

*"Bow down to King Kiff-Wiff, slaves!"
commanded the grotesque stranger.*



Deputy Marshal Lee Winters thought he'd seen just about every possible kind of creep—and all of them dangerous. That was before he encountered the one who called himself King Kiff-Wiff!

LONG LIVE THE KING

LEE WINTERS STORY
by Lon Williams

DEPUTY MARSHAL Lee Winters labored over his crude office table, which served as both desk and general work bench. He was reading his mail—one rambling letter in longhand from Marshal Hugo Landers at Brazerville. *Dear Winters.* That much he easily deciphered, mainly because he was familiar with his own name. Hugo's descriptions of wanted monkeys were grossly inadequate, frequently impossible. He must have written this particular letter while riding horseback, Winters thought. Yet there was one description, as best Winters could

make it out, that for being much in little took first prize. *This ape is a grand showoff who calls himself king. Says he is—* Here was what puzzled Lee. That king's name! *Kiff-Wiff.*

Deputy Winters scratched his head of dark curly hair. In his opinion there couldn't be any such name as Kiff-Wiff; yet there it was. Hugo's letter went on. *King Kiff-Wiff has one crony. Calls him his mighty man of valor. Name is—* Winters scratched his head again. *Name is Prince Shakafut.* Winters shook his head, but read on. *Kiff is worth one thousand smackers, dead or alive. But be*

careful, or you'll be dead, and he alive. Good shooting. Hugo Landers, Marshal.

Winters drew his right hand across his mustache. He wanted no truck with kings; from what he'd heard, kings cut men's heads off. He got up, went out and took quick glances up and down Forlorn Gap's empty, dusty main street. Thoughts of Kiff-Wiff made him thankful he had an arrest warrant for one Dolphus Dewberry, described as a sallow, sharp-nosed, mild-mannered counterfeiter believed to be hiding at Monte Gaut's ranch on Cracked Kettle Creek short-cut. Winters mounted his big, rangy horse Cannon Ball and rode east, willing, but not eager, to find his man.

He was ten miles out and two miles off Brazerville Road when, on a steeply ascending trail in a gorge, Cannon Ball snorted, stood on his hind feet and turned half-around.

A voice came screaming down upon them. "Yee-hoo!" It was hard, high-pitched. It echoed, re-echoed. Plunging down through those echoes came an unearthly beast, a "Woof!" exploding from it with every leap, on its back a yelling, strangely-attired rider.

Winters got one good look, but from then on his whole attention was concerned with holding onto his horse, while Cannon Ball, bridle bit clamped in his teeth, headed elsewhere. In all of his riding, Winters had never learned to ride at high speed downhill without having his liver up-anchored and his temper whipped to fury. But this time he was in a mood to go along with his frightened horse, jolts be hanged.

Cannon Ball hove to on Brazerville Road. He snorted and stamped, his sides heaved. Winters wiped sweat. Now he could think coherently enough to define what he had seen; it was some blasted heathen on a nobby-horse.

Already it was mid-afternoon. Another side trip was an alternative on his program. He'd make that trip, then go home and get an early start for Monte Gaut's next morning. Not that he wanted to get any kind of start toward Gaut's ranch again, but arrest warrants were mandates. No matter how scared he might be, he'd go after his man. *But*, he resolved, *I don't have to go today.*

He turned east, then headed north toward Big Buffer Creek, hideout of a lonesome polecat wanted for felonious assault on a deputy marshal at Pinhook Biggin's. He'd be late getting home, but a favorable moment for catching polecats was at

dusk, or shortly after.

IN FORLORN GAP a busy evening at Bogannon's saloon dwindled toward midnight stillness. Though a semi-ghost town, Forlorn Gap was a crossroads place and had its full quota of travelers. Doc Bogannon, saloon owner and barkeep, watched them come and go, his a friendly, understanding spirit. Wayfarers who stopped overnight at Goodlett Hotel; stagecoach passengers who ran in for whiskey and ran right out again; horse-backers who came and went at leisure—all these and more had paid their legal-tender tributes to Doc and drifted on, some of them men of silence, some quarrelsome, many unmistakably criminal. But they were all of a common breed to Doc Bogannon, who was at heart a philosopher. Except for queer ones who drifted in, they were all alike forgotten when they were gone.

One of those queer characters remained with Doc as midnight drew near. He was a small, coldly-smiling redhead with pointed face who wore two guns in side-holsters and a long knife in his belt. A queer, self-satisfied look in his eye suggested he was a man with a delusion. That suggestion soon materialized into fact. He laid an elbow on Bogie's bar and smiled a coldly superior smile. "You and me's about two of a size, ain't we, Bogannon?"

Doc was big and broad-shouldered, almost twice this stranger's size. He had dark, thick hair, broad forehead, a fine intellectual face. He surveyed his questioner with cordial feeling tintured by vague misgivings. "Yes, stranger," he drawled with mock seriousness, "I'd say that is true. Two of a size, physically."

Doc's guest glanced about warily, then fixed Doc with a frigid, haughty stare. "You put heaps of emphasis on that last word, Bogannon; why so?"

Doc found glasses to polish. With his answer he arched one eyebrow. "Now, stranger, emphasis is always one key to thought. Physically you and I are about of a size. Mentally? Well, sir, in that respect you are a veritable giant, compared to me. I wonder what your name is?"

Swells of pride had attended receipt of Doc's compliment; but no friendliness. "You can quit wondering, Bogannon. I am Andrew Barstow. Some call me Red Barstow; others, Two-gun Bart. I've been knowed as Ace of Diamonds, too, as well as Dead-shot Andy. So, take your choice." Barstow lifted his chin arrogantly.

This lunatic's delusion, thought Doc, related to more than physique. It was general. Barstow regarded himself as a superior being in every way.

Bogie glanced under his bar at a loaded six-gun, something he had never had to use. His feeling now, however, was one of sharp uneasiness; consequently sight of that thunder-gun was comforting. But being slow to anger had so far been his best defense. He studied Barstow cautiously. "An array of powerful names," he declared, his voice vigorous with admiration. "But Ace of Diamonds, I'd say, fits you best, Mr. Barstow."

Barstow nodded unsmiling agreement. "I wonder why you say that, Bogannon?"

Doc puckered his lips, frowned. "Well, sir, Ace of Diamonds suggests clean-cut thought. Hard. Keen. It suggests red blood, too, shrewdness, strong character."

Barstow was tight with vanity. Yet he swelled a bit more. "Interesting, Bogannon; you're a man of sense."

Bogie had an inspiration, not an uncommon one, though. He said offhandedly, "You don't happen to be a Boston Barstow, do you, Mr. Barstow?"

Ace of Diamonds leaned closer to Bogie. "It happens I ain't; I'm from California."

Bogannon shook his head deprecatingly. "That's bad."

"Is, eh?"

"Yes," Bogie said profoundly. "Doesn't speak well at all. Men just don't leave California, unless they have to."

Barstow's face showed menace. "Men don't talk disrespectful to me, Bogannon. Why did you insinuate I might be from Boston?"

Bogie turned to put up a glass. His fingers trembled, but his poise was in good shape when he faced his disagreeable guest again. "Boston?" he mused. "Well, there's something about Boston that gives character to men. Distinction. Culture. Self-confidence. Courage. You have all of that, Barstow."

Barstow's anger receded. He stood four-square and nodded his approval. For one swift moment, he looked sane. "You know, Bogannon, I've suddenly took a liking to you. Maybe I won't shoot you, after all. For some time there, I meant to do just that. You see, I'm looking for some place to go into business, one where there won't be too much competition. This looks like my camping ground;

want to sell out?"

Bogie glanced again at his six-gun, but did so as part of his train of thought. "We-ell," he said slowly, "I'd consider it, since you choose that manner of putting me out of business, in preference to murdering me. What do you offer?"

"Fifty dollars."

Bogie was shocked. "For my building, stock of goods, goodwill?"

"Everything, sir."

"Why, I've got five thousand dollars of stock alone."

Red Barstow backed two steps and let his hands hang close to his guns. His eyes resumed their odd stare. "People usually accept my offer, and no questions asked. Them as ask questions—"

HE DIDN'T finish. Bogie's batwings swung inward, and a lean, tall, unsmiling officer wearing a deputy marshal's badge strode in.

"Winters!" exclaimed Bogannon. "Come in, Winters." Under his breath he said, *Am I glad to see you!*

Winters strode forward and snapped down a coin. "Wine, Doc."

"Wine it is," said Doc, excited. "Been having any trouble, Winters?"

"Nothing unusual," said Winters. He watched his glass fill, picked it up, took one swig. He jerked his head toward Ace of Diamonds. "Who's he, Doc?"

"My apology," said Bogie. He set his wine bottle back. "Winters, meet my estimable friend, Andrew Barstow, also known as Ace of Diamonds, Red Barstow, Dead-eye Andy, and Two-gun Bart."

Mentally Winters reviewed every redhead reward poster he had ever seen; none bore resemblance to Barstow. He said casually, "You never was called *king* of anything, I reckon?"

Scare leaped into Barstow's countenance. Then he said in a slow monotone, "No, mister, I never was called *king* of anything." His feet were distanced solidly; his sneering lips disclosed sound, white teeth.

Bogannon said nervously, "Winters is our deputy marshal. Fine officer, too."

"Yeah," said Two-gun Bart. "I likes deputy marshals."

"Fine!" exclaimed Bogie.

"Yeah," said Two-gun. "I likes 'em so well, I eats 'em for breakfast."

Winters drained his glass, put it down and turned his back to Bogannon. "That reminds me of a feller who lived down on Trinity River, when I was a button in Texas. Name was Willie Spingler. Awful big eater, Willie was. Proud of it, too. Made a bet he could eat more boiled eggs than any man in Texas. To prove it, he et three dozen at one setting-down."

"Naw!" drawled Bogie. He drew his mouth corners down and lifted his eyebrows at Barstow. "Think of that!"

"Only drawback was," Winters said sorrowfully, "Willie ain't seen a well minute from that day to this."

"It's no surprise," solemnly declared Bogie.

"Moral of that is," said Winters, tossing Barstow an indifferent glance, "a man ought to watch what he eats."

"Truer words were never spoken," said Bogie. "More wine, Winters?"

Winters put down another coin. "No, Doc, but you can pour one for your man-eating friend. Goodnight."

"But, Winters—"

"Be seeing you, Doc," Winters flung back as he left.

Bogie's spirits drooped. With Winters present he'd felt safe. Now he was alone with Two-gun Bart again.

He eyed Two-gun with hopeful inspiration. "Since getting a look at our deputy marshal, maybe you don't want to set up in Forlorn Gap?"

Barstow inflated himself with renewed arrogance. "If you think I'm scared of your frost-bit, sun-shriveled—"

BARSTOW stopped suddenly. Bogie's batwings had swung inward again. Just inside stood a slender, kingly-looking stranger in purple, gold-braided jacket, blue trousers, sharp-toed shoes, and a red head-gear that could have been inspired only from an ancient-history book. It was a tight-fitting cap with a tail that rose behind, curled up and forward and ended with a golden plume.

For seconds this haughty newcomer stood with searching, glittering eyes, then, "Bow down!" he shouted imperiously.

Those fierce eyes moved observantly, accompanied by approving nods as an imaginary multitude of people prostrated themselves.

Doc Bogannon did obeisance by bowing his

head and keeping still and quiet.

"Ah," breathed this royal visitor. "My obedient subjects. My obsequious slaves? My—" Then his gaze rested upon Dead-eye Andy Barstow, who stood frozen with terror. His voice bore intimations of doom. "Churl! Bondman! Peasant! Why dost thou not bow down before King Kiff-Wiff?"

Barstow was pale, but rebellious. "I bow down to no man."

His majesty, King Kiff-Wiff, eyed Barstow with limitless scorn. "So thou wilt not bow down to mighty King Kiff-Wiff?"

Barstow trembled. He did not speak.

Kiff-Wiff's ferocity transposed itself into feigned pleasure. "Ah, then thou must be a king thyself at last."

Kiff-Wiff advanced, walked round Barstow, sized him up, faced him and lifted his royal hand in salute. "A king, indeed; be my liege man and I shall give thee a kingdom."

Barstow only stared, motionless.

Kiff-Wiff faced Bogannon.

Bogie bowed low. "Your majesty."

Kiff-Wiff was delighted. From his fine raiment he produced a shining old medallion. He said to Bogie, "By what designation art thou known, my obedient servant?"

"May it please your majesty," said Bogie with appropriate gravity, "your humble and obedient servant is known as Doc Bogannon."

Kiff-Wiff drew himself up regally. "Sirrah Bogannon, as a token of thy loyalty and obedience, I shall pin this medal of gold upon myself. When hereafter thou art privileged to look upon it, thou canst say to thyself, *His majesty, King Kiff-Wiff, weareth that golden medallion by reason of my great fidelity. Let it be a reminder to my descendants forever.*"

Kiff-Wiff pinned on his medal and strode grandly back and forth. "I have an incredible history," he said musingly. "My first appearance upon earth was as Cheops, pyramid-builder of Egypt. As Cheops I am familiarly known. But that was not my true name. I was Hwfw, erroneously called Khufu. Properly, I am Kiff-Wiff." He turned suddenly upon Bogannon. "Dost thou believe what I am saying?"

"Verily, I believe," said Bogannon.

Kiff-Wiff stared at Barstow. "Being king yourself now, thou dost believe, of course?"

Two-gun merely stared; it was certain that he

didn't know what he believed.

Kiff-Wiff resumed his promenade. Many times and under many names have I reappeared upon earth. I was Tamerlane, who built pyramids not of stone, but of human heads; I was Nero, who fed children to lions and burned Rome; I was Jenghiz, conqueror of Asia and slayer of millions. Ah, what glorious seas of blood hath risen where I trod!"

BOGANNON listened, scared witless, until a squeak interrupted his trance. His doors swung and a huge creature who resembled a man walked slowly in. This one was clothed in tight-fitting scarlet. A broadsword hung at his side. He bowed toward Kiff-Wiff. "My exalted and renowned master, what is thy will?"

"Come forward," Kiff-Wiff commanded. "This," he explained, facing Bogannon, "is Prince Shakafut, my mighty man of valor."

Bogie felt his eyes bugging. Shakafut was a giant, as muscular as a lion. "Pleasure to meet you," Bogie managed to squeak out.

"And here," said Kiff-Wiff, facing Dead-eye Andy, "standeth King Nobow. His royalty is made manifest by his refusal to bow down before mighty King Kiff-Wiff."

Shakafut nodded, his ugly face a deadpan. He walked slowly to one side of Andy Barstow, who turned and stared like a cornered rodent about to be swallowed by a snake. Shakafut continued, slowly circling. Barstow as slowly turned.

Suddenly Kiff-Wiff shouted, "To arms!"

Barstow whirled in panic, hands slapping at guns; but Shakafut had him from behind, had his arms pinned to his sides. Kiff-Wiff disarmed him, back-roped his hands.

Kiff-Wiff then squared himself before Bogannon. "Sirrah, let this be known abroad, from Pontus to Ethiopia, from Nile to Indus. Those who do not bow down before great Kiff-Wiff shall die." He turned and prodded Barstow with Two-gun's own knife. "Out, varlet!"

Barstow marched. He glanced, terrified, at Doc. "Call that deputy marshal. Please! Please!"

Kiff-Wiff prodded deeper. "Avast, thou churl!"

Bogie's hand went to his six-gun. He could have shot Kiff-Wiff and Shakafut and rescued Barstow; but he remembered that dirty deal Barstow meant to hand him. Bogie stayed his charitable impulse.

But he did venture outside and look. Shakafut lifted Barstow onto a horse, then mounted another.

From a nearby alley emerged Kiff-Wiff. He was riding an enormous black hog, as big a boar as Bogie had ever seen. Its tusks glistened by moonlight. Sighting Shakafut and Barstow's horses, it stopped, bowed its back, grunted, then leaped forward.

"Woof!" it said. With every leap, "Woof!"

Those horses sensed peril. One whinnied and reared. Both then ran for their lives. Their alternative was having their bellies ripped open.

Bogie went back inside, poured himself a stiff drink and wiped his face. He wasn't sure whether he'd witnessed an event, or had gone to sleep and experienced a nightmare, or had gone stark crazy. *It was a nightmare*, he concluded with charity to himself. *Nothing like that could be real.*

He closed up and started home. He dreamed now of more pleasant things, in particular of his amorous half-breed Shoshone wife, who'd be waiting with hot stew, bread, coffee, and gentle, hungry arms.

TWO MILES out Brazerville Road, Shakafut halted with his captive. They had passed round a sharp curve, where on their right a broad shoulder of rocky earth rose from a gorge. Shakafut pulled Barstow from his horse.

"Now," Shakafut said coldly, "perhaps thou wilt bow down before King Kiff-Wiff?"

Barstow's voice wheezed from a dry throat. "Set me free, and I'll give you everything I've got."

"We wait for his majesty."

"Everything; even my horse."

"We wait."

They waited several minutes. Kiff-Wiff appeared slowly round a bend. Upon seeing Shakafut and Barstow, he dismounted, hitched his steed to a scrub pine and strode up on foot.

Barstow, terrified, started to flee. Shakafut quickly overtook him, lifted him and flung him down hard. Barstow rolled over and rose to his knees.

"So!" exclaimed Kiff-Wiff. "Prince Barstow hath bethought himself to bow down before his king, after all."

"Spare me, your majesty," Barstow pleaded; "everything I have shall be yours."

"Thou didst murder Monte Gaut, who was my faithful servant."

"He threatened to kill me," replied Barstow.

"Thou didst murder my faithful engraver,

Dolphus Dewberry—my maker of money.”

“I done it for your majesty,” said Barstow. “Dolph and Monte leagued against you; they offered to let me in on their deal. When I refused, they said they’d kill me.”

“Ah!” said Kiff-Wiff mockingly. He stared at Barstow, whose kneeling posture gave him an idea. He whispered at length into Shakafut’s ear, then stood in front of Barstow. “My loyal Prince Barstow, I have grievously misjudged thee. To amend my error, I shall make thee a knight—a knight of desert sands, of pyramids and withered mummies. Shakafut, thou wilt touch his shoulder with thy mighty sword.” When Shakafut had taken position immediately behind Barstow, Kiff-Wiff extended his right arm forward. “With this ceremony, Prince Barstow, I dub thee knight. Enter thou into history’s immortal ranks of chivalry and valorous deeds. Be thou forever blameless—”

Barstow listened in dread of great Kiff-Wiff. He felt a sword touch his neck. It pained a little, though not for long.

AT BREAKFAST next morning, Lee Winters stared across at his charming wife, Myra. He stretched his eyebrows, then blinked to bring his eyes into focus.

“Myra, in all your reading, have you ever read of anybody riding a nobby-horse?”

Myra was puzzled. Then she understood what he meant. *Rhinoceros*. “No, Lee,” she said, an inclination to smile sternly repressed. “I’d think it would take some riding, wouldn’t you?”

“I’d think so,” said Winters. “In my opinion, no human could do it.”

“You have me curious, Lee.”

“I’m curious myself. Reason is, that’s what I saw yesterday. Maybe I just dreamed it.”

“It could have been somebody riding a hog,” said Myra. “That is something I’ve heard of. In fact, an Ozark Mountain farmer my parents knew had a huge hog that was saddle-broke. His owner had to shoot him, he got so mean. Killed two or three horses; almost killed a man.”

“Hog,” mused Winters. “That’s it. Monte Gaut is a hog-raiser. But that rider; reminded me of a flower on a cactus.”

Myra banteringly said, “Are you sure it wasn’t a ghost, Lee?”

He got up, buckled on his gun and put on his hat. “Since thinking it over, my guess is, it was

King Kiff-Wiff.”

Myra was frightened suddenly. “Kiff-Wiff? What do you mean, Lee?”

“Some wanted monkey who calls hisself King Kiff-Wiff.”

“Sounds crazy,” Myra said thoughtfully. She remembered other lunatics who had come near to killing her husband. When he was riding off, she ran out and called anxiously, “Lee, you’ll be careful, won’t you?”

He waved a silent, but reassuring goodbye.

Winters stopped to see Pegleg Hully, known also as Hully Gee, who owned a leather shop. Winters strode in and found Hully sitting on his backless chair, his peg leg thrust straight out, a pegging-awl rammed through a boot sole. Pegleg glanced up.

“Morning, Winters.”

“Hully Gee,” said Winters, “I need something, and I need it bad.”

“Name it.”

“First, I need a stout, double-rein bridle, one that would lift a buffalo.”

“What else?”

“A bridle bit, one of those hangdown jaw-breakers. My horse has got a mean streak. Any time he takes a notion, he clamps his grinders down tight on his bit, and there ain’t a thing I can do about it. I want you to fix me a bridle with a bit that would pry open a sawlog.”

“Have it tomorrow,” said Pegleg.

Winters left.

That day he rode to Elkhorn Pass. He was looking for a wanted monkey named Voss whom Luke Riser, driver of Elkhorn-Brazerville stage, had spotted there. He didn’t find his wanted monkey, but he found one Gottlieb Lather with a complaint about money.

“Look here, officer,” he snarled at Winters. He fluttered a twenty-dollar bill in front of Lee’s nose. “Valse money, it is. Vot’s it mit you Gowermint men for you don’t keep valse money outta circulation?”

Winters backed a step and eyed his questioner, a barber, he judged by oils and smells. “How come you got paper money anyhow?” he asked sternly; “paper money never was no good in these parts.”

“How vas I to know? Back East vere I come from, eferybody takes paper money. But ven I drops in at Leek Stevenson’s store for bottol of hair oil, he takes vun look at my money and holds his

nose. ‘Counterfeit!’ he screams. And I say, you being a officer, you gotta make it goot. For dis I gif one haircut and eighteen dollar gold and silfer money. You gif me eighteen dollar and I knock off oil and haircut.”

Winters swung onto Cannon Ball. “I’ll give you some good advice, mister. Don’t take no more paper money till you go back East.” He looked back as he rode off.

Gottlieb Lather tore up his spurious bill and blew its fragments toward Winters. “You no-goot deputy marshal! I report you. I haf you fired.”

ON A TURN several miles east of Elkhorn Pass, Winters met Beecher Turnbill’s four-horse stage on its daily run from Brazerville. Turnbill pulled up.

“Howdy, Winters.”

“Howdy, Beech.”

“Lookin’ for a man without no head, Winters?”

Winters’ reply was powdery. “No; I’m lookin’ for a head without no man.”

“You’ll find ‘em both two miles t’other side of Forlorn Gap, Winters,” said Turnbill. “Giddap!”

Winters was perturbed as he rode on. He could never be sure whether Beech Turnbill was serious, or merely ragging him. When he got to Forlorn Gap, he headed for Hully Gee’s leather shop.

Hully was at work, his peg leg thrust out, as before.

“Howdy, Winters.”

“Got that bridle ready?”

“Be ready tomorrow,” said Hully. He gave his pegging-awl a shove. Hully was still at his boot-making.

Winters glanced round. A newly-made bridle with jaw-breaker bit hung on a peg. Winters snatched it down. “What’s this?”

Pegleg drew a waxed thread through his newly-made pegging-awl hole. He said unconcernedly, “That’s a bridle, Winters.”

Winters examined it minutely. “Look here, Hully Gee, this bridle’s mine, and it’s done.”

“Be ready tomorrow,” said Hully, thrusting again.

Winters studied a while. People were sure queer. He scratched his head. *Maybe this means I’ve got one more day to live*, he thought. He considered whether to take his new bridle, with or without Hully’s permission. Superstition outdid his reason. He hung it up.

“See you tomorrow, Hully.”

“Be ready tomorrow,” said Hully.

Outside, Winters paused, hand on his saddlehorn. He reasoned that he should go and see about that headless body Beecher Turnbill had mentioned. Yet he wasn’t sure he should go without his jaw-breaker. Cannon Ball was making a coward of him. He was scared enough at best. If he couldn’t be master in his own saddle, he was just about done for.

Cannon Ball, as if sensing his owner’s problem, swung his head round and gave Winters a mean look. A mistake, definitely. Winters, furious suddenly, swung up and gighed with his spurs. He rode past Bogannon’s saloon and Goodlett Hotel at a dead run, and when Cannon Ball slowed Winters gighed him again.

But when out of town he allowed his horse to take his troubles more reasonably. Yet in a short time an ominous sign appeared ahead. Buzzards were circling slowly near Enloe Pass, dropping lower and lower. Cannon Ball began to toss his head uneasily and to push his bit forward with his tongue. Winters caught onto what his horse was up to and drew back hard, so hard as to pull Cannon Ball’s bit behind his molars so he couldn’t clamp down on it. He slowed, but Winters dug him with his spurs and kept him moving.

They came to a turn where they had a tussle, but Cannon Ball quieted at last and Winters swung down. Here was that headless body Turnbill had told about. To Winters it was a headless body, nothing more. But hasty search disclosed identity. Looking down, where road shoulder fell away into an abyss, Winters saw a head lodged in a notch between stones. He recognized it as that of Ace of Diamonds Barstow.

Winters shook his head. He was not an undertaker.

HE RODE back to town and stopped for a visit with Doc Bogannon, who was taking life easy at a table in a temporarily unpatronized saloon.

“Winters,” he cried joyously, and waved a big hand. “Come in, Winters. I was just wishing you’d drop around.”

Winters sat opposite Bogie. “Doc, remember a redhead named Barstow?”

“Certainly I do,” exclaimed Bogie. “That wild-eyed loony was going to take my saloon away from me. You arrived last night just in time to save me,

certainly to save my property.”

Winters stared hard at Bogie. “So you had a motive, eh?”

Bogie detected a faint grin behind that insinuation. “Winters, I was never without a motive of some sort; who’s been murdered?”

Winters tossed Bogie a coin. “Wine, Doc, and two glasses.”

Bogie tossed Winters’ coin back to him and brought wine and two glasses. He poured for both. “Something happened to my recent enemy, Winters?”

“He’s lost his head, Doc.”

Bogie sipped his drink. “I’m not surprised. Kings’ subjects frequently lose their heads.”

Winters stiffened. “Kings!”

“My apology,” said Doc. “I assumed you knew about King Kiff-Wiff, but he came into my place last night after you’d gone. Some king, this Kiff-Wiff. He and his mighty man of valor, Prince Shakafut, took my friend Barstow away. What they did with him I’ve no way of knowing, unless I’m to infer they decapitated him.”

“They what?”

“Cut his head off, Winters.”

“Oh,” said Winters. Doc’s learnedness was beyond his depth sometimes. “Well, Doc, that’s exactly what they done to Barstow; they decapitated him. Know why?”

Bogie sipped and lowered his glass. “Certainly, Winters. Barstow refused to bow down.”

Winters sniffed. “Don’t tell me you bowed down.”

“But I did,” declared Bogie. “If you don’t want your head cut off, you had better bow down, too.”

That was not funny to Winters. He had seen a head wedged between rocks, its dry eyes staring. “What else do you know, Doc?”

“Nothing,” said Bogie. But immediately he remembered something. “Wait, now. There was something queer about this Kiff-Wiff. He rode a hog—a huge black boar. It went ‘Woof!’ and took after those horses Barstow and Shakafut were riding. Its tusks curved upward six or seven inches.”

No wonder it had looked like a nosy horse, thought Winters. “Got any idea where Kiff is hiding, Doc?”

Bogie wrinkled his forehead. “Kiff is liable to turn up anywhere; you see, Winters, Kiff-Wiff is a ghost.”

“Hold it,” said Winters. “I’m not interested in ghosts.”

Bogie stared at his empty glass. “Well, he’s not a ghost, I suppose. A reincarnation, more likely. This Kiff-Wiff says he is really King Khufu, or Cheops, that redoubtable pyramid-builder who lived in Egypt anywhere from five to seven thousand years ago. Centuries after his death, he appeared as Sennacherib, Nero, Captain Kidd, and goodness knows how many other memorable scoundrels. With Kiff-Wiff, cutting a man’s head off is of no more consequence than mashing a grasshopper.”

Winters shoved back glumly. “That’s enough about Kiff-Wiff, Doc. I’m going home and get a good night’s sleep. If I see ghosts in my sleep, it’ll be your fault. Good-night.”

Doc was not smiling as Winters left. *Suppose,* he thought, *such rummies as Khufu could reappear on earth?* And maybe they did. Sometimes he wondered.

WINTERS was in a raw mood when he dropped in next morning to see Pegleg Hully. “My bridle, Hully.”

Hully had resumed work on a boot. “Bridle’s ready.”

“It was ready yesterday,” said Winters.

“Price is a quarter-eagle.”

Winters snatched his bridle and tossed down a gold coin. “There, Hully Gee; and I could as well had my bridle yesterday.”

Hully shoved his pegging-awl. “Mad about something, Winters?”

“Of course not. Why do you ask that?”

Hully pocketed his coin, extracted his awl and inserted a waxed thread. “You seem a mite crossways. Maybe it’s just your usual manner.”

Winters strode out and swapped bridles with Cannon Ball. He gave his jaw-breaker a trial pull and with satisfaction watched Cannon Ball’s mouth open.

His next stop was at Bogannon’s. Bogie had just opened up.

“Morning, Winters.”

“A nip of whiskey, Doc.”

“Whiskey?”

“I said whiskey.”

“Hmmm,” said Bogie. He poured a drink. “Thought you were off of whiskey, Winters; seen a ghost?”

Winters downed his drink, held his glass to be refilled. "Thanks to you, Doc, I saw ghosts all night. Kiff-Wiff was everything from wolf to Old Horny himself. Another thing; if I meet this Kiff-Wiff, I'm aimin' to ride. If I'm afoot, I'm aimin' to run."

"Can't blame you for that," said Doc. He gave his handsome head a mocking nod. "And if you can neither ride nor run, you can at least bow down. I did."

Winters finished his second drink. "No, Doc. Be confound if I bow down; no Texan ever bowed down to anybody. Be seein' you, Doc."

With that unexecuted arrest warrant still in his pocket, Winters went out and headed east. Later he turned south onto Cracked Kettle Creek short-cut. He was in an angry mood. He was also scared. It was a toss which mood predominated.

He reached that most rugged part of his trail, a mile from Cracked Kettle Creek and Monte Gaut's ranch. There Cannon Ball stopped, looked up, snorted, and started to turn. Winters held him, a moment later discovered what had caused his stop. On a high overhang, variously known as Smoke Pinnacle, Eagle Roost, and Judgment Day Rock, a large man dressed in bright red stood with white flag in hand. This, a signal flag, he lowered, raised and lowered again. On Winters' right was a perpendicular drop of two hundred feet. From Judgment Day Rock there was a thousand-foot drop.

With his attention diverted upward, Winters failed to see what approached suddenly round a shoulder of mountain. But Cannon Ball saw. Wise to his jaw-breaker, he reared almost straight up and spun round, all in one instantaneous movement. Winters turned a complete somersault and hit feet first. But he had been flung with such violence that he went on down. His breath was knocked out; blood gushed to his brain; his wrath was measureless. But so was his terror.

For coming toward him was that unearthly rider, King Kiff-Wiff, on his woofing hog. "Hail to your king!" Kiff-Wiff shouted. "Bow down, ye filthy slaves."

Winters could neither ride nor run. He was lying

face down, spitting dust from his mouth, clawing at his six-gun, shaking his head of its dizziness. Kiff-Wiff came on with amazing speed. He shouted. His hog woofed. Then, seeing that his fallen enemy stirred, Kiff-Wiff drew a forty-five and cracked down at Winters. His bullet missed.

Winters blinked his eyes of spattered dust. He saw only a dark blur plunging toward him. A second bullet from Kiff-Wiff's gun edged his hair. With eyes that swam and stung, Winters aimed. He triggered, aimed, triggered again.

His first shot had brought a squeal. With his second, Kiff-Wiff's steed swerved and leaped outward into space. His royal rider went out and down with him. Winters heard them thud. He sat up, swabbed his face.

Then from Judgment Day Rock came an agonized cry. "Oh, my king! My king is dead."

Winters saw indistinctly. But he was certain of what he had seen when seconds later a body shot out from Judgment Day Rock and whirled downward, for a second thud came up, and there followed a sickening stillness.

Minutes passed before Winters had passably clear sense and sight again. He got up then, staggered downtrail, found Cannon Ball with his mouth open, standing with a bridle strap half-hitched around his rear ankle. Winters, still too befuddled to be angry, untangled his horse and swung aboard.

Doc Bogannon, alone after whiskeying some stagecoach passengers, heard his batwings swing open violently.

"Winters!" Bogie hurried round and helped Winters to a chair. "Winters, are you hurt?"

Winters sat erect, but painfully. "No, Doc. I just stopped to ask a question. How long do you figure it will be before this here King Khufu shows up on earth again?"

Bogie understood by that question that Kiff-Wiff was a dead monkey. "Oh," he said, staring hard at Winters, who looked sick and battered, "I'd say at least a thousand years."

Winters pulled himself up to go. "Thanks, Doc. That's all I wanted to know."