



"Hey," Winters yelled, "that's no way to make a fire burn! You're blowing too hard..."

Lee Winters Story
by Lon Williams

THE MAGIC GRINDSTONE

"It'll sharpen anything for you that you want sharpened, Winters," the deputy marshal was told. And Lee Winters, though doubtful of this purported magic, figured it was worth trying out, under the powdersmoke-threatening circumstances. . .

DEPUTY MARSHAL Lee Winters, after a wanted monkey named Squint-eye Morgan, had lost his way at dusk in towering rough country southeast of Forlorn Gap. When he halted his horse Cannon Ball, he realized—too late—that he had ridden into a fearsome region theretofore known to him mainly by rumor and legend. It was Bellows

Canyon, a ghostly place where winds blew in gusts, like air from a bellows, and with great wheezing sputters and roars. Lately, getting home had become his greatest problem, as if fateful spirits had conspired against him. Certainly he would not get out of this situation without trouble.

He grabbed his hat to keep it from flying away. Rising gusts had swelled to

hurricane proportions. Earth and canyon walls vibrated; and rocks, dislodged from great heights, came down with tremendous crashing sounds. He would have turned and retraced his course, but a reversal of wind-direction made him hesitate then resolve to go on. Anyhow, this way was home.

He had gone a tortuous mile or so, when Cannon Ball, rounding a curve, stood on his hind legs. This was an old, infuriating habit he had, and Winters angrily sawed his bit when he had put his hoofs down again. Yards beyond, they came upon an explanation of Cannon Ball's fright.

A bearded little man was down on hands and knees before a smoking, reluctant fire. He puckered his hairy mouth and blew. Winters grabbed his hat, for once more there was a hurricane.

"Hey!" Winters yelled. "That's no way to make a fire burn. You're blowing too hard."

Gopher-like eyes blinked up. "Why, howdy, Winters. What are you doing here?"

"Now, let me ask one," said Winters. "How come you know me, when I don't know you from Adamineezer?"

"Oh, we all know you, Winters. I'm Cain Snuffer, better knowed as Lampwick or plain Lamp Snuffer. I prospect hereabouts. But right now I'm wrestling with this fire so's to make coffee. Light, and lend a hand."

Winters disregarded intuitive warnings, swung down and dropped Cannon Ball's reins. "What you need, Lampwick, is some shavings."

Snuffer got up. "Don't I know that!" He eyed Winters with mixed hope and distrust, ready to fly into a tirade. "Winters, why ain't you got no whittlin'-stick in your saddlebags?"

Winters gave him eye for eye. "It happens I have; why don't you carry your own whittlin'-stick?"

Snuffer folded his arms across his chest and lifted his chin haughtily. "Sir, I carried a whittlin'-stick regular, but I whittled it up."

"Naturally," said Winters. "If you whittled long enough, you could whittle up a wagon wheel."

"Now, that's neither here nor there, Winters," said Snuffer. "If you've got a whittlin'-stick trot it out, so's I can get this fire going."

"Since you ask it so nice," said Winters, "I'll oblige you. That is, for coffee." He took a short pine stick from his warbags. "There, Snuffer. If you've got a knife fit to call such, you can get shavings from that."

SNUFFER snatched it. "*If you've got a knife*, he says. Winters, you ain't seen no knife till you've seen mine." Snuffer produced a folding knife, thumb-nailed it open and poised its blade over Winters' whittlin'-stick. To Lee's amazement, curls flew off like snowflakes. His whittlin'-stick disappeared and Snuffer stood knee-deep in shavings.

"Be-confound!" exclaimed Winters. "Beats anything I ever saw."

Snuffer eyed him disdainfully. "*If you've got a knife*, he says. Winters, this knife is so sharp that when a shaving gets one good look, it don't wait to be shaved; it just curls itself up and away it flies."

"That I can see," said Winters. "But what puzzles me is, how did you get your knife so sharp?"

"Ah," said Snuffer, "that's another story." He dropped to his knees and in no time had a roaring blaze. "Set down, Winters, and first thing you know we'll have coffee."

Winters sat down and watched Snuffer prepare coffee and bacon. "About that knife, Snuffer?"

"Oh," said Snuffer, "that's right. You wanted to know how I got it so sharp, didn't you? Well, I'll tell you."

He halted there. A voice had sounded a short distance away. An Indian and his woman came within their circle of light.

"Now who?" asked Winters.

"That's Cozy Bear and his young squaw," said Snuffer. "Her name's Silent Little Prairie Dog."

"Humph!" Winters grunted. "Nothing silent about her."

Silent Little Prairie Dog was talking to her husband. "You heap big lazy no-good Bannock no-good lazy heap big Injun call self Cozy Bear that not cozy and squaw not cozy but cold all winter and move about all summer and heap big lazy no-good Bannock go round with him head bent over and no buffalo meat in stomach and Silent Little Prairie Dog no buffalo meat in stomach because Cozy Bear heap big lazy no-good. . ."

That continued without let-up, and Cozy Bear and Silent Little Prairie Dog disappeared round a curve.

Snuffer removed his skillet of bacon and his coffee pot. He gave Winters bacon on cold hoecake and poured drinks.

Winters ate heartily.

"There's quite a story about Cozy Bear," Snuffer said between gulps of coffee and chomps of bread and bacon. "Cozy Bear got lonesome, living in his tepee with Silent Little Prairie Dog. It was because she never talked none. So, one day Cozy Bear decided to have her tongue sharpened."

"Sharpened her tongue, did he?" said Winters sarcastically. "And just how did he do that?"

Snuffer replied impatiently, "How do you reckon he done it? Why, same as how

I sharpened my knife. He done it with Twining Bowstring's magic grindstone name of Rundum. Ain't you never hear tell of Grindstone Rundum?"

Winters drained his coffee cup and angrily put it down. "Now, see here, Lampwick Snuffer, I don't like people who tell jokes and pretend they ain't no jokes. I asked you a fair question."

Snuffer put down his cup with a bang. "Now, you see here, Winters. If you don't like my conversation, you can get on your long-legged horse and skedaddle. You asked me a question and I answered it. What could be more fairer than that?"

Winters got up. "When company's no longer company, it ought to be broke up. I sure know a lick it's done by." He swung onto Cannon Ball. Courtesy suggested thanks for his supper, but Snuffer was shaking his fist at him.

"Winters, you're complete unreasonable," Snuffer raved. "But you'll learn. More'n likely you'll be more fool than I was about that grindstone. It'll serve you right, too."

Winters kneed his horse. He called back, "Snuffer, if you're ever in Forlorn Gap, look me up. I've got a magic claw-hammer to show you. It pulls funny stories."

Snuffer was shaking his fist when Winters last saw him.

SHORTLY afterwards, Winters himself began to shake. He felt hot and cold by turns, but at last settled into something like open-eyed sleep. He dreamed he was in Doc Bogannon's saloon, where he drank magic potions and began to have visions. Next he dreamed he was riding up to his own house in Forlorn Gap and seeing his beautiful wife, Myra, within a lighted room. In that mystic condition of mind, he suddenly understood what had happened. Lamp Snuffer was a ghost; that coffee he

had given to Winters was ghost-brew. But Winters blamed only himself. Experience should have taught him by now to have no truck with prospectors, especially at night.

Bellows Canyon wound on between its great walls. At length sounds of burning filled Lee's ears. Cannon Ball grew nervous. However, both horse and rider had anticipated what was ahead. When they came upon a small campfire round a turn neither was surprised or scared.

Four men were there, their positions as they sat upon stones making four corners of a square. They glanced up with annoyance as Winters reined down near them.

"Howdy, strangers," said Winters.

One responded, "Howdy."

Then Winters saw something that stiffened him. It was a frame-mounted grindstone about as large as a granny poundcake.

Winters swallowed. "I reckon that's Grindstone Rundum?"

They looked up with sudden interest. He who sat nearest to Rundum even smiled vaguely. "Why, yes," said this one. "How did you know?"

"Just guessed it," said Winters.

"Interesting. Light and get acquainted, Winters. I am Twining Bowstring."

"Guessed that, too," said Winters.

"You did?" said Bowstring. "You must know something of magic yourself."

Winters' conscience began to object. "No," he confessed. "I merely put two and two together. Prospector Lampwick Snuffer told me about some feller named Twining Bowstring who owned a grindstone called Rundum."

"Ah," sighed Bowstring. "And I cautioned him to keep it secret. Oh, well, nobody would believe it anyhow; get down, Winters."

Winters stared, puzzled. That made twice that Bowstring had called his name.

"Say, now, how come you knowed me?"

"Oh," said Bowstring offhandedly, "we all know you, Winters. As much as you've been riding these mountains in search of wanted monkeys, you've become famous. Sort of legendary, especially among folks like me."

WINTERS eyed them suspiciously, wondered if they might not be ghosts. Nevertheless, he clung to realities. "I reckon you've not seen a monkey named Squint-eye Morgan, have you?"

Bowstring grunted. "We certainly have, Winters. Get down, and we'll tell you about him."

Winters halted between fear and sense of duty. Reluctantly he swung down. "Tell me, Bowstring."

Bowstring indicated a rock nearby. "Sit down, Winters. Squint-eye Morgan himself sat on that very stone not two hours ago."

Winters looked about uneasily. "You sure he ain't still around?"

"Positive."

Winters sat down. Immediately there was a general shifting of rocks. Square became pentagon, with their campfire its center.

Bowstring nodded at a pudgy-faced character with bushy eyebrows and thick, uncombed hair who sat opposite Winters. "That's Brogdon Heath, Winters."

Winters eyed Heath uneasily. Heath wore a six-gun whose walnut handle showed much wear.

Heath eyed him in return. "I hear you're pretty fast with your gun."

"There's no law agin' hearin'," said Winters.

"Let's not infringe hospitality," said Bowstring. He thumbed toward another of their group. "Your neighbor there, Winters, is Hubbard Damron Hubbard." He jerked his head left. "My neighbor here

is Strelson Tilyou.”

Each grunted, but neither glanced up. Tilyou was fat, of arrogant demeanor, but worried. Hubbard was thin, dirty, ragged. He looked starved.

Winters disliked all of them. He particularly disliked and distrusted Brogdon Heath. Bowstring showed manners, yet there certainly was treachery in him.

“You’re an odd lot, in my opinion,” said Winters, strangely aware of his indiscretion. He glanced at Tilyou. “That one looks over-fed. And Hubbard here—I reckon he must be one of Mother Hubbard’s own boys.”

Brog Heath’s mouth twisted. “You ain’t funny, Winters.”

“Never meant to be,” Winters retorted. “Judging by your disposition, I’d say you’ve been living on rattlesnake giblets.”

Heath’s expression became sullen and ominous. “You’ve got plenty of self-confidence, Winters. Careful you don’t lose it.”

Winters considered that good advice. He wondered why he’d been so outspoken anyhow. Snuffer’s coffee, he figured.

He turned to Bowstring. “You said you could tell me about Squint-eye Morgan.”

“Ah,” moaned Bowstring, “you can forget him, Winters. He was here, it’s true, but he got curious about my magic grindstone.”

Winters twisted round. Rundum stood between him and Bowstring. “Magic, eh?”

“Magic,” said Bowstring.

Winters scoffed but remembered that Myra was a tireless reader of books, especially books on history and mythology. He remembered Myra’s having read to him stories about a magic lamp and a magic carpet. He couldn’t recall anything about a magic grindstone. Oh, well, it was all fable anyhow.

“I suppose,” he said, “you’re ready to

spin some tall yarn, such as Lamp Snuffer done back there. Well, save your breath. Just tell me where I can find Squint-eye Morgan, and I’ll ride along.”

“You can’t find him, Winters,” said Bowstring. “I didn’t say I’d tell you where you could find him. In honest truth, I’ll say that Squint-eye will never be seen again.”

“That’s right, he won’t,” said Tilyou.

“No, he won’t,” said Hubbard with his dry, rattling voice.

“Winters must be from Missouri,” snarled Heath. “Maybe he’ll have to be showed.”

“I was born and fetched up in Texas,” retorted Winters with thoroughly unnatural boldness. “We Texans don’t have to be showed nothin’. It’s our business to show, not to be showed. Anything you’d like to be showed?”

BOWSTRING snapped in quick reproof, “Winters, don’t forget you’re our guest. You’re behaving rudely, I’d say. Have you got a pocket knife?”

“I have,” replied Winters.

“Like to have it sharpened?”

“I keep it sharpened.”

Bowstring sniffed. “Perhaps there’s something else you’d prefer having sharpened?”

Winters started to rise. “Strikes me you fellers ain’t too friendly yourselves. If you’ll excuse my abruptness. . .”

“Down, Winters,” Bowstring chided.

Winters eased down. “All right, where’s Squint-eye Morgan?”

Bowstring lost patience. “I said he got curious about my magic grindstone.”

“Well, suppose he did,” said Winters. “What of it?”

Bowstring shifted for comfort. “Winters, you’re pretending you don’t believe in magic.”

“I don’t have to pretend. I just don’t

believe in it.”

“But you saw one Lampwick Snuffer, didn’t you?”

“I did.”

“And did you see his knife?”

“Certainly.”

“And observed how sharp it was?”

“Yes.”

“And was told, no doubt, that he’d had it sharpened by Grindstone Rundum?”

Winters didn’t like to admit it, but he nodded.

“And possibly you saw Indians Cozy Bear and his squaw, Silent Little Prairie Dog?”

“I did.”

“And noted that her tongue was rather sharp?”

“Correct.”

Bowstring arched his eyebrows in mild contempt. “Haven’t you something you’d like to have sharpened?”

“This,” said Winters, “is what I don’t like. And now if you’ll excuse me. . .”

“One moment, Winters,” said Tilyou. “Here’s something I should show you.”

Winters eased down again and stared in amazement when Tilyou drew up one of a great number of leather bags that Winters had mistaken for lumps of a great mattress. His amazement catapulted when Tilyou untied a string and revealed a treasure in double-eagles.

“Gold!” he exclaimed.

“Gold, Winters,” said Tilyou. “Shall I tell you how I got it?”

This was something Winters could appreciate. “By all means,” he said.

TILYOU put his arms across his knees and peered sadly at Winters. “It’s not a long story, Winters. Ten years ago, I wandered into this canyon in search of gold. There was nothing I desired more than gold. In Bellows Canyon I met Twining Bowstring and his magic

grindstone.”

“And,” said Winters with rising disgust, “like King Midas, you received a golden touch.”

“Not exactly,” said Tilyou. “Bowstring asked me if there was anything I wanted sharpened. Of course there was; it was my power to acquire gold money. All I had to do, Bowstring told me, was to turn his magic grindstone, say, *Turn, Rundum, turn*, and think about what I wanted sharpened. As I turned, I soon felt that I had acquired a gift. And so it was. Wherever I went, anything I sold brought a fabulous price. Why, for an ordinary skinning knife I received one hundred double-eagles. Soon I had so much money that it took twenty pack-horses to carry it. That was ten years ago. Here is my beginning of another treasure. Already I’ve got so much, it’s a nuisance.”

“But you’ve still got it,” Winters observed pointedly.

Tilyou reached into his treasure and tossed a double-eagle to Winters. “There. To me, gold is no more than dirt.”

Winters had caught his present in his right hand. He tossed it up and caught it to test its weight. He admired its golden shine and beauty, warmed to its incomparable luster and assurance.

He eyed Tilyou with hungry challenge. “If it’s no more than dirt to you, why not toss me another double-eagle?”

Tilyou backed his shoulders; his face hardened in greedy resentment. “You are like all beggars. I’ve given you enough. You’ll get no more.”

“Well,” Winters replied dryly, “anyhow, thanks for small favors.”

Bowstring regarded Winters with sympathy. “And you still don’t believe this about Rundum’s magic?”

“Certainly not,” Winters scoffed. “If he’s dissatisfied with his gold, why don’t he give Rundum another twirl and fix

things like he wants 'em?"

"Ah," said Bowstring, "Rundum is not so generous as that. With all its magic, Rundum is only a grindstone. It can function in no other capacity. It will sharpen what you want sharpened. If you are dissatisfied, it will, if you desire, dull that which it has sharpened. When that is done, Rundum has exhausted its generosity for you and neither will nor can do more."

"Well!" exclaimed Winters. He glanced at Tilyou's woebegone face and chuckled. "So King Midas can take it or leave it, eh?"

"Exactly." Bowstring gazed at his boots thoughtfully. "Tilyou can go on acquiring more and more gold, or he can lose all and be poor again, and so long as he lives have nothing. It's not an easy choice, Winters."

"That's not so hard," said Winters. "He can make money and give it away, can't he?"

"Ah, no," said Bowstring. "Nothing makes him so miserable as giving something away. He gave you money merely to make his point. He no doubt regrets his loss already."

Tilyou looked at Winters with hatred, which confirmed Bowstring's opinion. Winters, however, held onto his gift, added to its security by putting it in his pocket.

He glanced at Brog Heath. "What's Rundum sharpened for him?"

Heath scowled. "Nothing. But I'm beginning to think of something. I was never as fast with my gun as I wanted to be. If you don't leave pretty soon, I may decide to have my gun-work sharpened."

WINTERS sat still for seconds. He wondered just how fast Heath was. He looked muscular, mean and nervous—a dangerous combination. Winters glanced

at Hubbard. "I reckon he can't make up what he calls his mind either."

Hubbard responded angrily, "Winters, I think you've overstayed your welcome. Why don't you ride on?"

"No," said Bowstring, "he is welcome until he's made up his mind what he wants sharpened. He'd best make it up soon, though, or he won't have any to make up."

Winters looked from face to face. Hostility had appeared everywhere. Heath had gripped his gun handle. Hubbard had drawn a long knife. Bowstring had reached inside his jacket. Tilyou held a derringer.

Winters sprang up and grabbed Rundum's crank. "Turn, Rundum, turn," it he shouted. As Rundum turned, Winters thought, *Make my gun-action sharp. Make it sharper than has ever been or ever will again be seen in this world.* Electrifying sensations raced through him. Rundum stopped and refused further to be turned. But Winters had taken on confidence and strength; he released Rundum's crank and turned to face his companions.

Bowstring smiled with beguiling friendliness. "Ah, Winters, what did you have sharpened?"

Winters glanced at a chunk of wood alive with fire at one end. Suddenly it disintegrated, and Bellows Canyon shook with thunder.

"Winters!" cried Bowstring. "Did you do that?"

"I did," said Winters, appalled at his own speed. He had drawn, fired and reholstered his gun quicker than his own thought; there'd been no visible motion.

"Amazing," Bowstring said with a sigh. "Now, I suppose, you believe in Rundum's magic."

"Yeah," said Winters. He was watching Brogdon Heath, whose gunhand had become restless. Here was danger such as Winters had faced in many tight spots. "Don't try anything, Heath."

"Winters, I hate you," said Heath. He got up. "I hate lawmen in general, you in particular. I hate Tilyou, also. I hate him because he has gold, while I have none. For seven years I've sat here in sight of this grindstone, trying to make up my mind whether to take Tilyou's gold or first sharpen my speed. I've wanted something besides gold. I've wanted to be a fast gunslinger and number-one badman. Winters, you've beat me to one choice I was considering. But Tilyou's gold is left. Who gets it, you or me? Or, maybe you'd like to divide it, Winters."

"No," screamed Tilyou. "It's mine. Nobody can have it. Do you hear? Nobody."

"Quiet," said Winters. "Nobody's going to bother you or your gold."

"But I've made up my mind at last," said Hubbard Damron Hubbard.

"So have I," said Bowstring. "I've owned this grindstone for thirty years. I came to this secluded place, where I could think and make up my mind. I've made it up. I'm going to sharpen my wits; I'm going to be wise. With wisdom, such as has never before been seen, I can acquire all else, both wealth and power."

"You'll have responsibilities, too," Strelson Tilyou reminded him. "Better think twice, Bowstring."

Bowstring got up. "I've thought twice; I've thought millions of times."

"So have I," cried Hubbard. He sprang up and grabbed Rundum's crank. "Turn, Rundum, turn. Sharpen my power to possess until it is invincible."

RUNDUM turned, then stopped. Hubbard threw his arms around it and hugged it tight.

"Get away from there," screamed Bowstring.

"No," cried Hubbard. "Rundum is mine. My power to possess can never be

broken. Nobody will ever touch Rundum again without my permission. Then only by promising to give me half of whatever they gain by touching it. I shall have power in everything, and wealth without measure."

"A fool I've been," groaned Bowstring. "But never again." He drew a gun from beneath his vest and blasted a hole in Hubbard's head. He turned toward Brogdon Heath, only to be blasted in turn.

"I have something yet to be sharpened," declared Heath. But instead of moving toward Rundum, he turned toward Winters. There was then a tremendous roar. Winters looked down and saw a smoking gun in his right hand. Heath was falling, already a corpse.

"Good work, Winters," said a squeaky, choked-up voice.

Winters whirled but let his gun slide into its holster. Tilyou had not moved. He sat as before, pudgy and perspiring. "It looks as if you have won Grindstone Rundum, Winters."

"No," said Winters. "It can do nothing for me."

"You mean I can have it?"

"Certainly."

"Then, if you don't mind, fetch it to me."

"I don't mind," said Winters. He stepped back to pick it up. To do so was impossible; Rundum was within an unbreakable embrace. Hubbard's arms were as iron. "You can have it, Tilyou, but you'll have to take a dead man with it." Winters strode to his horse and swung up. "What is more, you can have everything that's here, except me and my horse."

"One moment, Winters," called Tilyou.

Winters reined down. "Yeah?"

Tilyou fingered a coin from his golden treasure. "You saved my life, Winters. I owe you something for that. Here. I give

you another double-eagle.” He tossed it and Winters caught it.

Winters felt its wondrous heaviness. At first he thought to toss it back to its miserly giver. Then he remembered somebody who might appreciate it. “Thanks, Tilyou. You’re mighty generous.”

He dropped his second double-eagle into his pocket and lifted Cannon Ball’s reins. He immediately drew back.

What appeared to be a riderless horse approached and stopped a few feet away. Its saddle tilted, as it might have done had a rider dismounted.

A voice said, “Get down, Winters. You ain’t leaving yet.”

Winters looked down at Tilyou, thinking he might have spoken. But Tilyou was staring in terror, not at anything in particular.

“Who are you?” demanded Winters, scared spitless.

“Wouldn’t you like to know! But I said get down. If you don’t. . .”

Winters hesitated. He heard a gunhammer clicking back. He thought of giggling Cannon Ball and trying to run. Upon second thought, he swung down. “I can’t argue with what I can’t see. What are you, and where are you?”

“I was what you so carelessly called your wanted monkey,” came answer. “That’s all past, Winters, I’ve come back to get you. After that, I’ll be claiming more gold than I’ve ever before seen in one pile.”

“No!” screamed Tilyou. He drew a bag of gold into his arms and hugged it close. “You can’t have it. Winters, it’s him. It’s Squint-eye Morgan. He was here. Rundum sharpened his power to hide and disappear. He—he’s invisible, Winters. But it’s Morgan. I know his voice.”

“Sure, I’m Morgan,” responded Morgan gloatingly. “And you can’t see

me. Maybe I sound like I’m over there by my horse, but I’m not there. Sounding in one place and being in another is part of my new power.” He laughed coarsely. “Winters, you look scared. You’re supposed to be mighty fast with your gun; why don’t you shoot?”

“I don’t deceive my looks,” said Winters. “As for my being fast or slow, I make no claims. But I’ll say this: You’ve sure got a trick now that ought to take you places.”

“It will, Winters. But it’s going to take you places first. And then. . .”

“No!” screamed Tilyou. “You can’t have my gold.”

WINTERS felt sweat trickling down on his forehead. Three dead men lay close by. A campfire smoldered, too. An occasional spark popped free and spread faint light all around. Winters accepted invisibility as something Rundum’s magic might bestow upon its patron. Yet invisibility did not mean non-existence. Even an invisible object could not be transparent, yet have substance.

Cautiously Winters sought a shadow, a flicker of movement.

At last on a distant canyon face he saw it—a tall shadow, human in outline. A small blaze had flared up. Morgan’s invisible body outlined itself, gun in hand, feet spread apart for quick action. In that flare of light, a pattern of legs was cast against darkness, earth and towering stone.

Winters knew then where Squint-eye stood, saw movement of shadow that warned of approaching death. Such peril was not new. Winters’ muscles through bitter, deadly experience had acquired power that transcended thought for speed. His sixgun roared; an invisible body fell. Then, as death intervened, that quality of invisibility which had attached itself to life slowly detached itself, and Squint-eye

Morgan lay as starkly visible as any dead man Winters had ever seen.

Once more Winters mounted his horse. He heard Tilyou murmur something about another double-eagle, but he kneed Cannon Ball and did not look back.

IN FORLORN GAP, where winds blew through many empty houses, one place was alive and bright. This was Doc Bogannon's saloon, only place of its kind in town. Bogannon, owner and operator, man of mystery, philosopher who looked upon all men with charity and kindly understanding, engaged his hands busily with drying and polishing glasses. His last customer had just departed when his batwings swung inward.

"Winters!" he exclaimed. "Come in, Winters."

Winters moved unsteadily to a table. "Wine, Doc. Two glasses."

"Wine it is, Winters." Bogie hurried round. "Winters, you look whipped. Seen ghosts or something?"

"Yeah, Doc, something."

Bogie filled Lee's glass. Winters promptly drained it and held it for more. He drank more leisurely then. When Bogie had emptied his own glass, Winters reached for a coin and came up with a double-eagle. He laid it in front of Bogie, who stared at it.

"What's that for, Winters?"

"Doc," said Winters, skeptical of his own generosity, "that's something for you. Present."

Bogie eyed it suspiciously. "I don't know about your presents, Winters."

"What do you mean, Doc? Ain't my presents good enough for you?"

"You know I don't mean that," said Bogie. "I just mean that your presents are spooked. They don't like me." He stared some more, then his courage asserted itself. But no sooner had he picked up Winters' present than he shook it out of his hand as if it were biting him. It bounced and spun crazily.

Winters' eyebrows went up. "What's wrong, Doc?"

Bogannon was suddenly resentful. "Now, see here, Winters. I appreciate a joke, but everything has its limit."

Winters picked up his double-eagle. It did, indeed, impart spooky sensations. "Sorry, Doc," Winters said nervously. "Sure didn't mean you no harm."

Bogie wiped his face. "It's all right, Winters. Just happens I'm beginning to think about ghosts. Maybe there are ghosts, after all."

"Don't give 'em a thought, Doc," advised Winters. "There ain't no such things as ghosts; they exist only in people's minds. Good-night."

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