck me as truly phenomenal."

Delong moved his head an insignificant degree and stared at this smoothly talking stranger. Though he said nothing, his eyes betrayed his question.

"Of course," was his flatterer's answer. "You are interested in my identity. Very well, sir. I am Doctor Mesmer Ludwig, world-famous authority on mental behavior and thought peregrinations. After years of study, I have learned that silence is not man's natural state but is a condition induced by some weird experience. In other words, my friend, you have been victimized by some unscrupulous magician who has placed his dark spell upon you."

Bogannon under pretext of wiping his bar eased closer to hear what was being said. This Ludwig was a rare one, indeed. A glance told Bogie that his man of silence was being charmed as a bird by a snake.

"You are not truly this mild-mannered mouse which you appear to be," Dr. Ludwig purred on. "You are a strange somnambulist. Without realizing it, you are asleep."

"Sleep," Delong whispered, eyes round and staring.

"Yes, sleep," purred Ludwig. He continued, "Sleep, sleep, gentle, restful sleep."

Delong's eyelids grew weary. "Sleep," he sighed.

"Now," said Ludwig, "you are becoming your true self. You are not a mouse. You are a cat. You are a wildcat. You are a fierce, dangerous wildcat."

Delong bared his teeth and snarled.

"Now you are your true self," said Ludwig. "Yet, because I have removed a curse from you, your behavior henceforth is subject to my will. To prove what I have said, you will get down on your hands and feet and walk round in a circle."

Delong promptly got down and did as ordered.

Several of Bogie's guests left their tables and circled round to watch Delong.

"A right scrawny looking cat," a gold-digger remarked.

"Right high in his hindquarters," said another.

Ludwig threw an appraising glance at his audience, then snapped at Delong, "Growl."

Delong growled.

"Scream."

Delong screamed.

"You are a fierce wildcat," declared Ludwig. "Prove it by tearing these men to shreds."

Delong crouched, growling. Men moved back.

"No, keep him off us," one shouted in mockery.

DELONG charged. Immediately he was caught and tossed about by thick-shouldered gold-diggers and athletic men. Finally, his own clothing torn to shreds, he struck a wall and sat down at its base. He snarled. Otherwise he was subdued.

Ludwig walked over and said firmly, "You will now resume your former place. You will stop growling and be a good kitty."

Delong got up, limped back to his stool and stared submissively at his master.

Ludwig began again in his purring voice, "You are no longer a wildcat; you are your true self again: You are Napoleon Bonaparte Delong."

Delong blinked and looked about as one just awake. He looked at his clothing, groaned in pain from his bumps and bruises. "What happened?"

"Nothing at all," Ludwig advised him gently. "It is merely something you have dreamed. And you are still dreaming. You see, you are asleep. You sleep, sleep, sleep. Now, I shall tell you what you are. You are my pet sheep. You will go with me wherever I go and obey my every command. Now, down on your hands and feet again and follow me."

Delong obeyed once more.

As they were leaving, Ludwig paused, a door in each hand. "Before we depart, my obedient sheep, you will say goodbye by bleating like a nice little lamb."

"Baa!" said Delong.

"Splendid," said Ludwig. "Let us go now."

When they were gone, Bogie's guests stared at one another. Nobody felt like jesting. Bogie himself was sweating. He'd heard of people being mesmerized, had accepted reports as half-truths. And that was what they'd been. Half-truths. Only half had been told.

His reverie was interrupted by an outbreak of calls for whiskey.

"Whiskey!" men shouted.

"Let's have some whiskey."

"Whiskey it is," Bogie responded.

When there was a let-up, he helped himself to wine. He was ashamed of himself, now that he thought seriously of how badly poor Poley Delong had been treated. After all, if a man wanted to keep his mouth shut, that was his own business.

POLEY HIMSELF, being a sheep, had no worries. Two blocks from Bogie's saloon, he and Ludwig were joined by two friends of Ludwig.

"Be a good sheep," said Ludwig. "Stand up like a man. There, that's fine. Now, permit me to introduce my friends, Nelson Ipswitch and Darby Faw. Friends, meet Napoleon Bonaparte Delong."

Ipswitch and Faw grunted surlily.

"What's he got?" asked Ipswitch.

"That," replied Ludwig, "is something Delong will presently tell us. Napoleon, my sheep, where is your gold hidden?"

"Up there," said Poley, pointing northeast.

"Up there are mountains," Ludwig reminded him. "You will state in detail where your gold is."

"Buried," said Poley.

"Then, of course, you will take us to it," said Ludwig. "My friends, horses."

Poley took them on a twenty-minute moonlit ride. His shack was against a cliff where a drip

spring had filled his wooden water bucket nearby. At Ludwig's command, Poley brought out a lighted lantern.

"All right, runt, where's it at?" Ipswitch demanded in a quick, snapping voice.

"Ah, but your procedure is wrong," Ludwig chided. "You forget that our new friend is an obedient sheep. Where is your gold, Sheep?"

Poley pointed to his water bucket. "Under there."

"Dig it out, Faw," Ludwig commanded.

"Ye-e-e-s, sir," Faw responded with astounding slowness.

He lifted Poley's bucket with equal slowness and moved away its flat under-stone. Under that were other stones, which he likewise removed. Last was a one-gallon stone jar, which was filled with gold coins. This he dragged and lifted out and left at Ludwig's feet.

"Not bad," said Ipswitch. He jerked his head toward Poley. "What do you do with him?"

Ludwig nodded over his left shoulder. "There's a precipice off there. Sheep sometimes fall over precipices." He looked un pityingly at Poley. "Get down on your hands and feet, Sheep."

Poley obeyed.

"Now follow Ipswitch, like a good little lamb."

Poley followed obediently as Ipswitch walked away.

But when Poley saw danger yawning up at him, he drew back.

Ipswitch moved behind him and gave him a hard shove with his foot. "Over you go, Sheep."

Poley went over and down. . . .

WHEN SUPPER and dishwashing were over, Deputy Marshal Winters and his wife Myra sat in their living room for their usual hour of talk or reading. This time Winters listened to his wife's gossip.

"I think," said Myra, "there's a thief in town."

"Was there ever a town without a thief?" he asked.

"But this is different," Myra insisted. "Sarah and Bart Mellinger have lost all of their savings. They had their gold in a box buried under their hearthstone. Only those two, presumably, knew where it was. Yet this morning Bart looked, intending to add some money, and all of it—yes, all—was gone. And what is most strange, there hasn't been a minute since last they looked but one

of them has been at home. Still each professes complete innocence of having taken it."

"Right interesting," said Winters. Privately he was thinking of his own large store of gold whose whereabouts he alone knew. It was treasure in addition to their jointly-owned supply, to which Myra had free access. Considering that he might eventually be outgunned by some wanted monkey, he had his gold hidden where Myra certainly would find it in straightening up his affairs. Yet so long as she didn't know where it was, or even that it existed, no thief could trick or torture her into revealing its whereabouts.

"Is that all you have to say?" Myra inquired.

"I can tell you something more exciting than that," he replied dryly.

"Really? What is it?"

"Jim Wilkerson thinks he's a dog. He goes around on all fours and barks."

"No!"

"Sounds cuckoo, eh?"

"It really does. But maybe there's a reason. Wilkerson's money is also missing."

"Well, be-confound!" Winters exclaimed. He had an alarming suspicion suddenly. "Don't tell me a thief has got our money, too?"

Myra laughed softly. "No, Lee. Of course not. But don't be surprised if it does turn up missing. You see, Fox Geyger's money is gone. So is—"

"Say, now, this looks like a disease that's going round," declared Winters, indignation rising. "Anybody got any idea who's doing all this stealing?"

"Not exactly."

"Not even sort of thereabouts?"

"Well, only as to Herb Hanley. His wife, Bonzy, thinks Herb just gave his away. To complete strangers, too."

"Hmm!" mused Winters. "This ought to be looked into."

BUT A LETTER from Marshal Hugo Landers, received next morning by Winters at Bogie's saloon, sent him on a new manhunt.

That evening Doc Bogannon was serving drinks to a crowded saloon, when his batwings swung in and a handsome, cold-eyed lobo with two guns strode arrogantly in and leaned against Bogie's bar. He eyed Bogie malevolently. "Would you like to pour me a drink, or maybe you'd prefer I help myself?"

Bogie grabbed bottle and glass. "I should regard myself privileged to serve one so distinguished looking."

"You talk my language, I see."

"For which I am most grateful." Bogie filled a glass. "But I must humbly beg your pardon for my not immediately recognizing you."

"Oh, so you don't know me? Now, ain't that a insult for you? Maybe you ain't even heard of Raincrow Martin?"

"Ah," exclaimed Bogie, "I reckon any man who has not heard of Raincrow Martin is, indeed, a rare fish. You do fit his description perfectly. Slender. Redheaded. Eyes like ice. But handsome."

Raincrow Martin touched his left-hand gun. "I reckon you've heard, also, that I'm right handy with my shootin' irons?"

"Who hasn't?" returned Bogie.

Their conversation was interrupted by appearance of a man in black suit and hightop hat, with a thin, upcurving black mustache.

"Friend Bogannon, be so kind as to introduce me to your friend."

"My apology," responded Bogie, glad to be interrupted. "Mr. Martin, my good friend Dr. Mesmer Ludwig. Dr. Ludwig, my most recent and respected acquaintance, none other than Raincrow Martin himself."

"Delighted," said Ludwig.

"Yeah?" sneered Martin. "And just what kind of doctor are you?"

Ludwig bowed slightly, but kept fixed gaze upon Martin. "If I may speak somewhat boastfully, I am a world-famous doctor of human minds."

"You don't say!" sneered Martin. "And what do you think you can do for a feller's mind?"

"Without your cooperation, I can of course do nothing," replied Ludwig. "With your cooperation, I can do much. As your intelligence increases, so does my power to be of assistance. Of course, in your case, there is no need of a doctor's helpful ministrations, for I can see that you are one of remarkably keen intellect."

Guests began to gather round.

A gold-digger said gruffly, "Ludwig, I bet you can't put no spell on him."

"What do you mean, spell?" demanded Martin.

"I mean put you under a spell—make you think you're a wolf or wildcat or grizzly."

Martin stared round at curious, expectant faces. "I hope you don't think I'd be fool enough to let

him do that to me?"

Ludwig smiled. "Of course not. You would not submit to any such abasement. Moreover, my interest in your case would be improving your most noteworthy qualities. You are fast with your guns, but I could make you faster. You are quick of thought, but I could make you quicker."

"Well," said Martin, "if you can do all that, maybe I *would* let you."

Four men at a poker table were too interested in their game to gather round Ludwig's group. One of them called irritably, "You there! Whiskey!"

"On it's way," answered Bogie.

He left reluctantly. As reluctantly he responded to other calls. A half-stewed ape wanted to weep and relate his troubles. Another wanted an excuse to start destruction. Bogie lost time in quieting both of them.

WHEN HE got back to where he could see Ludwig and Raincrow Martin, Raincrow had that queer sleepy look which characterized a man going under a spell.

Ludwig was saying, "In your present state you are subject to my will, not your own. You sleep, yet you do not sleep. You sleep, and you will not wake until I command you. Now something strange is happening. You are slowing down. You are slow, slow, slow. Now you have completely stopped. You cannot move your hands. You cannot draw your guns. Your hands are in my power. You cannot move them. Why don't you try to move your hands? Ah, you do try. You do, but you cannot."

Bogie stared, amazed. Martin was trying, yet he could not move his hands. "Wonder of wonders," Bogie murmured.

Spectators stared, dumbfounded.

"But you can move your hands now," said Ludwig. "You can move them, though not fast. You can move them slowly, very slowly. See, it is as I told you. You can draw your guns, but so slowly, so slowly. You will never be fast again until I give my word. You are now subject to my will. You will obey me. You cannot move fast. You will move slowly, talk slowly, and if you are minded to use your guns you will draw them slowly. Slowly."

Suddenly Bogie's batwings swung inward again. A man of tall, athletic proportions strode hurriedly in. He pushed through until he faced

Martin.

“Raincrow!” he shouted.

Martin stared at him. His lips moved in a snarl. “Ipswitch! Dirty, double-crossin’ Ipswitch. So we’ve met again.” His voice was filled with hate, yet his words were frighteningly slow. “All right, Nelse, you know what this means.”

Men backed hurriedly, expecting gunplay.

Ipswitch also drew back. “No!” he shouted. “Don’t draw, Raincrow.”

Raincrow was coming up with both guns, coming with distressful slowness.

Ipswitch continued to back. But when Raincrow’s guns were out of their holsters and slowly lifting, Ipswitch with speed almost quicker than sight snapped up his gun and fired.

Bogannon blinked his eyes. There’d been other killings in his saloon. He’d taken them as they came, events as inevitable as these gold-rush towns themselves. But this one left him peculiarly cold.

LONG AFTER an undertaker had come and gone with Raincrow’s body, Bogie sweated and racked his brain. To him as to the other spectators, it had appeared superficially as a killing in self-defense. In reality it had certainly been murder. Who was this Ipswitch? How had he happened to appear at a moment so favorable to himself?

In time, however, Bogie shrugged it off as something beyond his jurisdiction. He was only a man who sold whiskey to wayfarers, strangers who demanded it as one of life’s necessities. They came, they went, they were forgotten.

Likewise this sinister mesmerizer had come and would go. He was friendly, polite, outwardly kind. But Bogie perceived in him more than an evil eye. Toward Mesmer Ludwig, death pointed, as a finger.

Three evenings later Ludwig was in Bogie’s saloon indulging in small risks at poker, when Bogie’s batwings swung in.

“Winters!” exclaimed Bogie. “Come in, Winters.”

Winters advanced and paid his tribute. “Wine, Doc.”

“Wine it is, Winters,” Bogie responded. In a low voice he added as he poured, “Am I glad to see you!”

“How come, Doc?”

Bogie slowly mopped his bar. “Winters,

something has gone wrong in this town. People are afraid, yet they don’t know what it is they’re afraid of. Savings of hard-working miners have disappeared mysteriously.”

“Hmm!” mused Winters. “Any people disappeared?”

“Not that I know of.”

Winters glanced about. He was about to ask for Doc’s little man of silence, when his attention was distracted by movement.

A man in black suit, with thin up-curving mustache and high-top hat rose and came toward him, his face alive with smiling friendliness. “Bogannon,” he said pleasantly, “may I claim your courtesy?” He nodded toward Winters.

“Indeed, my apology,” Bogie replied. “Winters, my new and distinguished friend, Dr. Mesmer Ludwig. Ludwig, my old and trusted friend, Deputy Marshal Lee Winters.”

Winters did not offer to shake hands. What he saw in Ludwig’s eyes warned him that he might later have to shoot their owner. Moreover, experience had long ago taught him to be wary of Bogannon’s new friends.

He said, “Howdy.”

Ludwig nodded, but now Winters perceived that his smile was cold and eerie.

“Indeed, a pleasure, Officer Winters.”

Guests gathered round. A gold-digger said, “Ludwig, I bet you can’t put no spell on Winters.”

Winters felt his scalp tingle. “Spell?”

“No, no,” Ludwig said softly. “I’m no good at that.”

“No?” said bystanders. “That’s not accordin’ to what we’ve been seeing hereabouts.”

Winters stared in awe at Ludwig. “You mean you can mesmerize people?”

“Winters,” Bogie said in sharp warning, “he certainly can.”

“I don’t believe it,” said Winters.

“If you don’t, then of course I can’t,” said Ludwig, lifting an elbow to Bogie’s bar and leaning closer to Winters. “I admit that I have had passing amusement for all of us by exercise of what these good men choose to call a spell.”

Winters backhanded his mustache. “That’s as interesting as a raccoon with his fist in a bottle. How do you do it, Ludwig?”

“It’s fairly simple,” replied Ludwig, beginning to concentrate coldly. “It requires your cooperation, of course. But you only have to listen to what I say,

to believe what I tell you, and to offer no resistance to my commands.”

“Huh!” scoffed Winters. “Want to try it on me?”

“Only in fun, Winters,” responded Ludwig.

“Winters!” Bogannon intervened sharply. “I have word for you, Winters. I must see you privately.”

Winters was staring at Ludwig. “I’m your man, Lud.”

LUDWIG drew inches closer and vanquished frivolity. “Winters, a great manipulator of human thought named Count Mesmer, for who, my parents flatteringly named me, had one simple formula, concealed though it was beneath useless gestures and distension of eyes and nostrils. Success depends upon you, Winters, rather than upon me. You merely relax—relax—relax. There. You realize that we are all your friends, that no harm will come to you. I note that you are relaxing surprisingly well, and that is good. With relaxation comes sleep. You close your eyes. You tell yourself that you are asleep. Of course your nerves respond to your thought. You relax your body, your eyes. Slowly, slowly, you sink into sleep.”

Obediently Winters had closed his eyes. He heard Bogannon speak insistently into his ear, “Winters, I must see you. Winters!” He ignored Bogie, but listened closely to Ludwig.

“Now, Winters,” Ludwig was saying, “you will open your eyes. You have passed from your former superficial self into your real self. You are now Lee Winters. But in relaxation your will has given up its control over you. My will has taken its place. To prove it, I tell you now that your right hand has become paralyzed. You cannot move it. Though you try with all your might, you cannot move your right hand. Would you like to try it, Winters?”

Spectators crowded close and stared at Winters.

“He’s done it,” several exclaimed. “Ludwig has put a spell on him.”

“Now,” said Ludwig, “your paralysis is gone. You can move your hand, though only at a snail’s pace. Try it, Winters. Slowly. Slowly. Your hand can no longer move fast. There, did I not tell you? You can draw your gun, Winters, but your draw is greatly slowed.”

Spectators gasped in amazement. Winters drew his six-gun, but it took several seconds for him to lift it.

“Winters!” Bogie called insistently. “Don’t trust

him, Winters.”

Winters stared at Ludwig, dog-like expectancy in his countenance.

“Well,” Ludwig sighed, “I must be leaving. Good-night, gentlemen.” When almost out, he turned. “Perhaps you would like to come along, Winters. I’m going your way and shall be glad to see you safely home.”

Slowly Winters followed Ludwig.

Bogannon called, “Winters, don’t do it.” He stared round. “You men stop him.”

“Aw, let him go,” a drummer suggested carelessly. “Ludwig won’t hurt him.”

Bogie was diverted by numerous demands for whiskey. Yet he worried. His fears were worsened by recollection of his little man of silence, one Poley B. Delong. Poley had gone out with Ludwig. Come to think of it, he hadn’t seen Poley again.

Outside, Winters dragged himself onto his horse and followed Ludwig, who had mounted his own animal and was riding off. Cannon Ball, spurred lightly, promptly overtook Ludwig’s horse.

“You understand, of course,” said Ludwig, “that you must do what I tell you to do?”

“I understand,” replied Winters.

They turned into a deserted part of town and stopped before an old shack where a lamp burned.

“Dismount, Winters.”

Slowly Winters eased himself down.

TWO STRANGERS came out. Bright moonlight revealed one as of excellent proportions, alert, suspicious. “Who comes now?” this one asked coldly.

“Ipswitch,” said Ludwig, “this is Deputy Marshal Lee Winters, reputedly of considerable means. Winters, my servant Nelson Ipswitch. You will bow to him as your superior in handling guns.”

Winters nodded with marked slowness. “My superior,” he drawled.

“And this,” said Ludwig, “is my other servant, Darby Faw. He, like yourself, moves very slowly. You see how it is, Winters. Both of my servants are subject to my will. One I have made extremely fast; one, extremely slow.”

“Slow, like me,” said Winters.

“Exactly,” said Ludwig. “Now, Winters, we shall waste no more time. I have a mission for you.”

“Mission?”

“Yes. You will go to your home, collect all of

your money and bring it here to me.”

Winters said draggily, “Bring you all my money?”

“Exactly. You are under my power, Winters. You will do as I say. Get on your horse and ride. You will return here in exactly twenty minutes. You are in my power, Winters. Do as I have told you.”

“But I couldn’t do that,” Winters protested, his words pouring like cold molasses. “I couldn’t give you my money.”

“You would disobey your master?”

“Ye-e-e-s,” said Winters.

“That is too bad,” said Ludwig. “For your disobedience, we shall have to kill you. Ipswitch, get ready.”

Ipswitch stepped briskly in front of Winters. “I always give my adversary five seconds before I draw. Go ahead, Winters.”

“No,” Winters objected, “I—don’t—want—no—gunfight. I—couldn’t—”

“You have no choice, Winters,” Ludwig told him crisply. “Ipswitch has his orders. He never disobeys.”

“Go for your gun, Winters,” snarled Ipswitch.

Winters sleeved his forehead. “You’ve—got—too—much—”

“I’m counting five on you, Winters. One!”

Winters lowered his hand, gripped his gun.

“Two!” snapped Ipswitch. “Three! Four!”

He waited, but Winters didn’t wait. Slowness suddenly ceased. In one swift motion his gun came up, his left hand palmed its hammer. Ipswitch staggered back, fell, kicked twice, and was dead. Winters whirled as Ludwig’s gun came from an underarm holster. Ludwig fired, but it was downward into his own flesh. Lee’s third bullet knocked Darby Faw into a squatting heap with a gun smoking in his dead hand.

BEFORE DOC BOGANNON had recovered from worries for Winters, his batwings swung in.

“Winters! Come in, Winters.”

Winters strode to a table with a heavy canvas bag. “There’s their loot, Doc. I reckon your fellow citizens as it belongs to can come and get it.”

Soon he was surrounded by curious guests.

Bogie was among them. “Winters, you had me scared; I thought Ludwig had put a spell on you.”

“That’s what Ludwig thought, too,” responded Winters. “But while he told me I was slow, I was telling myself I was fast. You heard him say he had to have cooperation in order to mesmerize a man. Well, I didn’t cooperate.”