

# REDEMPTION RANGE

by Norman A. Fox

WHEN the stagecoach stopped before the Flintlock station, Steve Anthony saw the swelling mob that had gathered and knew it would be no easy thing to face it. Here was a town where hate bubbled beneath a thin crust of stolid sullenness, though in this respect Flintlock merely mirrored Steve's own mood. Across the dusty miles, he had anticipated this hostility and rebelled against the futility of buck-

ing it. To any man there might come such an hour of trial. To Steve Anthony, no stranger to danger, the issue was complicated because his wife and son were with him.

They sat stiffly at his side; Greta's pretty face a taut mask concealing her apprehension; ten-year-old Danny sobered by his parent's contagious tenseness. Steve spoke swiftly.



*Steve was making every bullet count before Ludlow lead cut him down.*

"They know we've come to take over the ranch," he told his wife. "The stage only stops here ten minutes. No need to unload if you'd just as soon go on."

"Twelve years is a long time," said Greta. "Surely they still don't hold a grudge. Let's not run, Steve; not until there's something to run from."

She had made his decision for him. And because he had hesitated chiefly for her sake, Steve now swung open the door and dropped to the ground, a tall, lean man, square-faced and square-shouldered. He gave Greta his hand and hoisted Danny down after her. Then he turned to face the gathered men.

"Howdy," he said curtly. "Is this a reception committee?"

The three men at the mob's head were brothers, their blood tie manifesting itself in swarthy skins and a sameness to their bulking bigness. Steve had grown up with Beaut, Cass and Sim Ludlow. He recognized many faces looming behind the brothers, too, and it occurred to him that the trio had always been self-appointed leaders when deviltry was brewing. Beaut Ludlow swaggered a step forward.

"You wrote the county treasurer to make sure the title to old Dan Anthony's Boxed A was still in the clear," he snapped. "The ranch is yourn accordin' to the law, but you ain't settlin' on it. By rights that spread belongs to us that lost money when your dad's bank went bust here years ago. Better climb back on that stage, Anthony!"

His very tone was an insult, and Steve was swept by a desire to smash Beaut's leering face. But this was a time for convincing words. "You folks don't understand," he began. "I know what you thought about my father, but—"

"We ain't changed our minds none!" Beaut interjected. "And the same goes for you and your wife. Seeing as Greta was loco enough to marry the son of a thief—"

Steve hit him then, lashing out viciously and spilling Ludlow back into his brothers' arms where Beaut reeled, his lips bleeding.

"You filthy-tongued dog!" Steve raged and swung his eyes to the rest of them. "Anybody else got anything to say about my wife?"

IT was a moment when anything might have happened. The fact that nothing did was no indication of the true temper of this mob. Beaut Ludlow was struggling for his gun, but Steve, garbed in a dark traveling suit, visibly wore no weapon, and some of the gathered men had no stomach for murder. One of them was Hank Lafferty, grizzled cowman, who helped restrain Beaut. But there was no friendship in Lafferty's eyes as they swiveled to Steve.

"Beaut had no business draggin' Greta's name into this," the cowman conceded. "But he's told you how we all feel, Anthony. You'd better not settle here!"

"We'll finish this play sometime —alone!" Beaut raged.

Steve understood. He had struck Ludlow for the bully's sneer at Greta, and thus the issue had become a personal, man-to-man affair. The town's code forbade gunfire since Steve wasn't armed, and Beaut obviously had no desire for a slug-ging match. Already the mob was dispersing, the episode over. But there'd be a sequel if he, Steve, chose to stay here.

Little Danny was regarding his father with open hero worship, but Greta had turned pale. The stage

driver, Steve noticed, was climbing to his perch.

"You wanted to stop at the bank before we went out to the Boxed A," Greta reminded her husband. "Danny and I will wait here."

Again Steve hesitated. Then he swung up the street, noting subconsciously that Flintlock had changed but little, the same rows of warped and weathered buildings frowning at each other across the dusty channel that was the main street. The red brick of the bank was only a rusty shadow of its former glory, but the gray ghost of a man who plied a broom near the door as Steve stepped inside was as he'd always been.

"Shuffle!" Steve said, extending his hand. "You working here again?"

"The bank was opened three years after your dad left," Shuffle McGinnis muttered, managing not to see the outstretched hand. "Martin Sloane, him that was your dad's cashier, took over and give me back the janitoring job. Heard you might be headin' this way, Steve."

"Greta's with me," Steve told him. "She's at the stage depot if you'd like to skip down and see her. And you can get your first look at your grandson, too."

"I'm mighty busy just now," mumbled Shuffle. "Maybe . . . uh . . . if you stay here, I could come out to the ranch—"

"You don't aim to take sides by publicly welcoming your daughter!" Steve said in sudden understanding, but there was more pity than scorn in him. Shuffle McGinnis had never owned anything approximating a backbone, and his wife had worked herself into an early grave to rear Greta, their only child. But Shuffle had to go on living in Flintlock, Steve remembered.

"I'll tell Greta," Steve said and strode toward the door of Martin Sloane's private office. His drumming knuckles brought him an invitation to enter and he faced a rotund man across an expanse of desk, noting that Sloane was twelve years balder and that sandy side whiskers had given him a sort of dignity.

**W**HY, Steve— Steve Anthony!" Sloane exclaimed, coming to his feet and extending his hand. Steve took it, not unaware that this first act of friendliness in the town was tempered only by the fact that the office window shade was drawn against the afternoon sun.

"Heard you wrote about the old Boxed A," Sloane hurried on. "Thinking of settling there, Steve? And how's your father?"

"Dan Anthony is dead," said Steve quietly. "A month now."

Martin Sloane turned properly sober. "Too bad . . . too bad," he murmured. "He gave me my start here in Flintlock. A good man, Steve."

"Some," remarked Steve, "don't think so."

"Dan's trouble was that he was more cowman than banker," Sloane observed. "He couldn't say 'no,' and he loaned money recklessly. When the cycle of dry years hit, he was caught short."

"And he had to leave this town two jumps ahead of a lynch rope," Steve added bitterly. "Greta and me were just married, remember? I couldn't see her snubbed by people who'd lost money. That's why I took her and joined dad down in Wyoming. We've had hard years since, Sloane."

"You've got to remember that folks trusted Dan with their money," Sloane said. "When they

needed it to stave off ruin, he didn't have it. Yet he hung onto his own ranch, the best on the range. That didn't look good, Steve."

"I wondered about that, too," Steve admitted. "He protected it by having the deed in my name. But dad knew what he was doing. If he'd sold the ranch and divided the money, it wouldn't have gone far. Dad saved some money in the last twelve years, Sloane. He gave it to me and asked me to invest it in stock and run the ranch again. That's why I've come to see you—to get the name of every man who lost money in the old bank. Dad said you probably still had the books. You see, if I can make a go of the ranch, I intend to pay back every cent anyone lost."

Sloane was more than interested now. "You could do it in time!" he said.

Some of Steve's rebellion came back into his eyes. "I want no word of this to get around, Sloane. I'm not fawnin' for favor by airing a promise I don't know whether I can keep!"

"Just as you wish, Steve," Sloane shrugged. "The Boxed A is legally yours. Apparently your father paid the taxes all these years. The ranchhouse doesn't need much fixing, either. But it will be hard going for you, I'm afraid. Hard going!"

Much of this talk Steve remembered as he tooled a rented livery rig across the prairie's flatness toward the bulking Elkhorn Hills, Greta and Danny on the seat beside him. He loved this land of his boyhood, and nostalgia swept him as the miles unreeled and the terrain became broken. Here was shelter from the blizzard winds for the herd he would buy. The Boxed A was

wedged back into the Elkhorns, a vast expanse of lush acreage traversed by canyons and ravines. Enthusiasm grew within Steve, then died abruptly as he topped a bluff to look down upon the ranchhouse. For now the building was a heap of smoldering ruins, smoke tendrils still coiling about it.

"Burned!" he gasped. "Burned out!"

Yonder three riders quirted their horses in rapid retreat and, although the distance was great, Steve recognized the Ludlow brothers, from their blocky shoulders and burly figures. He clawed at suitcase straps, seeking the gun he'd stowed away. But in the midst of the effort he knew the moment of retaliation was lost.

"Beaut Ludlow has evened up for that belt in the teeth," he said hol-lowly. "I thought I was bringing you home, but there isn't any, Greta."

He didn't want to meet his wife's eyes for fear her bitterness would be greater than his own, but Greta only said: "The old saddle shed is still standing. It will keep the rain off us while you snake logs from the hills to build another house."

"Can I help, daddy?" demanded Danny. "Can I hold the boards while you saw 'em?"

**A**ND so it was decided, for how could a man lose with such partners to side him? But the odds were great, Steve soon discovered. In Flintlock the next day most merchants refused to do business with him though some, newcomers, grudgingly sold to him on a strictly cash basis. He fetched home tools, saddle horses and a secondhand buckboard heaped high with supplies, but his store of money had dwindled considerably.

In the many times Steve visited Flintlock during the following weeks he found that men studiously avoided him, while the three Ludlows made no bones about their open hatred for him.

None of which gave Steve any grave concern, for he was wearing his gun now, and if the Ludlows or anyone else wanted to challenge him, he was ready. But it rankled to see little Danny treated like a pariah at the crossroads school where Steve took him each day, and Greta snubbed by women she'd grown up with. Yet in a sense Steve couldn't blame these people for their animosity, for the failure of Dan Anthony's bank had blasted many hopes beyond repair.

Shuffle McGinnis rode to the ranch one night, greeting his daughter in an abashed fashion and watching young Danny with hungry eyes. He visited them often after that, always surreptitiously, a craven creature who had never called his soul his own, and Steve wondered how his daughter came by the courage that was hers.

Shuffle was there the night the house was pronounced finished.

"Ought to be a housewarmin'," the old fellow said wistfully.

Whereupon Steve and Greta fell silent, for they remembered such things from other days—laughing neighbors, violins scraping far into the night and the joy that comes when work shared together is completed.

"Some day," Steve promised.

But the next day the two things happened that were to change the whole course of Steve Anthony's life here on Flintlock range.

First there was the finding of the cattle tracks. At dawn Steve had headed into the hills, exploring his spread with an eye to the future

erection of fences. Thus he stumbled upon sign that told him cattle had been hazed across his land. Only a few critters, he judged, and the trail pointed north. But before noon he found many such trails, all of them converging toward the mouth of a canyon known in the old days as Lost Horse Gulch.

Someone was using his ranch as a thoroughfare into the hills. In a way, that was natural enough since the Boxed A. was the back door to the high country. But who wanted cattle hazed into that no man's land, Steve wondered? It was a matter worth investigating, but such a trip might require a pack horse and supplies. He turned back to the ranchhouse, arriving to find Greta smoke-begrimed and disheveled and one wing of the new house a charred ruin.

"I didn't see who fired it!" Greta cried, sobbing as Steve held her. "They must have sneaked up on foot. But I smelled smoke in time to get enough water from the well to put it out. Oh, Steve, why won't they leave us in peace?"

There was no reply Steve could make, but his jaw grew tighter as he looked upon that near ruin, and at last he spoke. "We build 'em—they burn 'em!" he said bitterly. "And what could I prove if I carried the war to the Ludlows? Greta, load our things in the buckboard. I'm going down to the school and get Danny. We're lookin' for new range!"

"But, Steve—" she began to protest.

"No!" he said emphatically. "Do you remember the hard years after we were driven out of Flintlock before? I owe you and Danny a living. The money dad left me is mine, rightfully, because he stole nothing from these people. That money

will give us a start some place else, even though we'll have to buy land and build a herd as best we can. Here it would be thrown away. It's yours, Greta, and Danny's that money. We owe it to the boy to build a home that won't be burned whenever our backs are turned!"

**S**PEECH still trembled on Greta's lips, but she checked it. Steve saw her turn into the house, stooped and worn, as he stepped up into his saddle. Then he was galloping toward the school, a beaten man. With fist and gun he could fight, but the thing that had beaten him here was intangible, made of the bitterness of men.

Thus he came to the schoolhouse to see the second thing that was to make this day a turning point for him. The dismissal bell had tolled, and Steve looked around for Danny who always sat forlornly waiting for him while other boys paired off to head for home. But now Danny was lustily swinging his fists at a boy half a head taller than himself, Pug Lafferty, grandson of old Hank Lafferty. As a fight, it was something of a shambles, because Danny had bitten off a great deal more than he could chew.

Steve and the schoolteacher reached the fracas at the same time, each hauling away a combatant.

"What is this?" Steve demanded sharply.

"He called you names!" Danny sobbed. "He said you was behind the rustlin' that's been going on lately. He said folks was likely to have a look-see at our spread pretty soon for their stolen critters!"

"Grandpap's fed up!" Pug Lafferty raged, trying to break away from the teacher. "Beef's been disappearin' and you're the gent that's hazin' it off. Grandpap says,

'Once an Anthony, always an Anthony.'"

Not much of this made sense to Steve at first. He had known nothing about any rustling—but then how could he? No man ever spoke to him. But all of Pug's wild babbling fitted in with the finding of those tracks pointing toward Lost Horse Gulch. Rustlers had been hazing stolen stock into the hills, and the ranchers suspected him, Steve Anthony, of doing the stealing. Which was just another reason for quitting this range! A man was accused, tried and convicted without a chance to speak in his own defense! Yet here in the schoolyard Steve had learned that he couldn't leave.

No; Pug Lafferty's words had changed all that. "Once an Anthony, always an Anthony," he'd quoted. Yet the Anthony name had stood for integrity upon this range in the long-gone days before Daniel Anthony's bank had failed. And here was another Daniel Anthony squirming in Steve's arms, bloody from defending that name.

Steve had wanted to build some sort of heritage for his son, something that would be safe from torch-wielding skulkers. But now he knew he must build something far greater for Danny—a name to be proud of. Running wouldn't work. Here on Flintlock range the name of Anthony had been defiled. Here on this range it must be made honorable again. That was the heritage Steve knew he really owed Danny.

"Son, you're walking home to-night," Steve said now. "Tell your mother not to bother packing our things. Tell her we're staying here, savvy? Your daddy's got to go into town. I'll be home soon as I can."

Then Steve was stepping up into the saddle again, pointing his horse

toward Flintlock, a fierce elation within him as he rode along. Now he knew what his course must be, and now he knew how to redeem the Anthony name upon this range.

The rustled stock was back in Lost Horse Gulch, and Steve would tell the cattlemen so. More than that, he'd ride with them to recover those cattle, even though he had no stock of his own and therefore nothing personal to gain. That didn't matter. He'd be gaining their confidence, riding stirrup to stirrup with them, sharing their danger if a rustler force challenged them in the canyon.

Yet there would be some like the Ludlow brothers who would listen to no proposal Steve might make. Therefore he was going to Flintlock first and tell his story to Martin Sloane, once his father's cashier, and the only man who had showed open sign of friendliness. Sloane would back up his story for him, urge the ranchers to give him a chance to prove himself.

**S**UCH was Steve's scheme and, turning it over in his mind, he found no flaw in it. Dusk had spread its purple powder over Flintlock when he racked his horse before the bank, but a light burned behind the drawn shade of Sloane's private office and the bank's front door was open. In the vast room of grilled partitions, Shuffle McGinnis, a shadow among shadows, plied a mop. Nodding at him, Steve stepped toward Sloane's office—and froze into immobility as a voice reached him through the partially opened door.

"Things is shapin' up fine," Beaut Ludlow opined in the room beyond. "If the fool don't run after us firin' his new house today, he likely ain't gonna be able to run. Most of the

ranchers is just about convinced that he's doin' the cattle stealing. They'll ride against the Boxed A one of these days and wipe it out!"

"But don't overplay your hand!" Martin Sloane countered. "Some of the ranchers are meeting here in town tonight to decide what's to be done about the rustling. If they drive Anthony out, that's fine. But supposing they get back the cattle you boys have corralled up in Lost Horse? What good will it do me to have a vault full of mortgages then?"

"We're keepin' an ear to the ground, Mart." Cass Ludlow laughed. "If the sign says the ranchers are likely to ride onto Anthony's spread, we'll just haze that beef so far back into the hills that nobody'll find it. Don't worry about that!"

For a moment Steve Anthony stood paralyzed as the astounding truth hit him. Martin Sloane wasn't his friend! Martin Sloane was working hand in glove with the Ludlows to ruin him as part of a land steal gigantic in scope! Steve had heard enough to see the shape of a pattern, and the missing pieces weren't hard to fit in. A red rage overmastering him, he kicked the door open and lunged inside, his gun in his hand.

"Set tight, you double-dealing skunks!" he ordered. "And get those hands hoisted!"

Under different circumstances their surprise would have been ludicrous. The Ludlows were scattered about the room, Sloane seated behind his desk.

"Anthony!" the banker shouted. "Is this a holdup?"

"Don't bluff!" Steve said grimly. "You wanted me off the range, eh? And no wonder! Once I stocked the Boxed A and had a crew roam-

ing the spread, you wouldn't be able to run stolen stuff across it and into the hills. And I was fool enough to figger that the only reason I was being burned out was because you Ludlows were still sore about dad's bank going busted! I didn't savvy until today!"

"Nonsense!" Sloane blustered, but his vehemence was forced. "Do you think I'd be mixed in anything as petty as cattle rustling?"

"No. You're playing for bigger game" Steve countered. "A vault full of mortgages, eh? You'd stand a chance of owning half the range if ranchers lost beef and couldn't lift those mortgages! And if I paid off dad's old accounts, the ranchers could get out of your grasp, too. But since I wouldn't quit the country you were going to make me the goat of this rustling deal! Now quit trying to lie out of it! I heard you talking, savvy?"

**T**HE bluster suddenly went out of Martin Sloane, leaving him a beaten man. But the Ludlows retained some of their surety. Beaut laughed raspingly.

"What do you aim to do about it, Anthony?" he demanded.

"A little gun thunder here at the bank ought to empty the meeting hall in a hurry and fetch the cattlemen here," Steve said. "When they come runnin', I'll have something to tell 'em."

Crossing to the window, he hoisted the sash and fired twice at the sky. And that was the moment the Ludlows chose to jump him.

It was a desperate move, but they had timed it efficiently. Steve, firing from the window, had been temporarily off guard. At the sudden scraping of a boot sole he spun, alert to danger, but the brothers were upon him. He managed to fire

once, a wild shot, and then they were wrenching the gun away from him, hurling it away, driving him into a corner with fists that worked like pistons. Steve was there, panting and reeling, when the cattlemen stormed into the bank, old Hank Lafferty leading them.

"What's the shootin' for?" demanded Lafferty. "What's goin' on here?"

"A little trouble with Steve Anthony, boys," Martin Sloane spoke up quickly. "He had a hide-out gun, but we got it away from him. You see, the Ludlows just fetched Anthony into town, and they brought him here first to talk things over with me. Beaut was afraid there might be lynch talk when the news got out. He was asking me if it might not be best to keep quiet about this until the sheriff could get Anthony to a calaboose in some other town."

"You mean—" Lafferty began.

Sloane nodded. "Yes, Anthony's been doing the rustling, just as some of you suspected. The Ludlows, here, were losing beef the same as the rest of you. They caught Anthony hazing some critters toward his spread. Probably the other stolen stuff has gone that way too."

The audacity of the man left Steve breathless. By his boldness Sloane had neatly turned the tables on him. Anything Steve might say now would sound like a weak attempt to lie his way out of this predicament. Yet a torrent of words burst from him.

"It's a frame-up!" he shouted. "The stolen beef is in Lost Horse Gulch. I cut sign on it today. But the Ludlows fetched it there, workin' in cahoots with Sloane to keep you boys from payin' off your mortgages. I heard 'em talkin' about it

tonight. Don't you understand? They're the rustlers!"

Martin Sloane smiled. "Did you ever hear such a wild yarn?" he asked. "Next he'll be accusing you fellows of rustling your own beef!"

"You can bet the sheriff ain't gonna have a chance at him!" growled one of the ranchers. "Rope law takes care of cow rustlers on this man's range!"

There was more that Steve might have said, but suddenly he had no will to say it, for speech would avail him nothing, anyway. He was beaten—beaten by the machinations of Martin Sloane and the hatred this range bore anyone named Anthony, a hatred Sloane had undoubtedly encouraged in his own sly way. Steve could see Shuffle McGinnis peering through the doorway now. The oldster might have heard what was said here before the ranchers came, but Steve's flaring hope died quickly. He could count on no help from a man who had never called his soul his own. And yet—

"It's the truth Steve's telling!" Shuffle spoke up. "Every bit of it. I know, gents. This ain't the first night-time meeting Sloane has had with the Ludlows. And this ain't the first dirty work Sloane has been mixed in!"

**I**T swung every eye toward the old janitor, and no man here was more surprised than Steve Anthony.

"Sloane never worried much about whether I overheard him schemin'!" Shuffle babbled on. "He didn't figger I'd ever have the guts to talk, anyway! But he's behind the rustlin', I tell you, just like Steve said!"

"He's lying!" shouted Sloane. "Greta Anthony is his girl. He's

just trying to save this wide-looping son-in-law of his"

"Lying, am I?" Shuffle countered. "I was janitor when Dan Anthony had this bank, too, remember. Many a night you came back to work on the books, Sloane, while I was doing the swamping. Sometimes I thought I saw you tote canvas currency sacks out of here. When the bank went bust, I caught on. You were embezzling from Dan Anthony, but he was more cowman than banker and he never got wise! Then folks got set to lynch Dan, and I kept quiet. I didn't have the nerve to get mixed into a deal where a lynch rope was concerned. But Dan's old books are still here—the books you kept for him, Sloane. I dare you to let somebody that savvies such look 'em over!"

Perhaps Sloane would have tried to bluff through. Perhaps he would have succeeded. But Cass Ludlow went for his gun then, spearing a shot that slammed Shuffle backward. The other Ludlows were going for guns, too, and Steve fell sideways to the floor, rolling toward his own gun which lay there. There were only three bullets in the weapon now, he remembered, and he used one of them to smash Cass Ludlow, dumping him in a sprawled heap.

Lead was grooving the floor, driving splinters into Steve's face, but he was making his own bullets count. He had to. The need was for a fighter now, he reflected grimly, for Shuffle had done all that such a man could do. Steve saw Beaut Ludlow's knees buckle beneath him, but Sim was still triggering. Something knifed along Steve's ribs leaving fire and agony in its wake. His last bullet broke Sim's gun arm. Then, only faintly aware that the ranchers had drawn irons, too,

Steve instinctively swung his empty gun toward Martin Sloane.

"D-don't shoot!" the banker quavered. "I'll make restitution! Don't shoot!"

Hank Lafferty was among those who crowded forward to lift Steve to his feet.

"Anthony," the old cowman said shamefacedly, "it sort o' looks like us jiggers made a mistake all along!"

"That's done and over with," said Steve. "Help Shuffle."

There was blood on the janitor's shoulder, but the wound wasn't serious.

"Shuffle," Steve said gently as he examined the man, "I'm apologizin' for things I've thought. You've got nerve and plenty of it."

"Nerve!" gasped Shuffle. "Where do you suppose I got the nerve to finally speak up—something I should have done years back? I borried it from you, Steve. When I saw the nerve you had, stickin' on this range with every man against you, stickin' for Greta and Danny, I figgered I could be part of the man you was!"

And here Steve sensed an ironic working of destiny, for he had had his courage bolstered by his son in the schoolyard this afternoon, and Shuffle, in turn, had learned from him. Yet the greatest courage of all belonged to still another person, and she was here, darting through the doorway, her hair flying.

"Steve! Steve!" she cried. "The schoolteacher brought Danny home on her horse and told me you'd gone to town. I rode as fast as I could, Steve. You were so bitter when you left me that I didn't know what kind of trouble you might get yourself into."

"There'll be no more trouble for us, Greta," Steve said. "Ever."

HOURS later when little Danny had been put to bed, a piece of beefsteak tied over one swollen eye, Steve and Greta sat on the doorstep of the new house.

"A good finish," Steve observed.

"Martin Sloane keeping himself from being lynched by offering to square up all around means that dad's name is cleared and the debt is paid. We'll be able to stock the spread and build it up. And, Greta, I'm wondering if you knew all along, somehow, that there could be this kind of an ending. Is that why you kept me from leaving from the very first?"

"No, Steve," Greta said softly.

"There was a better reason. Dad—Shuffle. He was a mighty poor excuse for a father, but I could pity his weakness. Up until tonight he side-stepped trouble all his life, never meeting it squarely. Can't you see, Steve? It didn't matter what happened to us here so long as you faced it instead of running. I knew what my mother suffered, Steve. I didn't want my life to be bound up with a man who ran from trouble. Even though you only wanted to run for Danny's sake, and mine."

He fell silent, feeling both humble and strong. "The ranchers gave us an escort of honor, riding home with us tonight," he said at last. "I'm helpin' them haze their stock out of Lost Horse. They'll be fine neighbors, Greta, and they'll ride this way often."

"Yes," she said and smiled. "They're coming to help us rebuild the wing that the Ludlows fired today. And for the housewarming afterward."

THE END.



*Lead tore at Ben, but he was hardly conscious of pain as he struggled to make his last bullet take deadly toll.*

## DIM-TRAIL DESTINY

by Wayne D. Overholser

BEN ESTEY took one step away from the bar in Del Rickert's Bonanza Saloon, and stood so that he faced Rickert squarely. A man can stand only so much, and the patches of dull red on Ben's sun-browned cheeks showed he had reached the point where he wasn't going to stand much more.

"Rickert, you've been hoorawing me in that silky way of yours ever since I sloped into Wagonspoke," Ben said. "If you're aiming to work into a gun ruckus, now's as good a time as any."

"You got me wrong, marshal," Rickert said smoothly, and turning to the bar, casually poured himself