

A "LEE WINTERS" STORY
by Lon Williams

GHOST, RIDE WITH ME!

There was no such thing as a ghost, maintained the hardly-valiant Deputy Marshal. Now, if he could only convince himself of this assertion . . .

DEPUTY Marshal Lee Winters rode warily by moonlight into Black Fox Gap. He seldom traveled on Pedigo Road. First, because he seldom had business there. Second, because at night it was a perilous, haunted trail. This night he took a chance because it would save him many miles of hard riding. He was tired, too, and a-jangle with frayed nerves—result of a deadly shoot-out on Licking Creek before sundown.

His route wound precariously along three miles of precipice and cliff, through shadow and souging winds. He came to a treacherous turn round jutting rocks, where a misstep could have sent mount and rider plunging in space to a depth of two hundred feet. Cannon Ball, Winters' big, rangy horse, was taking it easy round this turn, when a ghost rose from nowhere and seated itself behind Winters.

Cannon Ball leaped like a charging panther and took off for Forlorn Gap, five miles away. Winters, already scared from his recent close call with death, grabbed bridle leather and saddle post. Cannon Ball, though ordinarily a steady, dependable animal, was sometimes a devil for meanness. This time he clamped teeth to bite and thundered round rock-bound curves and along perilous edges, like a horse gone crazy.

"Let him run," Winters' spectral companion said in a toneless, quavering voice. "I like fast riding. Always did. You remember me, of course. I'm Binkley Aspentree. I was murdered here in Black Fox Gap, six years ago."

Winters looked over his shoulder. In doing so, he very nearly threw his horse off-balance, a circumstance that caused shivers to run up his back. What he'd glimpsed rising onto Cannon Ball's back was a ghost, and no mistake. He'd never seen Bink Aspentree, dead or alive, but he'd heard of him plenty, had seen his picture, too—an insane

monster, brutal and murderous. Here was his pattern, a slim, tall figure, dressed in white, face as white as snow.



Winters dared not let go his hold of leather to strike at this apparition; and he was sure that if he did strike, his hand would pass through empty space. He tried to say something, tried to ask what his uninvited companion wanted, but he could speak not a word.

“That’s quite all right,” said Binkley Aspentree. “Just keep an eye on your horse. He’s hitting it off right lively, you know. ‘Twould be too bad if he missed his footing.”

Winters faced front. By moonlight, he could easily see his way. So could Cannon Ball, who thundered ahead, rearing at times, but immediately pounding on. He barely missed projecting cliffs; at times he seemed within inches of nothing but dark abyss. Winters had not tried to slow him down. Instead, he entangled his fingers in Cannon Ball’s mane and did nothing but hold on.

“Good horse you’ve got, stranger,” said Bink Aspentree’s ghost. “I had a fine horse in my day. Ran like a stampeding wind. No posse could even keep within sight of his dust. I’d have been riding high and handsome to this night, if Bud Lenox hadn’t knifed me here in Black Fox. Cut my throat, he did. But I had my satisfaction. I saw him hung by vigilantes at Powder River a year later. It was a pleasure to see his mouth gape and his eyes bug out. Well, stranger, I’ll be leaving you now. Nice ride we had together; perhaps we shall try it again sometime.”

Cannon Ball, blowing hard, had swung onto upgrade, toward plateau land and wide sky. He slowed abruptly, snorted and slung his head. Winters looked back.

He was alone.

His right hand crept down, his fingers clawed slowly, clumsily. Those fingers, after exhaustive effort, clutched numbly at an empty holster.

Winters’ breath exhaled in a slow growl. Anger was displacing fright.

A little later he felt in his left-hand hip-pocket. His wallet, too, was gone. He felt for his hat and found it in place. He still had on his clothes. His money belt, where he carried most of his money, was still with him, concealed under his shirt. His war bags were intact. In one of them he found an extra six-gun; he holstered it viciously; he could have bitten its barrel off, he was that furious. He was scared stiff, too, for sweat beaded and rolled on his face. He considered turning back. Immediately he had a better thought; he wanted no further truck with ghosts.

IN FORLORN GAP, Doc Bogannon’s saloon was still open for business, although midnight was close. Gold-hunters continued to stream northward for Pangborn Gulch and westward for

Elkhorn Pass. Many stopped over at Goodlett Hotel, and some spent long evenings at Bogie’s, card playing, drinking and yarning. This night they’d filtered down to a mere handful, then only one remained, a dapper gentleman who came forward and slapped a coin onto Bogie’s bar.

“A sip of wine, Bogannon.”

“Wine it is,” said Bogie. He poured a glass. Meanwhile he got an eyeful of his customer, a slim, keen-cut cross between a professional gambler and possibly a poet. He had a pleasant face that could suddenly turn cold and brassy; he wore a polka-dot soft bow tie whose ends hung six inches down, and he also carried a six-shooter under his coat.

“Very good wine, Bogannon.”

“Don’t believe I’ve met you,” said Bogie.

“Then you’ve missed something, sir. I’m Victor—but more widely known as Bobo—Brandon. World traveler, adventurer, philosopher, and poet. Indeed, I’m something of almost anything you can name.”

“Interesting,” said Bogie. Doc Bogannon was himself an enigma. He was big, broad-shouldered, and handsome. He had a fine big head and thick black hair. In appearance he was a statesman; yet he, for reasons best known to him, was content to own a saloon in a semi-ghost town a thousand miles from anywhere and to spend his nights with a half-breed Shoshone wife. Doc leaned back and folded his arms. “You’re not a Boston Brandon, by chance?”

“Boston?” Bobo Brandon reflected a moment. “Well, no. I’ve been in Boston considerably, but you could hardly call me a Bostonian. Are you from Boston?”

Bogie arched his heavy eyebrows. “A Bogannon from Boston? Impossible!” He filled Brandon’s glass again. “I presume it takes a great deal of courage to be a world traveler?”

Brandon sipped wine. “Courage? That’s hardly a word for it. Fearlessness is more accurate. Ever face a charging lion with only a single-shot rifle between you and death?”

“Never hunted lions,” said Bogie.

“Well, I have, and that has been my situation more than once. Now, don’t ask me if I escaped alive.”

Bogie puckered his massive mouth. “I was just wondering how many times you’d been et up. Of course you’ve faced dangerous men, as well as lions?”

“Naturally. I’ve killed my share of gunmen, assassins, and such. I once pulled a cobra out of a hole by its tail and clipped its head off with a hunting-knife.”

“That does it,” declared Bogie. “I’d say you’re absolutely fearless.”

“I am afraid of nothing.” Brandon picked up his glass and strode leisurely back and forth. “Ah, for those adventurous days again. Brazilian jungles, head-hunters, Bengal tigers, Shanghai pirates, pythons, leopards . . .”

DOC BOGANNON’S batwings swung, and a tall, swarthy gent with round, battered hat, sharp nose and dark, cold eyes strode in.

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

Winters advanced slowly, half-dazed with chained fury. He laid an elbow on Bogie’s bar. “Whiskey, Doc.”

“Whiskey?” said Doc. “I thought you were off of whiskey.”

“You heard me, Doc Bogannon.”

Bogie poured a stiff drink. “Winters, not only do you look like you’ve seen a ghost, you look like you’ve been chewed up by one.”

Winters drank absentmindedly. “Don’t talk to me about ghosts. Talk about something I believe in; there ain’t no such things as ghosts.”

Winters looked over his glass. Hazily he saw something that looked human, though not exactly normal.

“Ah, yes,” said Bogannon. “Winters, meet my good friend Victor—more famously known as Bobo—Brandon. Brandon, my friend Deputy Marshal Lee Winters.”

Brandon nodded. “A pleasure, sir.”

Winters held onto his glass. He didn’t like this cross between a fop and a cardsharp. “What’s he got to do with anything, Doc?”

“He’s an unusual man, Winters,” replied Bogie. “He’s one of these fellers that ain’t afraid of nothing.”

“Yeah?” said Winters. “I’ve heard of such. We had one down in Texas when I was a button. A cyclone picked him up and dropped him in a well. He was too good for this world. Goodnight, Doc.” He planked down a coin and stomped out.

WINTERS had been gone but a few minutes when a stranger entered. *And here is a*

character, if ever was, thought Doc. Truly a red fox. As straight and sinewy as an Indian, as sly and deceptive as a male witch. His gold-red hair hung long beneath a gray hat, his thin mustache pointed up at each end.

“Gentlemen,” he said. He removed his hat and wiped his face and high forehead with a handkerchief. He approached Bogannon. “Two fingers of whiskey.”

Bogie obliged. “You look a bit distressed, if you’ll pardon my so observing.”

“My name is Gregory Pone; yours, I presume, is Bogannon.” He tossed off his liquor and gazed with pale-eyed thoughtfulness at his empty glass. “Distressed is a proper term, sir. Truth is, less than an hour ago I had a most harrowing experience. My residence temporarily is at Pedigo Ranch. On a matter of business, I had to make this night trip to Forlorn Gap. In a mountain pass a few miles out, my horse reared suddenly and leaped into a mad run, skirting precipices where ordinarily a man would hardly dare do more than walk a horse. I happened to glance back, and sitting astride my animal was a ghost.”

“No!” exclaimed Bogie. He put a big hand over his mouth to hide a grin that had popped into life.

Bogie’s new friend, Bobo Brandon, had eased up. “You interest me, Gregory Pone. My name is Brandon; Bobo Brandon to men of travel and adventure.”

Pone thrust out his hand. “Delighted. If I mistake not, I’ve heard of Bobo Brandon.”

“Then you’ve heard of a brave man,” declared Bogie. “Brandon is one of these fellers who ain’t afraid of nothin’.”

“Methinks I detect a note of sarcasm in Bogannon’s speech,” said Brandon, “but he speaks truth nevertheless. Let’s hear more about this ghost.”

“What I’m wondering,” said Pone, “is how I’m to find courage enough for a return ride to Pedigo, for return I must.”

“Ah,” exclaimed Bogie. “Brandon is your answer; a man of adventurous spirit would delight in such a ride.”

“Well, I certainly would not be afraid of it,” said Brandon. “When do we start?”

“As soon as possible.”

“But there must be more about this ghost?” said Bogie, grown curious.

“Indeed, there is,” declared Pone, a peculiar

gravity upon him. “He got on my horse and rode behind me through that pass, as I said. I was helpless, for my horse was having fits and running his legs off. This ghost said he was a certain Binkley Aspentree, who was murdered there in Black Fox—yes, Black Fox Gap he called it—six years ago. Sometimes, he said, he’d wandered off to remote places, but he’d always come back. He liked to ride fast horses. He especially liked to ride on dangerous roads, liked to see men scared out of their wits. If horse and rider should go plunging over a precipice, it would do him no harm, of course—he being only a phantom—and it might bring him good company. Truth is, he said, he got mighty lonesome there alone in Black Fox Gap.”

Bogie was watching Bobo Brandon, whose face had paled slightly. “Still think you’d like to ride a ways with Pone?”

Brandon gave a start. “Oh, by all means.”

Outside, a black horse was hitched to Bogie’s hitch-rail. It took a short time for Brandon to get his own horse from Goodlett’s stables, but they rode off serenely under a moon that cast a mellow glow upon Pedigo Road.

“You might be interested in knowing my business hereabouts,” said Brandon, as they loped northward.

“That I would, sir.”

“My fame rests more upon my success as a mining-promoter than upon my numerous adventures. In South Africa, I was a guiding genius at Kimberly. Willoughby Syndicate in North Australia was my brainchild. Here in this gold-country there is opportunity for bold spirits, such as mine—and perhaps yours?”

“I fear I’m a follower, rather than a leader,” said Pone regretfully.

They carried on with it for more than five miles of rough riding and two global circumlocutions on wings of fancy.

Then Gregory Pone reined to a halt. He held out his hand as Brandon drew up beside him. “You’ve done me a great favor, Brandon. It’s too bad I can do no more than express my gratitude. Moreover, I must leave you here.”

“It has been a pleasure,” said Brandon. “My horse needed exercise, and I always enjoy a jaunt by moonlight. I must say, however, that I’m disappointed in your ghost: we saw neither hide nor hair of him.”

Pone said with subtle suggestion, “You may

have that pleasure as you ride back to Forlorn Gap. Anyhow, goodnight.”

Brandon turned his horse about and cantered southward. In Black Fox Gap he began to whistle, for he wasn’t so brave as he liked to have gullible folks believe. Then at a sharp turn round jutting rocks, it happened. His horse reared, twisted and leaped. It barely missed going over a precipice.

“Keep a hard rein, my friend,” a spooky voice said. “Nothing I like better than a fast ride, but this is a dangerous road.”

Brandon glanced over his shoulder. That strange voice was dreadfully close. So was its source. A ghost rode behind him, its vestments white, its face white. Brandon tried to scream, but his throat balked. By some reflex independent of all volition, he nevertheless swung his right fist in a wide arc.

His fist struck hard. It contacted flesh and bone. “So!” Brandon screamed. “You’re a fake.”

“Too bad you made that discovery,” replied a voice he’d heard before, but could not then place.

Brandon grabbed for his underarm gun, only to find his body encircled and gripped crushingly by a human arm. A knife-thrust into his back drove a shrill cry from his lips. He lived long enough thereafter to reflect that he was only a windbag and cheap swindler, who’d been nowhere to speak of, and who’d come to a cheap end.

DEPUTY WINTERS lay on his back in bed beside his beautiful wife, Myra, who was asleep. In many ways Winters had been lucky. He’d outdrawn a long line of gun toughies; his six-gun had been unerring; he’d collected a fortune in bounty on wanted monkeys. He hadn’t been sick an hour since he was ten years old; he’d owned a fine horse since he was twelve; he’d always had a job. But his luckiest day was when he married Myra Jenkins, widow of a good man and successful gold-digger who’d been robbed and murdered by one of those two-legged polecats who never seemed to run completely out of stock.

By his marriage he’d also come into a neat cottage and a mining-claim. Through his Tennessee ancestry, reputedly Scotch-Irish, he’d inherited thrifty habits. All in all, he was well fixed, and why he’d continued as a deputy marshal he’d not been able to figure out.

But right now nothing was farther from his mind than quitting his job. He lay awake in their half-story upstairs bedroom and listened to night

sounds; winds whispering down from Elkhorn Pass, eerie cries from Alkali Flat, a night stage on Pangborn Road. Those he heard but subconsciously, for his active thoughts were upon that ghost-companion of Black Fox Gap, who'd given him a rough ride, taken his six-gun and wallet, and scared his daylight out.

It was that paralytic scare that made him sleepless. He'd always been afraid of ghosts. Also, his fright had always been followed by anger. Fright and subsequent anger stood in definite ratio to each other. Which meant that in this instance he was in a killing mood. He had no thought now of a peaceful, retired life; his thoughts were of deadly revenge on a ghost, and while his wife breathed gently at his side he searched his brain for a plan.

He had that plan when, next morning, he rode down to Forlorn Gap's lone leather-shop, a one-room shack operated by Pegleg Hully, otherwise known as Hully Gee. Hully made and mended saddles, boots, shoes, bridles, whips, harness—anything, whether of rawhide or leather.

Winters hitched and tramped in to where Hully was driving shoe pegs into a boot sole, his wooden leg thrust straight out in front of his backless chair.

"Morning, Winters."

Winters drew up a stool. "Look here, Hully Gee, you drop what you're doing and make me something."

Pegleg continued to drive shoe pegs. "Make anything you say; what is it?"

"I want a porcupine saddle-blanket."

"What's that?"

"I don't know myself, but I want one. Ever been in Black Fox Gap at night?"

"Not me. What's more, I ain't aimin' to be."

"Why?"

"Why? It's ha'nted, that's why. I been in this place five years and heerd that yarn a hunnerd times. A desperader name of Bink Aspentree was murdered there—had his throat cut. His ghost is still there. Every time a rider comes through at night, this ghost hops on behind and gives 'im a ride for his money. Now, me, I wouldn't ride through Black Fox even in daytime, much less at night."

Winters bent over and made two sweeping finger marks on Pegleg's dusty floor. "Suppose a rider had a leather blanket like that behind his saddle, strapped down tight right where a ghost would land when he settled on a man's horse.

Suppose, too, that leather blanket had about a hundred needle-sharp nails sticking out in all directions. Suppose, also, that ghost turned out to be made of flesh and bone—sort of human, so to speak—he'd feel right uncomfortable, don't you think?"

Pegleg was looking at Winters' dust artistry. "I reckon he wouldn't be too comfortable, at that."

"You catch on fast, Hully. Make me a porcupine saddle-blanket, one that will spread back from saddle to Cannon Ball's hips. But don't let anybody see it, and don't talk about it. As you've no doubt guessed, I'm figurin' to strike up an acquaintance with this Bink Aspentree of Black Fox Gap, maybe sort of surprise him."

Hully Gee resumed his peg driving. "I'll have it ready before sundown."

Winters left. He was back before sundown, and it was ready; a flat, two-layer leather flexible mat, with sharp nails protruding about an inch through its upper layer.

"Hully, I'm delighted." Winters rolled it, fastened it with its own straps, and stuffed it into one of his war bags. "Anybody see you making this?"

"Nothin' human, I'd say. There might've been a spook lookin' over my shoulder. But if so, he didn't say nothing."

A COUPLE of busy days took Winters to Cow Creek for a gunfight with a varmint named Keefe Ketchum, thence to Rocky Point and arrest of a pug-ugly named Wick Wood, who was left in a pokey to be picked up later by Marshal Hugo Landers. Winters came back by late night ride across Alkali Flat.

Ordinarily he'd have gone round by Cow Creek and Elkhorn Pass rather than take this short-cut home, but he was in a fighting mood. Moreover, he was an arsenal on horseback, a six-gun at his right hip, another in an underarm holster, a third in his belt. He almost hoped he'd meet a ghost on Alkali Flat, he was feeling that belligerent.

He heard spooky noises aplenty, wind-borne alkali dust stung his nostrils, and a three-quarter moon cast a long shadow of him and his horse. He even fancied that he saw ghosts whipping along before a southwest wind and heard them moaning away into flat remoteness. But those ghosts, if any, maintained a discreet distance.

Doc Bogannon was alone when his batwings

swung in.

"Winters! You're just in time for a nightcap; I was about to close up."

"Then it must be midnight," said Winters.

"Lacks half an hour, but business has played out." Bogie brought bottle and glasses, they sat at a table, and Bogie poured wine. "Where've you been, Winters?"

"Cow Creek. Rocky Point."

"Then you came across Alkali Flat?"

"I did."

Bogie puckered his lips. "Unusual."

"What's unusual about it?"

"Why, coming that way without seeing a ghost. As a general thing, you come in with beading sweat and face stinging with alkali dust, an unmistakable sign you've been scared."

"For once I wasn't scared, Doc. Maybe it's because I'm mad. I've just been wishing I could see a ghost; I'd like to shoot him full of holes."

Bogie shook his head. "It's a bad mood, Winters, a kind that gets men killed. Anger slows your gun-hand. Better get over your mad spell right now."

Winters drank sparingly. "Doc, have you ever seen a man who could stand flat-footed and jump astride a horse?"

Bogie reflected. "Why, yes, I have. But only in a circus. Back in—back East, when I was a young fellow, I saw a man who could take three or four steps and leap atop a horse and land standing up. Could do that, too, with a horse at slow gallop."

Winters looked at his glass. "Then it wouldn't be any trouble at all for such a bozo to leapfrog onto a horse."

BOGIE'S batwings squeaked and a lithe redhead strode in.

"Gentlemen."

"Pone!" exclaimed Bogie. "Join us for a nightcap."

Pone nodded gracefully and took a chair. Bogannon hurriedly fetched a glass. "Winters, meet my good friend Gregory Pone."

Winters picked up his glass with his right hand. "Howdy, sir."

"Charmed to meet you, officer Winters," said Pone. He took out a handkerchief and wiped his face. He looked at Doc. "Bogannon, I've had that harrowing experience again."

"Huh?" said Doc. He scratched a corner of his

big forehead. "Oh, yes. You mean in Black Fox Gap."

Winters was suddenly curious. "What harrowing experience are you talking about?"

Pone leaned back casually and smiled crookedly at Bogannon. "Winters, being a practical man, won't believe this, and it's possible I was merely a victim of one of those illusions which are said to haunt men in certain surroundings. But truth is, Winters, a spook rode behind me through Black Fox Gap tonight—as it did once before, recently."

"No!" said Winters, arching incredulously. Meanwhile, ostentatiously, he took out a hip-pocket wallet, flipped through a mass of bills, tossed one to Bogie.

Pone's eyes spread at sight of so much money. He smiled. "I hardly believe that ghost business myself." He again wiped his face. "But it happens I've got to get back to Pedigo Ranch tonight, and I haven't stomach enough left to ride through there alone." He glanced at Winters, a subtle invitation, or dare, in his expression.

Winters held his glass for a refill. He looked hard at Bogie. "Ghosts don't exist, do they, Doc?"

"Except in men's minds," said Bogie.

"Well," said Winters, "my mind's too heavily stocked with practical matters to abide a ghost." He returned Pone's dare. "Are you suggesting I ride a few miles with you?"

Pone chuckled softly. He was tall and slender, but muscles rippled under his tight clothes. "It's not within your line of duty, Winters, but I confess to a hope you wouldn't mind doing a favor like that."

"I'd like it," Winters declared suddenly.

Then Doc Bogannon remembered something. Only two or three nights before, this same Gregory Pone had invited a stranger to ride with him. After a moment, Doc recalled his name, Bobo Brandon. A great braggart, as Bogie remembered him. And a funny thing about it, he hadn't seen Brandon since.

"Winters," said Doc, "you realize, of course, that Pone is only joking—merely finding out if you really had nerve enough—"

"Quite to contrary," Pone interrupted. "Fact is, I'm completely unnerved. I'd be glad to pay Winters—"

Winters was on his feet. "Pay, nothing! It'd be worth a ride just to see this ghost. Let's go."

"But Winters—" Bogie got up.

Pone was up, too. He hastily followed Winters out, and Bogie observed that he was not only lithe

and resilient, but that he wore not boots, but light shoes that made hardly a sound as he walked.

Bogie studied a moment, then ran outside. “Winters, I’d like a word before you leave.”

But they were already riding off.

GREGORY PONE proved to be an affable person. He talked of Pedigo Ranch, of gold mining, of supernatural things. He’d known a man, he said, who’d lost a leg and suffered excruciatingly for months, suffered until his leg was dug up and reburied in a more comfortable position, after which its former owner had felt no more pain.

“Merely because of common experience,” said Pone, “we’re inclined to think of our material surroundings as excluding other worlds and other creatures, but why should we say another phase of life does not exist merely because we do not see or experience it?”

“I wouldn’t know,” said Winters.

“Well,” said Pone, when they’d passed uneventfully through Black Fox and emerged upon high ground bordering open country, “I have no fears from here on.” He offered his hand. “I’m deeply grateful, Winters.”

Winters did not see Pone’s hand, mainly because he did not want to see it. He never liked to shake hands with a bozo he might later have to shoot. He swung his horse round and headed back. “Goodnight, Pone.”

“Goodnight, Winters. Be seeing you again soon, I hope.”

There was a vague hint of queerness in Pone’s last words, a kind of lunacy Winters had observed in a number of characters he’d had to kill. Yet he was not disturbed about Pone, for right then, he was thinking of that ghost of Bink Aspentree, waiting for him in Black Fox Gap.

As soon as he’d turned a bend, Winters dismounted and strapped his porcupine saddle-blanket to Cannon Ball’s back. He remounted and rode on then, whistling intermittently, but keeping sidelong watch at every dark curve, at every rock or bush that might conceal a spook.

He was again making a turn round jutting rocks when he saw an apparition dissociate itself from a crevice, sweep forward, place hands on Cannon Ball’s rump and leapfrog onto his back.

Simultaneously Cannon Ball reared, a scream altogether human shrieked out, and Winters saw his

ghost-rider somersaulting backward to earth.

“You devil!” his would-be ghost-rider shouted, “you’ll die for that trick.”

Contrary to Doc Bogannon’s theory, anger did not slow Winters’ gun-hand; he fired. His antagonist, gun lifting, fired under Cannon Ball’s belly. Winters triggered a second time and swung off his horse.

He found, lying in his spilling blood, wearing white cloak and mask—Gregory Pone.

Winters hitched Cannon Ball to a shrub and began a search. High above Black Fox Gap he found a black horse—Pone’s—hitched to a pine. By moonlight he discovered a cut-back trail, running smoothly northward toward Pedigo Road.



Doc Bogannon had not gone home. His paternal feeling toward Deputy Winters held him, restless and worried. He’d heard distant gunshots. Several minutes after midnight, he heard hoof beats outside. He hurried out.

Winters rode up, leading a black horse, over its back a corpse in white.

“Lend a hand, Doc.”

Winters dismounted and hitched both horses. He and Bogie took their corpse inside and sat him in a chair. Winters snatched off his white mask.

“Pone!” exclaimed Bogie.

They tied him up. Rigor mortis kept his head upright.

“Doc, how about a little wine?”

“Nothing I’d like better.”

They drank together.

Winters drew a faded reward poster from his shirt and spread it down. “Read that, Doc.”

Bogie looked at it, and his eyes grew wide. He looked at their guest. “It’s Bink Aspentree!”

Winters sipped wine. “Doc, it had to be. One thing I remembered from years ago, Aspentree had been a circus-rider. He was never murdered in Black Fox Gap. Somebody was, of course, and likely done by Aspentree himself.” Winters got up suddenly. “You keep him company, Doc; I want to show you something.”

Winters went out and came back with his porcupine saddle-blanket. He dropped it across a chair back.

He grinned. “A ghost-saddle, Doc.