



Here was the most beautiful woman Winters had ever seen.

## THE DANCING TREES

*Lee Winters story*

by Lon Williams

**Deputy Marshal Winters had been called upon to assist lovely damsels in distress before—but never a damsel like this, and never in this kind of distress!**

**D**EPUTY MARSHAL Lee Winters, nervous and confused from his recent skirmish with death, got caught by darkness in that cliff-bound, ghostly region southeast of Forlorn Gap significantly known and dreaded as Plutonia. A full, late-winter moon—which had risen soon after nightfall—cast weird patterns of light and shadow not at all conducive to peace of mind. Winters rode in hazy, constant dread and started fearfully at every new sound. When reality and fancy merged and became inseparable, he was scared even more, for then imagination alone limited the creation of bogies.

After an indefinite time of clatter and

echo, he came to Little Dog Creek, where his horse Cannon Ball stopped to drink. Winters, reminded that he, too, was uncommonly thirsty, swung down, lay flat on his stomach and touched his lips to Little Dog's bracing, clear water. Afterwards he washed his face to remove what he had thought was a trickle of blood.

But as he alternately washed and looked at his hands, he saw no stain, from this, he guessed that his gunfight with a wanted monkey at Monte Gaut's ranch had ended luckier for him than he'd thought. Certainly he had been stunned and was still dizzy from concussion. Nevertheless, he reckoned that this

supposed trickle on his face had been only a product of fear, hence was sweat, not blood.

He was about to remount when a peevish, quarrelsome voice startled him. "So it's you again, Winters."

He whirled, ready for fight. What he saw, however, relieved his scare. Opposite to where he had knelt to wash his face, a small creature in human form sat at ease on a large stone. "Who are you?" Lee asked inhospitably.

"Humph! I'm surprised you don't know me. I'm Elbert Vittitoe, mostly called Little Vittitoe in my day. Prospector, I was."

Winters swallowed, suspecting that here was a ghost. "W-what are you doing there?"

"Oh, I live hereabouts," Vittitoe replied casually. "They's heaps of us lives hereabouts, Winters. Where you headed for?"

"I'm headed for home," Winters replied unsociably.

"Forlorn Gap?"

"Yes. "

"Thinking of riding through Tallyho Canyon?"

"It it's any of your business, yes."

"I wouldn't do it, Winters," Vittitoe declared loftily.

"Why wouldn't you?" Winters demanded with mounting resentment.

"Now, look here, Winters," Vittitoe said impatiently, "why do I have to give a reason for everything? Ain't my advice good enough without a lot of explaining? When I tell a man something important, I expect him to listen and not ask foolish questions. I said I wouldn't go through Tallyho, if I was you, and I meant it or I wouldn't have said it. You never did have much sense, Winters. You was always one of them fellers nobody couldn't tell him

nothing; it's a mystery to me how you've managed to get along."

"I can say that for you, too," Winters responded warmly. "A runt like you ought to crawl in a knothole in some big tree and live with squirrels. I ain't seen a desert rat yet that had goose-sense, and I figure you ain't no exception. Taking advice from you would be like taking pills from a horse doctor. Good-night, and I hope a billy-goat chews your whiskers off."

Little Vittitoe got up and shook a fist at Winters as he mounted and headed homeward. "I don't have to *hope* for what'll happen to you, Lee Winters; I *know* what will happen. I expect you'll be squeezed as tight as a greasy rawhide."

**W**INTERS dismissed Vittitoe from his mind and soon afterwards turned into a canyon whose walls rose straight up so high their rims seemed set with stars. This, he recognized fearfully, was Tallyho. It helped little to reflect that he had hoped to ride through it by daylight, for it was not daylight now. Somewhere he had been delayed—possibly by lapse into unconsciousness. Indeed, now that he reflected upon it, his progress from Monte Gaut's had been in great jumps between things distinctly remembered and periods of hazy dream, fear-filled and haunted by nameless images and imagined perils.

Now abruptly he remembered Little Vittitoe's admonition against riding through Tallyho Canyon. Maybe he should have taken that advice, he thought with a cold shiver. Off to his left, where a smooth patch of ground lay, a circular path had been beaten. Stranger still, around that path two men were running, a pursued and a pursuer. Round and round they went, until they spied Winters; they stopped and stared at him.

He who had pursued closed his right fist and twisted it in a gesture of determination. "Loan me that horse, Winters."

Winters had pulled up. "I ain't about to," he said grouchy. "Who are you, anyhow? And why do you and that other bozo go round and round in a circle?"

"Winters, what I've heard about you is apparently true. You, if I may speak bluntly, are a most ignorant and unenlightened person, as well as one who would pass reasonably well for a tramp. And who am I? Sir, my name is Post Poner. He whom I pursue, and have pursued for so many ages, is known as Tempus Fugit. Why do I pursue him? Winters, even so simple a person as you should be able to answer that; I pursue him because I'm trying to catch him."

"Well, well," Winters commented sarcastically, "there could hardly be a more sensible reason than that."

"Yet there is, Winters," said Poner, "though I doubt if you have mental capacity for understanding it. In my young days I was ambitious but, unfortunately, given to putting off important decisions. It resulted that when opportunity at last presented itself, I was a little late. In other words, I was behind time. Angry beyond measure, I resolved that such should never happen to me again. In short, I determined to catch up with time."

Winters pointed with his thumb. "You mean that other feller is time?"

"Winters," said Poner, "for once you have shown a spark of intelligence. That other fellow, indeed, is time."

Poner was tall, athletic. Tempus Fugit seemed frail, hardly meat and bone enough to command a second look. Judged half-heartedly, he was of small value. Both men were nude, except for loin cloths, sandals and—in Fugit's case—ankle contraptions that looked like small wings.

"Can't figure it," said Winters with a feeling of contempt. "You look much bigger and faster than him. Why can't you catch him?"

"Winters, I give you credit for sense not indicated by your unimpressive appearance. That is a question I've often asked myself. Why can't I catch him? But there's been no answer. Whether I go fast or slow, Tempus keeps his distance ahead of me. It never varies. Let me show you."

PONER STARTED at a trot; so did Fugit. When suddenly Poner put on speed, Fugit did likewise. Failure to gain must have enraged Poner. He speeded up until all that Winters could see was a circular, luminous blur.

Tiring of what appeared to him a great piece of nonsense, Winters was about to ride on when another figure caught his eye. This one was raggedly dressed and stooped. He walked about aimlessly, but continually looked down.

"Be-confound!" Lee exclaimed. "What kind of queer business is this? What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing, Winters, if it's any concern of yours."

"I reckon it ain't," said Winters. "That don't keep me from being curious, however. Who are you and what are you looking for?"

Without desisting from his search, this shabby stranger flung back his insulting reply. "Winters, I can say only one complimentary thing about you. I must admit that you ride a fine, big horse. It's too bad that such a magnificent animal has to be disfigured by having for a rider one so uncouth and insignificant looking as yourself. In forgiveness of your bad manners, sir, my name is Regretful Shade. As to what I'm doing, it is quite simple. I'm looking for yesterday, which I lost hereabouts."

In his night rides through Forlorn Gap's surrounding mountains, Winters had encountered some mighty odd characters. Yet he couldn't recall having before seen such queer ones as these.

"Strikes me," he said, "I've run into a bunch of cuckoos." Once more he was about to leave, when his road was suddenly blocked by two fierce characters with knives. They were going round and round each other, parrying and watching for a chance to make a deadly thrust.

Winters, suspecting suddenly that these monkeys were in cahoots against him for some mysterious reason, became furiously angry. "Get out of my road," he stormed. "If you've got to fight, do it somewheres else."

They stopped and stared maliciously at Winters. "Ah," one said with a sneer, "it's Deputy Marshal Lee Winters. Sir, that's pretty harsh language to be directed at Hokey Pokey here and Braggy Doshey there."

"Yeah?" said Winters. Despite their evident craftiness, ferocity and treachery, they were men of excellent stature. "You look like men of moderate good sense," said Winters discreetly. "Why do you fight?"

Braggy Doshey, darker and fiercer of demeanor than his adversary, put his shoulders back proudly. "Winters, so long ago that time between is without measure, Pokey and I engaged in a manly encounter in which I was victor."

"It was not a fair fight," said Pokey sullenly. He eyed Winters wickedly. "I'll kill anybody who says it was."

"That has always been his complaint, Winters," said Doshey. "He keeps coming back and insisting that next time he will win. Countless times we have engaged; each time I have won. Still he is not satisfied. His excuses are inexhaustible. So here we are once more, fighters without

equals in life or in death, yet with no better cause for combat than pride and vanity."

They backed off and once more went at each other. Moonlight glistened from polished, silvery blades. Arms and bodies moved so fast that Winters saw little more than those flashes. While he watched, their treachery swiftly revealed itself. As they whirled about each other, they drew closer and closer to him. Certain that they intended to slice him to shreds, Winters gripped his sixgun, readied himself to meet knives with fire.

But something occurred from an unexpected source, of a nature as unsuspected as it was magic. Winters forgot his peril and listened. From far off in Tallyho Canyon came notes of eerie, enchanting music.

**P**OKEY AND DOSHEY stopped their fight. Regretful Shade quit looking down and stood erect. That circular blur where Poner and Fugit went round and round, disappeared. Pursuer and pursued stood apart and listened, terrible, angry frowns on their faces.

"That wretched Orpheus again!" Poner exclaimed with an angry sigh.

"Always disturbing our endeavors!" sighed Fugit with strange bitterness.

Pokey put away his knife. "Two seconds more, and we would have had another victim," he said coldly and maliciously.

Doshey momentarily resisted this musical enchantment. He glared at Winters, as a panther about to leap upon its prey. His body quivered with wrath. But soon he, too, thrust his knife into its sheath.

Regretful Shade was last to succumb. "We've had enough of this," he said menacingly. "Orpheus must die."

Frowns which at first had distorted all of their faces melted into reluctant,

embittered surrender.

"Let us go," said Pokey.

"Yes," said Fugit. "Time flies."

Winters was puzzled that they should not have liked this music. He could explain their displeasure only in that it had mysteriously deterred them in their purpose to kill him. As for him, never before had he heard music so wonderful. It came from strings instead of pipes. Everything within him stirred in harmony. Sensations of pleasure repeated themselves over and over. Rocks quivered, too. Earth and sky filled with sound, sweet, tender and stirring beyond description. One urge vanquished all else, an irresistible longing to come closer, to be near that enchanting fountain, to drink of it forever.

He pressed Cannon Ball gently and rode forward. Regretful Shade and his evil conspirators trotted rhythmically yet vengefully ahead.

"This Orpheus," Winters called to Post Poner, "who is he anyhow?"

"That you should ask such a question," Poner replied pityingly. "Nothing should so proclaim your abysmal ignorance. When hated Orpheus plays his lyre and sings his enchanting songs, streams of water change their courses to be near him, all things that live give ear to sweet forgetfulness, even those long dead awake to listen. Yet you would ask, *Who is this Orpheus!*"

"That's one way to find out," said Winters.

With further progress, his mind cleared as to who Orpheus was. Myra Winters had read to him, Lee now remembered, something about a musician by that name. According to his recollection from old books, Orpheus was a faithful lover, as well as a wondrous musician. He had married a beautiful maiden who, according to Myra's pronunciation, was named U-

riddy-see. In print it was Eurydice. Lee called it Eurie Dice, but as to which was correct he would have bet on Myra's version any day.

Again, according to books, Eurydice was of such beauty that gods cast longing eyes upon her—which meant, of course, that wives of those lustful gods saw her through eyes of envy and jealousy. When Orpheus married her, the interest of divinities did not cease. Somebody—whether male or female he could not recall—arranged for a snake to bite poor lovely Eurydice, from which bite she died.

WINTERS' recollections were interrupted by appearance of an extraordinary scene, encountered when he had rounded a turn in Tallyho Canyon. Tallyho was much wider here, its floor a green, grass-carpeted flat, a large portion of it encircled by aspen trees. Just ahead on a stone, crudely carved to resemble a chair, sat a young man with a lyre whose strings he touched dreamily.

Winters and his companions slowed and stared intently. A spell of rhythmic motion kept them swaying gently.

"Accursed Orpheus!" Winters heard Poner mutter in a tone of deep, murderous hatred.

Those other queer characters struggled vainly against their spell. Their hatred of Winters was surpassed only by their hatred of Orpheus. They spread apart, became stealthy in their movements, thus betrayed an intent to surround and attack that most hated one.

Winters, resentful of their criminal intentions, rode forward until he was within a few feet of Orpheus. Here he saw a young man in tunic and sandals of such charm as he had before seen only in women. His face was fair, beardless and without blemish. His hair, seen by moonlight strangely brilliant now, was

lighter than gold, thick with waves and almost long enough to touch his shoulders. In profile he looked weary. His head was bent, as in sleep.

When Cannon Ball's shadow stirred at his feet, Orpheus glanced up, startled. His fingers became motionless. Sounds of movement ceased, except when musical echoes revived them briefly. After staring a moment Orpheus brightened into alert expectancy. He did not salute his visitor, as man to man, but touched his lyre, played joyously, and as strings vibrated spoke gently in song:

O Winters, you have come to set my  
dear one free,  
Sweet beauty, caged by wicked trees to  
mourn in tears  
Forever. Beyond those writing limbs  
Eurydice  
Abides her savior, a gallant warrior  
without fears.

"If you're trying to tell me something," said Winters, "you'd better use horse talk. I could catch on heaps quicker that way."

Orpheus continued to play. Meanwhile he looked at Winters, in his face such yearning as Winters had never before seen anywhere. When he spoke again, his voice in quality bore ages of accumulated longing and defeat:

Captive to cruel Maenad trees, she lonely  
waits  
For one whose slow, avenging footsteps  
hither bend,  
While I with song keep hope alive that  
someday gates  
Will open, and this long, long loneliness  
will end.

"Well, Orph," Winters commented impatiently, "it sounds like you might be trying to tell me something; but unless you can put it in plain talk, I reckon I'll ride along home."

Orpheus looked hurt and panicky.

"Forgive me, O Winters," he pleaded. "So long have I voiced my thoughts in music that I fear I have no talent for what you call plain talk."

"It might come handier than you figure," said Winters. He glanced about to see what had become of Post Poner and his fellow-rascals. Mysteriously they had disappeared—gone into hiding, he discovered, when a pair of eyes stared fiercely at him for a moment then disappeared behind a stone. Curious as well as angry, he said to Orpheus. "Who are these sneaking monkeys hiding around here?"

Orpheus, still playing, gave Winters a puzzled look. "Monkeys?" he asked.

"Well, cuckoos then," said Winters.

Orpheus glanced about curiously. "I see no cuckoos."

"Men, perhaps," said Winters.

Orpheus' lips parted in understanding. "Ah, Maenads, no doubt."

"Maenads?"

"My perpetual and relentless enemies," said Orpheus.

**N**OW WINTERS remembered something else his wife Myra had read to him. According to books, Orpheus had been murdered by wicked people called Maenads, only Winters himself had called them Mean Edds.

"Something's wrong here, Orpheus. You'd better watch out for them Mean Edds; according to history, they won't be doing you no good."

"How well I know them," said Orpheus. "If you will dismount from your gallant steed, you will see how very wicked they are, indeed."

"Oh, no, Orpheus. I ain't asking for trouble from nobody."

"Your danger will be no greater, nor will it be less. Demeter herself, goddess of marriage and fruitfulness, has promised

that a mighty warrior will someday come to free Eurydice from her cruel prison. I suspect that you, O Winters, are that warrior.”

Winters swallowed in alarm. “Oh, no, mister, that wouldn’t be me.”

“What gods will for us, we are not given to know,” said Orpheus.

“Anyhow,” said Winters, “I don’t see no prison.”

“To you, O Winters, a prison means walls of stone and gates of iron. To a jealous god like Jupiter, a prison more cruel than stone is one that seems no prison at all, one that forever offers freedom and yet forever denies it. Winters, do you see those aspen trees just there?”

Winters looked. He recalled having seen them before. “Yeah,” he said. Then his mouth opened in astonishment. “What’s happening to them? At first I thought it was only wind that moved them.”

“They are dancing to my music,” said Orpheus.

Winters stared in awe. Truly they were dancing. Their roots had become twisting, writhing feet. As Orpheus played a more lively tune, they waved their branches, also, and began to go round in a great circle.

At length as spaces opened and closed between tree branches, Winters understood what Orpheus had meant by prison. Before a vine-covered shelter within that circle of dancing trees stood a young woman of exquisite charm. Glimpses revealed by degrees that her hair, adorned with a blue or purple flower, was fastened round her head in silvery braids; that her garments were white and flimsy; that her figure had fawn-like grace and shapeliness; that she was looking in his direction and with a countenance filled with excitement and expectancy.

“Humph!” Winters grunted. “Something’s wrong here, Orpheus. My wife’s books never said nothing about no prison made of trees.”

Orpheus, playing gently, said, “Do not be surprised at that. Books often err. Should you live to relate what you witness here, your version of it will vary from what your eyes have seen. Truth is one thing. What is accepted as truth is quite another. As light often is too bright to be seen except by shaded eyes, so is truth sometimes too poignant for acceptance except as myth or legend. What you see, O Winters, is truth as it is lived and suffered. Those trees are Eurydice’s prison. I cannot make them set her free; I can only make them dance, which they sometimes do until they are weary almost unto death. Even so, they do not yield.”

“Beats me,” said Winters. “What did you mean by calling them Mean Edd trees?”

“Maenad trees, O Winters. They are Maenad trees because Maenads live in them; Maenads are wicked nymphs who live in trees and stones and other likely places where they can do great harm.”

**W**INTERS took a quick look around. Poner, Fugit, Hokey Pokey, Doshey, and Regretful Shade had formed a semi-circle and were watching evilly. Instantly they dropped out of sight. Winters was uncertain whether they had dropped behind stones or into them. It could have been either. He had never cared much for their looks. He liked them now even less.

Suddenly he heard a mournful cry, “O Winters, why do you delay? Orpheus, do you not see him? My deliverer, he has come at last.”

Winters turned in his saddle. Eurydice within her prison was holding out her

hands. "Oh, no," said Winters. "You don't get me into this mix-up."

A voice which sounded like that of Regretful Shade said tauntingly, "Go ahead, Winters; save her. Haven't you been cowardly long enough?"

Post Poner's voice added insultingly, "Winters reputedly is a great fighter. It is an unearned reputation, however. He has only fought to save his own life; he has never risked that life to save another's."

"A lovely woman means nothing to him," sneered Hokey Pokey.

"Heed them not, O Winters," said Orpheus. "Whatever their motive, it is evil."

"That's what I figured," said Winters. "They're trying to dare me into a trap."

"O Winters," cried Eurydice, "they, indeed, will do you harm, if they can. But so long as Orpheus plays his lyre, they can do to you nothing of which you need fear. This is an hour set apart by destiny for you, to test you and to make for you a lasting place in legend. Be brave and chivalrous, and all your after-years will be filled with pleasant memories. Refuse to save me, and remorse and shame will haunt you always."

Orpheus took up her theme and set it to mournful music:

Turn not your heart and hand away, O  
warrior brave,  
And always after mourn for that which  
might have been  
Solace to your weary soul as you approach  
your grave—  
But know, when justice called, that you were  
valiant then.

Winters swung off his horse. "Now just a minute, Orphie. I don't get much from that poetry. Tell me—why don't Eurydice crawl out of there?"

"Alas, it is fear that binds her to captivity," replied Orpheus. "Those trees and these frightful Maenads have been

placed about her to see that she does not escape. They tell her that limbs of Maenad trees will become as mighty arms to seize and tear her into shreds; and well she may believe it. Behold how fierce they can be."

Orpheus played stirring, martial music. There was immediate response. Tree limbs whirled and lashed one another until leaves and twigs were whipped into fragments. When Orpheus suddenly stopped his music, those limbs stilled and formed an impenetrable hedge, rigid, gnarled, forbidding.

"I guess she's got it figured right," said Winters. "Now let me ask another question, Orpheus. Why don't you go in after her?"

"Winters, do you not see what happens when my music stops?"

"That's plain enough," said Winters.

"Did you not see what could happen while my lyre is playing?"

"Couldn't have missed it," said Winters.

"There's still more to be considered," said Orpheus. "I am a lyricist, not a warrior like yourself. Should my harp be snatched from me by those wicked trees, hope would be gone forever. Yet more important than all else, there has been a prophecy to keep away despair. Long ago fair Demeter promised to send a deliverer."

"And he has come," cried Eurydice. "He has come at last."

"I reckon she means me," said Winters. He studied his situation nervously. "All right, Orphie," he concluded. "You do as I say and I'll make a go at it. Play slow and easy. When those tree limbs are up, I'll make a dash under them. We'll see how it goes."

**O**RPHEUS played sweetly and gently, and to Winters it looked easy. He walked slowly forward. When near, he

observed a space which seemed large and high enough for him to get through untouched. Accordingly, he tensed and made a run for it.

But something unexpected happened. Orpheus' music jarred, lost key, rasped discordantly. Tree limbs lowered swiftly, caught Winters by his arms and legs. Instantly he was lifted high, flung down, lifted again, whirled, whipped and pulled.

"Oh, Winters! Winters!" Eurydice wept frantically. "You are lost—lost, and my wondrous hope is betrayed."

Winters was too scared for speech. He was angry, convinced that Orpheus had played this dirty trick on him.

Luckily another change took place that prevented his being pulled apart. Orpheus stopped playing. At that same instant branches that held Winters were at their lowest point. Though twigs had become rigid, he managed to free both of his legs, which had been lightly held.

He was not so fortunate with his wrists. They were encircled by stout twigs which refused to yield, twist and jerk as he might. He was facing inward, toward Eurydice. Finding his struggles vain, he rested and gazed wretchedly at his fellow-captive. Failure was bitter. One so beautiful and gentle as she, deserved better luck.

"O Winters, do not despair," Eurydice sobbed. "Even though you failed, you bravely tried. For that, you deserve immortality."

"That's not what I'm looking for," said Winters grimly. "All I want right now is a chance to square things with your friend Orph. Way I figure, he tricked both of us."

"Do not be unjust, O Winters," begged Eurydice. "Orpheus was assailed by those dreadful Maenads; they tried to take his lyre away. He still would help you, if he could. His danger now is even greater than your own."

Winters looked over his shoulder. Her words, he found, were true. Orpheus was being beaten by Maenads. They had knocked him from his chair. He lay below it, face downward, his precious harp clutched in his arms. For a moment it seemed to Winters that all was lost. He and Eurydice were captives, and Orpheus was about to be killed. With Orpheus dead, who would make music? By whom would these Maenad trees be made to dance?

Suddenly Winters broke out in a sweat. Realization glowed that hope was not completely extinguished. For an instant those twigs which squeezed his wrists relaxed their intensity. Music from Orpheus' lyre had come back as an echo. In that brief respite, though it had passed unexploited, Winters could have snatched himself free.

He waited now with but one thought—to be ready when opportunity again presented itself. He closed his mind against Eurydice's tears, against Orpheus and his enemies. Seconds passed. Then an echo came. With that same cat-like quickness with which he acted in gunfights, Winters twisted his arms and leaped forward to freedom.

This freedom he knew, however, was only an exchange of one form of captivity for another. He was now surrounded by trees, as was Eurydice. But he had room for action. He wasted no time either, but flung himself down and drew his sixgun. Through a low open space, he could see Orpheus, as well as his brutal attackers. Regretful Shade had just picked up a large stone and was advancing with it, his evident purpose murder. Immediately Winters beaded on him and fired. Regretful Shade collapsed and lay beneath his own rock.

CONSTERNATION seized Regretful's confederates; they stared uncertainly at their fallen comrade. Before action could be decided upon, Braggy Doshey, Post Poner and Tempus Fugit were likewise dead. Hokey Pokey alone remained. Just in time, he retreated into a stone.

Orpheus lay still, as if dead. Winters called, "Orph, get up."

Orpheus did not stir.

Beside Winters rose a gentle whisper of movement. Eurydice stood near. "Is he dead, O Winters?"

"Sure looks like it," Winters replied.

"Oh, no," she sobbed. "It must not be. Orpheus!" she cried. "Oh, Orpheus, do not die. Awake while there is time."

Winters watched. "Talk to him some more. I thought I saw him move."

While Eurydice called and pleaded Orpheus did, indeed, move. He rolled onto his side, sat up and shook his beautiful head. "Eurydice! Where are you?"

"Here, O Beloved, in my prison, as before."

"Where is he who was sent to save you?"

"I'm right here, Orph," Winters answered. "Get busy on that harp. I got an idea, too; play something slow and waltzy."

"O Winters, have I not often tried to do that very thing? But each time these wicked Maenads have seized my lyre and stopped my music."

"They won't this time," said Winters. Orpheus was puzzled, but when he cast about to see what had become of his enemies he saw only dead bodies. His face brightened. "Ah, indeed."

Winters reloaded his sixgun and afterwards kept an eye out for Hokey Pokey. "Play, Orph."

Orpheus set his harp on one knee and began to play softly. Maenad trees began

at once to sway and wave their branches, slowly, gently. Winters saw Hokey Pokey's head rise from its hiding place. A sixgun bullet made it to lower out of sight.

Then Orpheus measured his music into a lively, irresistible waltz. Response was a fierce struggle of resistance at first, with trees twisting and turning individually. But soon their resistance ended; they paired off and began to waltz, with resultant great gaps in their circle.

Winters turned to Eurydice. "Now's your chance, lady. Better take it."

Eurydice trembled. "I can't. I can't. I'm afraid, O Winters."

"In that case, there's only one thing to do. I'll carry you." Without leave or objection from her, he flung his left arm around her legs and laid her like a sack of feed over his left shoulder. Hokey Pokey lifted his head again, again withdrew it as a bullet hissed close.

When Winters had reached safety, Orpheus stopped his playing. In an instant Eurydice was in his arms. Winters waited, at first in sympathy, finally in boredom.

"That ought to do for a spell," he told them.

They drew apart and favored him with looks of gratitude. "O Winters, most valiant of mortals—"

"Don't get sentimental," said Winters. "There's still a job to do."

They looked puzzled. Orpheus said, "What else could there be?"

Winters pointed at Hokey Pokey's hiding place. "There's a Mean Edd left in that rock. We're going to flush him. You two come with me."

They obeyed readily. "No request of yours could we deny," said Orpheus.

"Nor command disobey," said Eurydice.

They took positions back of Pokey's rock. "Now, Orph," said Winters, "I want you to play a tune that will fetch him out

of there. When he's out, he'd better run toward them trees or I'll shoot him. Just as he gets there, I want you to change your tune to one as fierce as ever you played in your life. We'll see what happens to Pokey."

ORPHEUS played a tune so shrill that Pokey's rock shivered and splintered. Pokey leaped out and ran streaming, reckless of his course. As Winters had intended, he ran straight to Eurydice's recent prison. Trees caught him. When Orpheus changed his tune, those trees pulled Pokey's head off and tore his body into pieces.

"There," said Winters. "According to my wife's books, that was supposed to be you, Orpheus."

Orpheus looked at him gravely and sighed. "Except for you, O Winters, it might have been as your loved one's books have said."

Eurydice lowered her pretty head in wistful thought. "In token of our gratitude, you deserve a gift at our hands, O Winters. But we have so little." She looked at her fingers, felt at her throat and shook her head sadly in realization that she had neither gold nor precious stones.

Then she remembered and removed that flower which adorned her braids. "This, O Winters, I give to you, because it is all I have. It is a crocus. Plant it somewhere, and I shall bless it with my love. It shall ever after be sacred to Eurydice. In centuries yet unborn, hearts will be gladdened by it, because it will bloom even before winter's chill breath is hardly stilled."

Winters took her gift, held it clumsily. "You sure don't owe me nothing, but I reckon you wouldn't give me this if you didn't mean me to take it." He studied a while, could think of nothing more to say.

"Well, I better get along home." He swung onto Cannon Ball and headed east.

"From Elysian shores we shall remember you forever," Orpheus called.

"Farewell, O Winters."

A night breeze filled with music lightened his journey. Presently he thought that wonders would never end. Eurydice's gift, he discovered, was growing roots. They crawled along his fingers, probed eagerly between them. Well, wasn't that something!

Where Tallyho Canyon opened from Alkali Flat, he swung off his horse, dug with his fingers beside a boulder and planted his crocus. He watered it from his canteen, reluctantly left it and rode out onto Alkali Flat.

When only a mile south of Forlorn Gap he experienced an unusual sensation, one that suggested transition, as if he were passing out of one time into another. An upward glance at familiar constellations told him that midnight had passed. Bogannon's saloon, of course, was closed.

At home he found his lovely wife Myra waiting up for him. She had supper, kept oven-warm. When they sat down to eat and drink, she looked at him curiously, somewhat disappointed.

"Lee, don't you see anything?" she asked.

His eyes came to rest upon a bowl of short-stemmed flowers, some pink, some purple, some saffron. "Yeah," he said with a gulp. "Flowers."

"Crocuses," said Myra happily. "Had you realized it is spring? These are its very first flowers. Lovely, aren't they?"

Something caused Lee to glance at his fingernails. He had washed his hands, yet under his nails was fresh earth. For a moment he thought he heard distant music. But, he told himself, it was only a whisper of wind.