



The doctor's horse was pitching when Walt's hands closed about Kistler's leg

## Nurse's Big Call

By CLEE WOODS

*Wanda Milbourne, assistant to a range doctor, faces a stern test when nester folks need quick medical help!*

**T**HAT insistent knock on the door frightened nurse Wanda Milbourne. She got to her feet and stood there, uncertain. A slender girl in an orange dress, Wanda had such gorgeous black eyes and black hair and such fair skin that it was a wonder she hadn't

married some intern before she finished her training three months ago.

After graduation, she had come to this Idaho county seat to work in young Dr. Kistler's office, and now she was engaged to him. Only two nights ago she had finally let him take her in his arms, and

she had nodded when he implored her to marry him next week.

Again came that knock on the door, impatient now. She moved over, held out her hand for the knob, then paused. Dr. Kistler never knocked like that. His knock was easy, with some of his wooing in it. Nobody else ever came to her little two-room log cabin on the edge of town.

"Miss Milbourne," a deep, vibrant voice came through the door, "this is Walt Arrowhill. I've come to get you on some mighty needy cases."

She opened the door. The young rancher's rugged, square-set face was so tanned it blended with the moonlight night behind it. He was rangy, somewhat on the slim side.

"How can so young a man be so lonely in his heart?" was her first swift thought.

That was the way he looked, aloof and lonely and tormented by a deep inward hunger. Yet he couldn't have been more than twenty-four. He stepped upon the threshold, as if too proud to be kept standing outside in the shadows.

He had a sure, lithe feel in his step and Wanda heard the soft tinkle of his spurs. There was a bit of dash in the red neckerchief about his throat, and there was quality in his plaid wool shirt and gray whipcord riding breeches.

The nurse's eyes flitted to the Colt on his right hip. That gun hung there so easy and low, as if just waiting handy to a long arm.

Wanda had heard about this Walt Arrowhill, the last of four brothers. The whelp of an old range lion who six years ago had been shot down in the darkness not two blocks from here. Nobody ever had been tried for the murder, but all northern Idaho knew the old man had been ambushed by some "little rancher" from Blackfoot Hole.

"Over in Blackfoot Hole they've tried

for days to get a doctor for old lady Marsh and the little Turner girl," Walt said. "Now an epidemic of fever's broke out—four families hit hard inside of five days, after a big picnic at Spring Grove two weeks ago. Bad water."

"I'm so sorry," Wanda said. "Wish I could help, but I don't go out on cases. You see, I work in Dr. Kistler's office."

"But these people are in desperate need!" Walt insisted.

"But Dr. Kistler is the only doctor for this town of three thousand," insisted Wanda, "with several hundred more people on ranches and in little towns nearby. It's more practice than he can take care of. Besides, the Blackfoot Hole people don't pay their doctor bills."

The rancher took a step nearer her. His big right hand clamped onto her shoulder. An angry light whipped into his blue eyes below their craggy brows.

"You're a nurse, aren't you?" he fired at her.

"Yes."

"And a nurse is trained to be a person of mercy. But you just sit in an office in daytime and wait for patients with money to come in—when other people are dying!"

He made his words burn and sting. But he was hasty, unfair! Her heart went out to all sick people. She yearned to help every patient she ever cared for. Maybe she had let the established routine of a doctor's office make herself sound unsympathetic, but she knew in her heart that she wasn't.

She would never admit to this man her mistake of sounding routine and cold, though! Not to this highhanded ranny! Nevertheless, she felt her face flaming hot. She never had been so humiliated in all her life, nor so angry.

Another barrage was leaping from his lips.

"I've almost begged Dr. Kistler to go,

but he won't stir. Claims he's too busy here. But it's that little item of pay, too, I think. What if the Blackfoot people didn't pay? There are children sick over there, and an old woman!"

"But you forget the sick here in Beaver City," Wanda argued. "It'd take a day for one visit to Blackfoot Hole, with the spring mud like it is."

"Any serious sickness in town now?" Walt demanded.

"Not too serious," she had to admit.

"Then let them wait!" he snapped. "I tell you people're dyin' over there! All because the road's muddy and they haven't paid. Heaven help us!"

He strode off into the darkness. Back to her every jingle of his spurs said "Shame! Shame! Shame!"

She slammed the door shut, tried to shake off his stinging indictment. It was unjust, far too exaggerated anyway. If he hadn't been so impatient, so unwilling to tolerate her defense, she would be getting ready to go with him right now.

Why had young Arrowhill come after a doctor for neighbors who hated him anyway? The Arrowhills had been pitted against the so-called "little ranchers," as folks here called those Blackfoot Hole nesters for a generation. The little ranchers had nothing to do with the big K Pothook spread, which today belonged solely to Walt Arrowhill.

Wanda walked from window to mantel, back again, and again. She sat down and picked up a book. She couldn't read. At last she took off her clothes, picked up pajamas, stood holding them a moment, wholly unconscious of the beautiful perfection in every line of her slender body.

**S**UDDENLY she threw the pajamas down and began putting on her clothes again. The burning words of that young

cowman had made her doubt, suddenly and alarmingly, whether she really loved Dr. Ed Kistler. He was so downright handsome and so persistent a lover that . . . Well, some things had to be thrashed out tonight.

She buttoned up the chic orange dress that set off her black eyes and hair so well, dabbed on some powder and went to the telephone which Dr. Kistler had had installed so she would always be on call. But he didn't answer her ring.

It was only a minute, though, before Dr. Kistler himself was at her door. He was a big man, and a regular blond Apollo. His gray suit had been tailored to the last stitch. But in spite of his sartorial perfection he looked worried, really upset. "There's something in the wind, Wanda," he said shortly. "May I come in?"

"Yes, of course, Doctor." He closed the door and started to take her into his arms, but she stepped back.

"What is it?" she asked.

"There's a lot of sickness in Blackfoot Hole," he said. "Walt Arrowhill seems to think I'm the man to shoulder it off onto, but you can see that I just can't leave all my patients. I do so wish—"

He stopped. Outside there was a jingle of spurs. Then that imperative knock on her door again. Wanda flung the door open. Somehow she had let Walt Arrowhill get away with a lot before, but she wasn't going to now.

"Easy," Dr. Kistler said. "He's not too much to blame."

"Back to do some more lecturing, Mr. Arrowhill?" Wanda greeted the visitor, with heavy sarcasm. "How about letting me ask you about the lives you've helped to snuff out—for greed of grass? Let's see, how many men do they say the Arrowhills and their hired gunslingers have killed in the past twenty years? Nine or ten? And you killed two of them, didn't you?"

She stopped short, for lack of breath. And for shame. Because she saw how hard her words had hit him. It was in his eyes. Utter remorse. She knew that instant that he had been haunted by the killings in which he had participated. One man down before his gun last year, and a second only weeks ago.

"They forced it on me both times," he said, and suddenly he was humble, deeply hurt. "In fact, I backed off from each man once, and let him brag he'd made me eat crow."

Oddly, Wanda wanted to believe him. But her sympathy went to him only momentarily. Then his hand was on his gun and he brought it leaping out onto Dr. Kistler. A gasp died in Wanda's throat.

"Dr. Kistler," Walt was saying, "you're going with me to the Hole. I'll take you to your office, let you get what you'll need for fever for nine people, more to come, and for old lady Marsh and the little Turner girl."

Wanda was amazed at her sudden courage. That gun was not scaring her now. For in her heart, she knew Walt Arrowhill was not a man who wanted to kill, or who would pull a trigger in excitement.

"Pay no attention to him, Doctor!" she said quickly. "That gun's only a bluff. He won't shoot!"

Dr. Kistler was quick to grasp her meaning. A man would hardly shoot a doctor for refusing to go see sick neighbors. Kistler had played tackle in college and he was still young enough to feel the brawn of his two hundred and ten pounds. He had to be given credit, too, for a certain reckless courage. Besides, Arrowhill was too imperative.

"Cowboy," Dr. Kistler said, "I'm taking that gun from you, and I don't think you'll be fool enough to wrap a noose around your neck by shooting me."

Kistler flashed Wanda a look, to see how she took that bit of daring. Then he suddenly dived at Walt and grabbed for the rancher's gun hand. He had good right to think he could take the weapon from a man weighing thirty-five pounds less than he did.

But he just didn't know Walt Arrowhill. The cowboy stepped back from his lunge.

"So you want to make it man to man, huh?" he said.

Walt dropped his six-shooter. Dr. Kistler promptly shot a big fist for Walt's jaw. Walt's head bobbed sideways and the doctor was thrown off balance when his fist only fanned thin air. Then Walt let him have it right on the jaw. A right, a left. Then a swift uppercut that jerked the doctor's head back and sagged his knees. Kistler only pawed the air weakly with another fist, and Walt dropped him cold.

He had hardly hit the floor when Walt seized him beneath the arms and started dragging him out the door.

"He'll wake up somewhere on the road," Walt said to the nurse. "Get in the station wagon with us and we'll stop at his office for his saddle-bags and whatever else you think a doctor and nurse'll need over there."

"I'll do no such thing!" the girl said defiantly. "I'm going straight to the sheriff!"

"Try it, if you like," Walt invited. "Sheriff Blanchard happens to be an old friend of us Arrowhills. I told him what I had in mind, and he said it was just the medicine Doc Kistler needed to make him useful in this cow country."

"So that's why you can lord it over all the little ranchers in the basin, is it?" Wanda hurled at him. "You've got the sheriff bought off!"

Walt's shoulders lifted in a careless shrug. "No," he said. "He's just a fair-

minded man dishing out justice without too much red tape. Come on! Somebody may die over in the basin while you're standing here arguing with me."

He half-carried, half-dragged the big doctor out. Wanda stood in the door, peering after them. But she hardly saw the two forms by the station wagon. Those sick people were first in her heart now.

What a strange man, Walt Arrowhill. He made her want to get into his station wagon and hasten to the fever-ridden ranch people, in spite of the way she hated him for his highhandedness. He had a mastery about him, and she was afraid of him all the more as the full strength of him gripped her.

He had Dr. Kistler loaded into the station wagon now. He was coming back. Suddenly panic seized the nurse. She wanted to slam the door and lock it. But that would make her out just a frightened woman, and she knew she had to be more than that in his presence. He stirred rebellion in her, even against her will.

"Coming with us?" he demanded.

"No, I'm not!" she again defied him. The words almost choked her.

She knew that he was going to do it, but a quick gasp broke from her when his hands reached out for her. Again she wanted to run, would have run, but she was frozen with fear of him.

His arms went about her, gripped her hard. He lifted her off the floor. She felt the iron of his body as he held her and blew out the lamp. Then he was carrying her down the walk as though she were only a small girl.

She could see his face above her only in dark silhouette. It was like the rugged outline of Idaho rim-rock in the night, not the chiseled smooth perfection of Ed Kistler's features.

He reached the station wagon with her and stopped, as if reluctant to let her go

from his arms. Nobody had seen these strange goings-on, apparently, because it was night, and Wanda Milbourne's nearest neighbor was half a block away. She knew that she could scream suddenly and stir up excitement, but Walt could whirr the station wagon away before any help could reach her.

"You know, Wanda," he was saying, "I'm going to tell you something. Maybe it's funny to you, but you're the first girl I ever held in my arms—and I'm all throbby inside. Aren't you?"

All at once Wanda knew that never again was she going to be afraid of Walt Arrowhill. So much a man, and yet so like a mere boy talking to his schoolgirl sweetheart.

"Yes, I am," she said, before she could stop herself. Her answer alarmed her, and she instantly tried to cover up. "But I've never been kidnaped before, you see."

**H**IS ARMS gripped her tighter and he smiled down at her. "You know," he said, "I'd be in love with you right now if you hadn't refused to go see sick people so bad in need of you."

That made her mad again. "Don't try too hard to forget my refusal," she said, with a little sting in each word. "If you'll let me, I'll go on from here without trouble. I've wanted to go, all along, but . . . I'll get up on the seat by myself."

He put her down and she climbed to the seat. He threw a tarp over Dr. Kistler, got up beside Wanda and drove away. They stopped at his office and she went in for supplies. Walt didn't offer to go in and keep watch over her, didn't even warn her not to try to escape from him. Now he knew this girl's heart was in the right place.

"He knows I'll go—like a darn fool," she thought. "And I'd give his whole ranch if I hadn't let him make me think

he's right in shaming me and Ed for not going!"

It was late spring and the mountain road was rutted and muddy. Sometimes they crept along in low gear; often they stalled on the worst spots. By midnight Wanda's back was tired from the long ride, and there was a chill in the air of the nine-thousand-foot pass. Walt dug an old slicker from somewhere behind and threw it around her.

He shook Dr. Kistler and Wanda worked again to revive her fiancé. It was only a few minutes before they had the bewildered doctor recovering.

"Where—what's coming off here?" the doctor stammered.

"You're on your way to work," Walt explained. "Top of Blackfoot Pass. Want to sit up on the front seat with us and act like a real doctor? Or do we—"

"Never mind," Dr. Kistler cut in. "I'll go on without trouble."

They got going again, Wanda between the two men on the front seat. Neither Walt nor Wanda said much, and Dr. Kistler didn't want to talk at all. They rode like that for two hours, down the steep road cut through fir, spruce and aspens. The mud was bad, even downhill.

Then Wanda was beginning to feel something new inside her. New fear. Not of Walt Arrowhill, though; just fear of herself. She had been changing so fast, in the way she saw things.

Dr. Kistler was doing all he could to be pleasant, under the circumstances. He was trying to take it like a man, now that he had been dragged into this thing. Nevertheless, he resented the way Walt had done it, and he couldn't help showing it.

"It's not that I wouldn't go see these people without pay," he finally said. "I don't want either of you to think that of me."

Walt didn't answer that, and it was not until three in the morning that he had something to say for himself.

"You haven't given me a chance to tell my side of it, Wanda," he said then.

"Then why not now?" She was feeling better toward him.

"I mean, my side of the trouble in Blackfoot Hole. You see, my granddad settled the basin first. For twenty years he had it all to himself and his boys—my dad and uncles. They spread out, homesteaded the best spots on the range, used all the grass.

"Then the little ranchers got to pushing in. Bad ones at first, mostly rustlers and men on the dodge. Then plenty of good ones, too." He paused a moment thoughtfully, before he added, "It seems too bad, but it's in a lot of people to hate men who've got something they want. Both the big and little ranchers in the basin have fought and killed. Both have been right and both wrong."

"You know, Arrowhill," Dr. Kistler said, "I was afraid of some kind of trap when you first came for me. That's mostly why I wouldn't go. Now I see you just a little different. I'm sorry, cowboy."

"Trap?" repeated Walt. "We don't fight that way over in Blackfoot. But there's no more of the old struggle over there. My ranch is down to patented land and range that we've leased, all legal. All free grass is gone—and I'm I glad of it."

There came a long pause this time. And Wanda knew that the cowboy behind the wheel was aware of her thought. Then he was bringing it into the open.

"That man I had to kill several weeks back," he said. "That was a fair standup fight. He forced it on me, though. I got the best of it only because for years I've realized that second place in a gunfight is not so good."

"You mean," Wanda exclaimed, "that

you've practised with a six-shooter all these years?"

"Yes'm. That was the only way the Arrowhills could stay alive, in past years."

Dr. Kistler slumped back into a grouch. He could be that way, first high, then untalkative, moody.

"So," he said, "you can kill them sometimes, but still you have to drag us out over here to see them when they're sick. It just doesn't add up, Arrowhill."

"Maybe not," Walt half agreed. "But I can't stand to see kids and their mothers sick, in danger of dying, and me not lift a hand to help. We'll be to old Bill Grady's place shortly. Bill and two of his kids are down with fever. . . Hmm—sounds like I'm about to lose my right-rear chain in this rut. . . ."

Big, massive, unshaven, Bill Grady was the leader of the little ranchers. He just couldn't believe his eyes when he saw Walt coming in with a doctor and a nurse.

"Well, I don't savvy it," Bill said, "but we're in desperate need of a doctor. So I can't question this funny business."

Wanda's heart was wrung by the sad plight of these oddly acquired patients. She set to work at once over little Jennie Grady, while the doctor examined the child's father. Walt stayed outside, but close by the door. Wanda knew that he was watching her.

When she went to the door to throw out some water, Walt looked at her in her immaculate white uniform and cap. Those blue eyes of his had a way of making her look up and meet them. This time there was a quick, sudden blaze in them.

"Now there is no *if* to it!" he whispered. "I love you, Wanda!"

Her face flamed as hot as that of little Jennie on the bed. But she was more angry at herself than at Walt, for letting him start that crazy throbbing inside her. She wanted to put him in his place with some

quick retort, but somehow her mind fumbled for words. And she felt Dr. Kistler's eyes on them both. She turned to him.

That look in Ed Kistler's eyes made her start. If a man's eyes had ever flamed with pure hate, they were the doctor's gray eyes now. He turned his head from her, as if to hide what he felt toward Walt.

Wanda saw his hands trembling as he felt awkwardly into his medicine bag. The trembling kept up for minutes, while he measured out powders into even doses and wrapped each dose separately in tiny papers. His voice was tense, husky, as he told Mrs. Grady to give her husband and two sick children each a dose of the powders every two hours. He was terrified now by his own plight.

Bill Grady was looking at the doctor with puzzled expression. Then he looked back at Walt.

"Arrowhill," Grady said, "you make me mighty ashamed, if this fetchin' us a doctor and nurse really comes from your heart."

"You'd do as much for me," Walt said.

Neither of them spoke to each other again. But Wanda felt that the brief conversation was left hanging in the air. Grady was unconvinced, just a little suspicious. Mrs. Grady showed it even more. She kept eying Walt and the doctor. . . .

It was the same at the next ranch and the next. Suspicion, mistrust; even fear. And Dr. Kistler added to it by his increasing sullenness. He was glum during his examinations. He grew more and more nervous as he gave out medicine. He had seen too much pass between Wanda and Walt.

Once Wanda saw him stop and look at a bottle of powder sharply. Then he thrust the medicine back into its place and his hand shook as he hunted for something

else, without seeming to see anything. He jerked his head around, saw her eyes on him. He closed the medicine bag abruptly, and got up.

"Let's go," he said. "I'll write out a prescription they need, and have someone go into town for the medicine."

"I'll send one of my cowboys," Walt said. "You've got two more families to a visit, and I'm leaving it up to you and Wanda to finish the job."

"No!" Dr. Kistler said, with sudden h panic in his words. "No, you stay with us. They—they might mob me and Wanda."

"What's the matter?" Wanda asked, sensing his fright.

**T**HE doctor's face was as white as any powder he ever gave.

"This thing upset me horribly from the start," he said. "And it didn't help any, seeing you throw me over for him, Wanda." His voice rose to a hysterical shriek. "I was crazy! Yes, crazy, I tell you! That's how it happened!"

"What happened, Ed?" Wanda asked quickly.

"I was so nervous and—and scared that I gave the Grady family the wrong medicine. It might kill Bill Grady and his little girls! But I didn't mean to mix up the medicines. It was a mistake! A mistake, I tell you!"

And the way he cried out the words Wanda knew that it had been a mistake. That was understandable, with such a double strain upon the doctor.

Nevertheless, the nurse's face was draining white. The ranchers might think that Walt Arrowhill had planned to poison them through this fetching in of a doctor and nurse. They would be sure to lynch Walt also! "Can't you save the Gradys?" she cried. "Let's go. Have you a stomach pump with you?"

"Yes, but—it may be too late!"

"Just the same," Walt snapped, "we're going to try to get you back there in time. Jump into the station wagon, both of you!"

Walt helped Wanda into the station wagon first. Just as Dr. Kistler was getting in, he saw Walt off guard for a second.

Like a big grizzly turning on his keeper, Kistler lunged at Walt. He closed arms about the young rancher and carried him to the ground with all the force of his huge body. Walt was underneath as they hit. His head slapped hard against a stone. Kistler smacked fists into the cowboy's jaw—terrific wallops. Walt went out cold.

Kistler grabbed Walt's six-shooter and leaped up to the driver's seat. Wanda tried to spring from the station wagon but Kistler caught her and tugged her back with one powerful arm. Managing to hold her, he got the station wagon on the move. He kept feeding the gas.

Soon he turned Wanda loose and gave all his attention to holding the station wagon in the muddy, gutted road. Wanda knew that jumping out now meant mangling her body, and might mean death. But she had to do it! They were leaving Walt back there unconscious, to be lynched!

She tried to snap off the ignition. When Kistler knocked her hands away she clawed at his face.

"Stop it, you little fool!" he cried. "We're riding for our lives! We've got to get clean out of the country, and by some back door—the wilder the better!"

"But I'm not going without getting Walt out too!" she vowed. "They'll lynch him, dead sure, the same hour one of the Gradys dies."

"I can't help that, even if I'm sorry," snapped Kistler. "He's the cause of it all anyway. Doctors give the wrong medicine sometimes even under the best of circumstances. I can't help it if I made a mistake! And I'm keeping you—as a

hostage, if it comes to that.”

“I know it was a mistake, Ed,” she said pleadingly. “But let’s don’t leave Walt to pay for it like this!”

“He’d leave me,” Kistler retorted. “And I’m afraid of him! He terrifies me.”

Wanda snatched at the ignition keys. The station wagon swerved, rammed into the bank, stopped. Kistler seized her wrist, but she tore loose and leaped from the seat. He caught her before she took the third running stride.

Then with almost brute fury, he held her and tied her hands together. With his belt he bound her feet. Then he put her on the floor in the station wagon, behind the front seat. He backed away from the bank, stepped on the gas. . . .

Walt Arrowhill didn’t recover consciousness until the station wagon was out of sight. When he did sit up, the ranch family peered out a window, as if he were a wild beast they feared.

Walt got up and walked toward the house, regardless of their fear of him. As he neared the open door the rancher, Henry King, stepped out with a Winchester in his hands.

“I don’t savvy all this stuff, Arrowhill,” King growled. “You better head the other way.”

“Lend me a horse, Henry,” Walt begged. “Dr. Kistler gave Bill Grady and his family the wrong medicine—by mistake. I’ve got to catch Kistler and take him back to try and save the Gradys.”

“A few horses in the corral,” King said grudgingly, still afraid. “It’ll go mighty hard with you if Kistler poisoned somebody.”

Walt raced to the corral, grabbed a rope and dropped a loop over the head of a medium-coupled bay with deep chest and good legs—a stayer, if he knew horses.

It wasn’t long until the fresh tracks showed him that Kistler had turned out of

the main road with the station wagon, and fought it up a side road toward the mountain. Still with Wanda along, too.

About a mile up the side road Dr. Kistler had bogged the station wagon down entirely. Tracks led from it toward a small ranch over a ridge. Wanda’s footprints beside Dr. Kistler’s. Anyway, he hadn’t killed her by turning the station wagon over on her. But Kistler was a crazy man now, and there was no telling what a crazy man might do. That inward urgency kept Walt pushing his horse for all it was worth.

At the little ranch only two small children were home. Yes, a man and a woman had come and got horses. The pretty girl had been crying. The man was mean to her. He had tied her onto her horse, looked like.

“Taking her along,” Walt thought, “as a pawn to save his own hide, if worst came to worst. At least I hope that’s it.”

Walt sized up the lay of the country. The horse tracks led up the back of a ridge that curved crescent-shaped. He cut across the crescent, then dropped off and led his puffing horse hard up the mountainside.

Just as he was topping out, he looked back and saw Kistler coming. Kistler had Wanda tied on her horse now, and was whipping it along. Walt eased his own mount back, bushed it in some oaks. Then he crept downward, trying to get where he could leap out and grab Kistler’s horse as he passed.

But Wanda’s horse spotted Walt in the manzanita brush. It stopped, blowing through its nostrils. Kistler pulled up, peered Walt’s way. He grabbed out Walt’s Colt as Walt stepped out into the open.

“Walt, haven’t you got a gun?” Wanda cried.

“No,” Walt answered, “but I’m taking my Colt from Kistler.”

“Arrowhill,” Kistler said measuredly,

“three steps more and I’ll kill you.”

“You haven’t got the nerve to shoot,” Walt taunted. “That horse’d pitch you off into those rocks and break your neck. I’m taking you back to save the people you poisoned, Kistler.”

“To be lynched, you mean!” Kistler cried. “Stop, or I’ll shoot!”

Kistler cocked the six-shooter. He was a cornered coward, and Walt knew that kind would kill.

“You might hit me one shot, Kistler,” Walt said, “but I’ll carry your lead long enough to get to you—after that horse pitches you off.”

“No, Walt, no!” Wanda cried.

But Walt took a slow, deliberate step. Then another and another. He saw the wild panic in Kistler’s eyes, knew the man wanted to murder him. But a coward shrinks from being torn and bruised in such cruel rocks.

Walt took the fourth step.

“Oh, Walt, dear,” he heard Wanda saying, “Don’t make him kill you! I love you!”

But Walt didn’t stop. He was within five steps of Kistler. He saw in Kistler’s eyes that the man was going to shoot. Walt made a swift dive for him. In the same instant he yelled wildly at Kistler’s horse.

The horse tried to swing around. Kistler fired. The bullet tore into Walt’s left side, plowing a furrow off a rib. The next instant Walt’s hands closed about Kistler’s leg. The horse was pitching.

Walt dragged Kistler from the saddle. Kistler fired a second time, and missed, then Walt was into him on the ground, fighting tigerishly to keep that gun from his body. All the while he could hear Wanda’s anguished calls. She had to sit her horse helplessly and watch the fearful battle.

THE two men rolled down among the rocks. Walt had the bad luck to land underneath again, jammed in tight between two jagged rocks. Kistler crashed the six-shooter into the side of Walt’s head and everything went black before Walt’s eyes.

But he did manage to get both hands onto Kistler’s big bony wrist. He had enough strength left to hang on and turn the gun aside.

That was the way they were when Wanda saw her chance. She had the use of her hands for guiding her horse. She whirled the animal, yelled at it, and sent it charging down upon Kistler. He saw her intent and threw up a hand as if in a vain hope to ward off the charge of the horse.

The horse swerved, refusing to run over the two writhing men. But Kistler’s momentary diversion gave Walt his chance. The blackness was fading. He could see the blur of the man above him. He flung up both legs from behind, caught one around Kistler’s neck and heaved.

That bent Kistler backward, and Walt whirled out of his tight spot. Then he was tearing the gun from Kistler’s hand. As Kistler lost the Colt, he also lost his last vestige of fight.

“Don’t shoot me!” he cried. “I’ll give up!”

Walt pulled back from him, panting, bloody.

“You’re going back, Doctor,” he ordered. “To try to save Grady and his family, yes, but to tell them just how it all happened, too.”

Walt untied Wanda’s feet, then ordered Kistler to get back onto his horse.

“Walt,” Wanda pleaded, “don’t go back! Kistler isn’t saying a word, see. I mean, not fighting this return. He’s told me that he’ll be satisfied to die if they lynch you with him.”

"I'm not built to run off from a thing like this," Walt said. "It's got to be settled down there today, mob or no mob. . . ."

The nearer they came to the Grady ranch, the more tense all three grew. Wanda wanted to scream out to Walt to turn around and ride for it while there still was time. But she knew he was right. He just wasn't built that way.

They came in sight of Grady's big log house. There was no mob. Not a living being was around. They rode up to the door. Walt got off and knocked.

Mrs. Grady came to the door. Walt began to explain why they had come back. He nodded to the disheveled doctor and glanced down at his own bloody self.

"Come in, Walt!" he heard Grady call.

Walt forced Kistler to lead the way inside. There lay Grady in bed, no worse than when the doctor had left him.

"I didn't take your cussed medicine, Doctor," Grady said. "Wouldn't let my kids take it. This thing looked too suspicious to me. But now"—his eyes ran over the two men—"I can't help believin' what I see. Walt, you're not half-bad. But I'm still mighty glad I was suspicious. Kistler, you better start ridin' and stay long gone, hombre. . . . Walt, could you go after some other sawbones for all of us?"

Walt heard a little sob. There was Wanda, crying right out loud, and not one bit ashamed of it. Walt stepped over to her.

"Wanda," he whispered, "I'm going to kiss you right here in front of everybody."

"If you don't," she said, so all could hear, "I'll have to start it first!"