



Rainbow Morning

By JAMES STEVENS

Hunted for a crime he did not commit—this cowpoke vindicated himself by his only resource—a lasso

WES HARNEY was musing dismally about the rainbow that made a grand and shining arch from the timbered slopes of Gawley Mountain to the breaking cloud-drifts, when the two bandits entered the bank. Naturally Harney did not know at the time that the two were bandits, though he was expecting a cloudburst of trouble to storm upon him soon. It was a rainbow morning, and in Wes Harney's experience that meant bad luck brooding. He wasn't so superstitious, he simply summed up the facts. Wes could name seven separate times when rainbows in the morning had been followed by dismal trouble. He'd tell anybody they were plumb poison to him.

For an hour and more, Wes had been moseying up and down the two

business blocks of Salal's main street. He was killing time until the departure of the logging train for the Gawley Mountain camps. They had just opened for spring operation, and Wes had come to Salal with fair hope of a job. But now the bad-luck rainbow was shining up.

Wes mused at it from a sidewalk spot just below the little bank building. A vacant lot gaped between the bank and a store, providing an unobstructed view of the mountainy horizon. Now and again he noted that he was the object of curious glances from the Salal folks who passed along. Salal was a Western Oregon logging town. Wes Harney was from east of the mountains. By nature and breeding he was a cowpoke. Fortune had switched him to the big timber, but he was still

wearing a sheepskin coat and a ten-gallon hat. Thus Wes was a conspicuous and somewhat curious figure among the mackinawed woodsmen of Salal. And thus Wes Harney was the one emphatically remembered participant in the hold-up of the Salal bank.

The robbery broke when a large, high-powered sedan was stopped in the gravel street before the bank. From it two men in slouch hats and dark overcoats emerged, one from the front and the other from the rear door. The doors were carefully pushed shut, so that the latches were left uncaught. The motor was left running.

So much Wes dimly noted with a sort of glancing attention. Big cars were in no way unusual in the mountains, and this one had the customary look of hard usage. It was likewise common for a driver to leave his motor running while he transacted small business. Wes was unalarmed, yet he felt a stir of wonder at the care with which the car doors had been closed. He drifted idly toward the bank.

The time was a few minutes past ten, the bank's opening hour. The bandits had chosen this time because the vault was sure to be open for the transfer of cash to the window tills. The robbery was a swift, two-man cleanup. One, pulling a sawed-off shotgun from under his overcoat, covered the five early customers, the one teller, and the chief of the bank. The other cornered the cashier in the vault, and held him with the threat of an automatic while scooping currency into a black bag. The loot secured, the bandits back for the doors.

At this precise moment Wes Harney eased one of the doors inward and took in the scene. He was unheard, for the crackling roar of an automatic exploded in the small room. The cashier had taken a chance and jumped for an

alarm button. A slug of lead struck him in the middle and he collapsed in a huddle on the vault floor.

The gunman paused to snarl threats. The door closed. Wes Harney was backing for the sidewalk like a roped broncho. Just one thought was blazing in his head. How to put up the bars against a getaway? It took furious figuring. Wes was unarmed. The gunman had shown he would shoot it out with anybody who stood in his way—

For maybe a three-count Wes Harney stood on the sidewalk, thinking fast. Then the purr of the idling motor struck his ears. The sound spurred him into sudden action. He ~~whirling~~ his heels and lunged for the front door of the big sedan. In the whirl Wes glimpsed the morning rainbow, but it meant nothing to him now. Bad luck was forgotten.

Wes lunged for the door, swiped it open, and dove for the wheel. The emergency lever was already down. Wes drove in the clutch pedal, yanked the gear shift, and booted the accelerator to the floor board. The car bucked violently backward. He had yanked the shift lever into the wrong corner. Seconds were lost in retrieving the error. They were time enough for the bandits.

As the car finally plunged ahead, the tires throwing gravel, Wes heard ominous sounds above the roar of the motor. He glanced over his shoulder. One bandit was twisting up from a sprawl on the rear seat, with his left hand gripping the handle of a black bag, his right still holding the automatic. The door was wide open. The second bandit was clawing at it, pulling himself on from the rear fender.

Wes instinctively shifted his right foot from the accelerator to the brake. In the instant his back hair lifted from

the touch of hard, cold steel. Words rasped into his ears:

"Keep goin', fella, or you die sudden."

Wes kept going. There was nothing else to do. Under snarled orders, he shifted into high and stepped hard on the gas. The street-end loomed. The gravel road swept in a long curve to the left. The big car took the curve with a lurching skid, and then shot down a straight stretch between the banks of a cut. The gun muzzle had hardly quivered from Wes's neck. It froze down the impulse that had blazed in him back yonder at the bank. He saw clearly his desperate situation.

HE was a stranger in Salal, as much of a stranger as the two bandits. Now the law would peg him as one of them. Last night Wes had suffered one brush with the law in Salal, in the person of a deputy sheriff. He had, he realized, gotten himself into a hopeless jam. And now Wes Harney remembered the rainbow. Rainbow morning! A sure and certain sign of a smashup in the fortunes of Wes Harney. And this one seemed to be a finisher.

Bleak desperation gripped him, drove him into a temper of utter recklessness. The big car swooped to the foot of the hill, soared on up a pitch that ended in the logging-railroad crossing. The grade narrowed sharply, its shoulders sloping to the steep sides of a fill. Wes eased the car toward the right shoulder. Suddenly he jerked the wheel, and at the same time he threw himself face down on the seat.

The automatic roared as he dropped, but it was a wild shot. The gunman had been caught by the quick shift. The shot was echoed by the crash of the car into the bank of the railroad grade.

For a terrific second Wes Harney had a queer sense of being in the center of a dynamite explosion. Then, an equally terrific quiet.

He was, it seemed, miraculously unhurt. The smash had jammed him under the dash and entangled his legs with the shift and emergency levers. Pulling himself up cautiously, Wes peered into the back of the sedan. The bandit with the automatic was writhing and groaning on the floor, his face a red smear of blood. The other's head was caught between a door and the sedan body. Evidently he had tried to jump as the car struck on its side. Certainly he was dead.

Wes twisted around to the upper front door. The crash had buckled it loose. Wes scrambled out and up to the road. Then he realized that his left leg was injured. As he stooped to feel it down, a bullet spattered the gravel ten feet ahead of him. He straightened like an unloosed steel spring. An open car, its top back, was swooping down the hill. A man stood by the driver. He pumped lead over the windshield with a rifle. Wes dropped, and rolled down to the shelter of the car.

It was escape or eat lead. That rifleman plainly had no intention of taking any bank-robber alive. At the best, a capture might mean a lynching—never a chance—nobody would believe his story—

Harney's desperate gaze was caught by a culvert at the foot of the slope. It appeared large enough for a man to crawl through, and it led under the railroad fill. Wes crawled for it on hands and knees. In a minute he had pawed through a mucky blackness and was in daylight again. Peering up through marshy weeds and willows, Wes saw that he had crawled under both the mainline and a sidetrack. On

the latter stood a string of empty log trucks. This was the made-up train for the woods, due to start in half an hour.

On toward the river loomed the mills, yards and offices of the Gawley Timber Company. Wes crawled on through the marshy thickets, toward the upper end of the string of cars. It was headed by three camp-supply cars—and then Wes saw the speeder.

Some track boss had come down from the woods on his gasoline car. Wes scrambled for that hope in a limping run. The motor was hot. The ignition key was in its slot. This was usual in the woods, where anybody might suddenly need the car. Luck had given Wes Harney this break. In a ten-count he was off for a desperate getaway.

He had to stop for the main-line switch. From there he glimpsed the wreck, through a hedge of second-growth timber. The two man-hunters were at the culvert mouth. They seemed to be in violent argument. Wes had a fair start. The speeder chugged on around a bend, up the steep grade to the mountain.

An hour later he ditched the speeder after crossing a canyon trestle. He had spotted a camp of some kind ahead. A telephone wire followed the tracks. There was a solid chance that man-hunters would be out up here in the woods.

Wes took a double-bitted ax from the speeder's tool rack. He headed up the wild canyon. A mile of fierce climbing over windfalls and thick undergrowth, and the pain in his hurt leg became intolerable. Wes took shelter behind a huge mossy windfall. Grimly he waited, sure that he would be tracked down, that at last bad luck had followed him to a finish.

The sky above was clearing. Spring sunlight poured in golden floods through widening gaps in the clouds. The morning rainbow had vanished; its work was done.

WES HARNEY was allowed only a short breathing spell.

Crouching under the bulk of the huge windfall log, he was unlacing the ten-inch boot-top from his swollen ankle, when he heard the bush shattering down the canyon. Gripping the ax, Wes waited for the end. He was so low in hope and spirit now that he could only see himself trailed out right here and soon. But he would fight, he vowed, to the last lick. That was the only style for a man from the John Day county.

Squinting one eye along the log, Wes saw the bush break. A brindle cow loped into the spot of clearing, with a spindling bald-faced calf squeezing her ribs. Expecting smoky hell to storm over him, Wes was somewhat petrified by the sight. Then things happened.

Opposite the windfall the calf fell. The cow hauled up and whirled about, frantically nuzzling the calf. It wobbled up and staggered on, but fell again at the base of a shoulder of rock some fifty feet from the log. Then the bush broke again. A pair of gaunt, slaving, hungry-eyed timber wolves snarled into the clearing. They separated, one charging the cow, trying to draw her up the canyon from the rock shoulder, while the other cut in for the calf.

The cow was a milker, with none of the cunning and experience of a range critter. She let herself be baited too far from the calf. Wes found himself rising up behind the log. He choked back a yell, which might have brought a pack of man-hunters up the canyon after him. For an instant he braced

himself and swung the ax behind him. Then, with a whiplash sweep of arm from the shoulder, he threw the double-edged blade. The bits made a whirling glitter in the sunshine, then struck with a bone-breaking thud. The wolf was caught in the middle of a leap. He rolled for a dozen feet, and was still.

The second wolf plunged for the bush, in frenzied flight. Her brindled sides heaving convulsively, the cow turned back to her calf.

Up the steep canyon slope a bush swished and crackled. A loosened rock rolled, and thudded into a tree trunk or a log. With a huge sigh of resignation, Wes Harney swung up to a perch on the windfall. He forked a twisted grin at the brindle and her bald-face.

"No use, no ma'am," sighed Wes. "Me, when I meet up with a rainbow and a cow in the same mornin', I'm a goner beyond help. Men, you can fire when ready."

With that, he began to twirl up a brown-paper cigarette. He kept his back squarely on the approaching footfalls. There was some method in the pose. Wes figured that even bandit-hunters would pause before plugging a man in the back. The notion seemed good. The footsteps came to a close halt. There was no shooting. Then:

"Good herding, cowboy. I sure am plenty obliged."

It was a girl's voice. A soft twang sounded in its tone, the drawl of the Eastern Oregon range country. Wes slowly swung around on the windfall, hooking his bad leg over a snag of a limb. Without realizing it, he had naturally taken the position of a rider at ease in the saddle. He stared hungrily at this girl who talked like home.

She flushed under the steady, burning gaze of the gray eyes below the

brim of the big hat. She said: "I'm Letty Makin, from the pulp-wood camp yonder over the ridge. I've been out hunting Scatter and Bunch all morning. First sign I had of 'em was when I glimpsed the shine of your ax as you flung it. I reckon, mister, you saved Bunch from a timber-wolf breakfast."

"It was no trick, ma'am," said Wes slowly. "No trick a-tall." Then he remembered his manners. He pulled off his hat, unloosing a tangled mane of black hair that contrasted vividly with his gray eyes. "Pleased to meet you, ma'am," he drawled. "I'm Wesley Harney, from the John Day. You sound like folks your own self."

"Dad and me are from the Grande Ronde."

Both were silent. Wes remembered things. He lit the cigarette and wondered just how he'd explain said things to this girl from home. She wouldn't believe him. She couldn't. Nobody could.

Letty Makin was frankly studying him. Wes returned the compliment with a sidewise gaze through blue curls of cigarette smoke. Despite her clothes—a battered Scotch cap, an equally worn green-and-black checked mackinaw which was so oversized it fairly swallowed her, army breeches and heavy laced boots—Letty Makin was a festive figure for any male eye. In the huge mackinaw her young slenderness was like the silver lining of an ugly cloud. A curling fringe of fine blond hair escaped from the coarse cap. Blue eyes smiled.

"You look Spanish," said Letty. "You don't mind my saying so?"

"Nope. Proud of the look. Plenty of us yonder east, and it's sound stock—"

Wes remembered again. His tone

suddenly and resolutely harshened. "Looky here, ma'am," he said. "I don't like to say flat out your company ain't wanted, but the dismal fact is this here canyon is plumb unhealthy right now. I'm wanted, bad, by the law."

The girl's blue eyes shone with unbelief, then caught the truth in Harney's expression. Her gaze roved quickly around. The canyon wall rose sheerly behind the windfall. Beyond the opposite ridge were woods' camps. Down the canyon was Salal. Above were the mountains and snow peaks of the Cascade range. And now Letty noticed the unlaced boot, the ankle swelling through the gap.

"You're pretty much corraled then, mister," she said gravely. "I believe what you say, but I don't believe you're a bad hombre. I don't figure to quit you till I hear your piece. What happened?"

The temptation was too strong for Wes, and he yielded. It had been months, years, seemed like, since he had talked to anybody sympathetic. As briefly as he could, he narrated the events of the rainbow morning.

LETTY MAKIN listened with grave attention, leaning against the mossy log; her eyes now keenly searching Harney's face, then gazing reflectively across the canyon and up the ridge.

From the clearing skies the warm and mellow sunlight poured down, sifting through the rain-washed boughs of the scrub pines. Birds chirped and squirrels chattered from the trees. Earthy spring smells wafted from the budding bush. In such a scene Letty Makin could not think evil of anybody.

"Just what happened," Wes concluded. "But who'd believe it?"

"I do," said the girl quietly. "And I'm going to give you a chance to prove up. First thing"—her tone sharpened—"you shuck that sheepskin and range hat. I'm swapping you dad's old mackinaw and cap, and no argument."

There was some argument, but Wes soon gave in. He was young enough for hope to spark in him at the least sign of a shift of luck. Seeing this girl, a slender sprig of a girl in a gray flannel shirt as she shed the oversized mackinaw, her blue eyes sparkling with excitement, made Wes wonder if maybe this rainbow morning hadn't been a golden sign, after all.

"If that one bandit is still alive, he'll surely clear you," Letty said. "In the meantime, mister, you do just what I tell you, and you'll be safe from the law. If you can only manage to hobble to our camp—"

Letty Makin unfolded a plan. Wes agreed to it. He saw no other hope. And the plan might work. Anyhow it was a try, not just waiting in a trap.

Letty cached his sheepskin and hat in the hollow end of the log, while Wes, in the mackinaw and cap, treated his bad leg in the cold water of the canyon creek. There the girl left him, and headed on up the ridge. After a time Wes labored his boot back on, left it unlaced, picked up a stick to serve as a cane, then started the completely subdued Scatter and Bunch down the canyon.

AT the logging railroad trestle the brindle and the baldface turned up the trail that led to the tracks and on to the Makin camp. Wes, hunched with pain, hobbled and dragged behind them. At the top of the trail the cow stopped, shied to the left, then started on up the tracks in a trot. Wes felt a sudden thumping

under his left ribs and his breath seemed to choke in his throat. But he made himself limp on, shoulders hunched in the mackinaw, head down, the peak of the cap well over his eyes. A rasping voice hailed him.

"Hey there, logger! You haul up!"

Wes obeyed, turning deliberately toward the voice, his eyes staring dully from a dirt-streaked face. He stood fast, gaping.

Two men armed with rifles stood at the end of the trestle, where Wes had ditched the speeder. The one who had called out was the deputy sheriff of last night's encounter. That had transpired in the railroad yards as Wes debarked from a box-car. The rainy darkness was too thick at the time for either man to see much of the other. But Wes well remembered the rasping voice, which had informed him bluntly that if he was caught in Salal after the next morning's train left for the woods, he would be jugged. The speaker had declared himself as Cully Hatch, the one arm of the law in Salal.

Wes surmised that Mr. Hatch was the party who had shot at him over the windshield of the open car. His partner was a lean, sallow, mournful-eyed man with a drooping mustache. Mr. Hatch was distinctly in command. He had the build and the belligerent manner of a bull. He swung over the rails and hauled up before Wes, with square chin jutting and smoky eyes glowering.

"Can't you talk, huh? Can you answer a civil question, hey?" boomed Mr. Hatch. "Who th'ell are you? What th'alleluiaah you doin' here? Hey?"

Wes blinked dull eyes under the peak of the cap. He shrugged his hunched shoulders. He spoke in a thick voice.

"Me Mike Hrbacek," he said. "Me

bullcook Makin camp. No talk good motch, nossir."

"What's that? What's the name?" Mr. Hatch looked bewildered.

"Me Mike Hrbacek," said Wes stolidly.

"Oh—uh—Erbycheck—hell of a handle," growled the deputy. "Bohunk, hey?"

"No Bohunk," said Wes placidly. "Me Hunyok."

Hatch scowled heavily. He seemed reassured, but still a mite suspicious. "I didn't know Ed Makin had a bullcook," he said. "When was you hired?"

"No spik motch." Wes looked puzzled. "Donno you say motch."

"You're just wastin' time on him, Cully," protested the mournful-eyed man, in a shrill, cranky voice. "Ast him whut he was doin' up the canyon and if he seen thet sagebrusher."

"I was just goin' to." And Hatch repeated the questions.

"Donno." Wes looked more puzzled still. "No savvy motch. Me hunt cow." He waved a hand after Scatter and Bunch. "Make leg sick." He juttet a thumb at his twisted ankle. "Better me go now, honh?"

"Let him go," whined Mournful Eyes. "We'd better hustle and prow the canyon. You've mussed things enough already, Cully."

The deputy wheeled around with an angry snort. "Who's mussed things?" he roared. "It was you much as me let that bandit crawl outer the wreck and git away. It was you who talked me into grabbin' the log train up here—"

"Aw, shet up." Wes was startled and perturbed as he saw Mournful Eyes wink warningly at Hatch. The deputy was suddenly silent. "Git along, hunk," barked Mournful Eyes at Wes. "Ramble outer yere."

Wes hobbled on, holding his pose. But he had a dismal hunch that he had muffed his play. He hobbled slowly, held his breath, listening. Stray words muttered to him—

“Did’n’ sound—Bohunk—me, Cully. Injun—”

Hatch’s deep growl was plainer. “But he said he was a Hunyok.”

“What’s—diff’? And—thumb nail—rope burn—”

“Well, that leg is no fake. We’ll prowl to camp later and make sure. Now let’s comb the canyon.”

In Wes the spark flickered low as he hobbled on after Scatter and Bunch. He had, he now realized, talked more like an Indian than a Hunky in the attempt to play Mike Hrbacek, bullcook. And that spike of a thumb-nail—a rope-brand to a wise eye—

But he forced the spark to flicker into life some more. A girl from home had made herself his lookout in the game with the law and his luck. Wes vowed he would deal on to his last white chip.

THE noon-hour was over when Wes Harney finally dragged into the Makin camp. Scatter and Bunch had preceded him by several minutes. Letty had already picketed the prodigal cow on a grassy slope above a row of tar-paper shacks. In front of the largest shack she waited for Wes, beckoning for him to enter. He limped along, and into a combination office and living quarters. Behind a plank counter stood a battered rolltop desk, a blanketed bunk, a box stove, and sundry chairs. A curtained doorway led to a back room.

“I reckon you’re hungry, mister,” said Letty. She was lifting a roll of bandage and a bottle of liniment from a first-aid box. “You set here by the

stove and fix your ankle while I rustle a plate of grub. And you can use these, cowboy.” She stooped at the end of the bunk and hauled forth a pair of heavy wool socks and a pair of rubber shoes for use with felt boots. “These are dad’s, and should fit you up. Make yourself to home—and save the thanks—Scatter and Bunch owe you plenty—”

Words trailed away with Letty into the back room. She hadn’t given Wes a chance to say anything. He sagged down gratefully into a home-made padded chair by the stove. For a moment he rested, twirling up a cigarette. He blinked wearily through the smoke. A sunlit window shone before him, giving him a view of the timber up the railroad.

He had glimpses of the wood-cutters. Two horse-teams were skidding hemlock logs down to a sidetrack. There a dragsaw was chugging, and a pair of men were splitting the blocks with wedges and mauls. An empty flatcar flanked them from the sidetrack. A similar car had been dropped close to the camp. It bulked with stuff covered by tarpaulins. Feed, Wes surmised, baled hay for the horses. Probably the two cars had been switched and dropped from this morning’s logging train.

Relaxing and thinking hazily, Wes seemed to catch a movement of a tarpaulin. He stared hard for a moment, then, as he saw nothing more, he decided that a flaw in the window-pane or the smoke in his eyes had deceived him.

The incident vanished from his mind with her appearance—blue eyes smiling through a drift of steam from a loaded tray.

“It’s my cooking,” she said, setting the tray down on a chair by his side.

"Regular ranch grub, so maybe you can stand it."

Wes could only look his thanks. A rush of feeling was sort of like a rope on his throat. It burned to his eyes, and he had to stoop low over the steaming plate to hide it from Letty Makin. He was wolf-hungry, but the first swallows came hard. Months and months in a strange land, an alien from the sagebrush country in the big timber, and here he was home again. It was something to melt up a tougher man than Wes Harney.

The girl from home talked along, seeming to understand, not expecting him to chip in. She had told dad, she said, and dad had given her a free hand. Ed Makin, Wes gathered, had himself been having a hard time of it over here in the woods. It appeared that he was running behind in his pulpwood contract and was in some jam with the Salal bank. Anyhow, he was about ready to quit and pull up stakes.

"Over home we've got two hundred acres in winter wheat," said Letty. "If we lose everything here, we'll still have that. I'm afraid dad is wishing the bank would close us out, sudden. It's spring on the Grande Ronde." Her voice was wistful, her eyes looking far away. "The wheat is sprouting green."

"Grass peepin' up in the sage," said Wes softly, leaning back and lazily rolling a fresh cigarette. "The bald-faces turned out of the feedyards and grazin' up the draws. Cowpokes ridin'. Hosses still winter-wild, snortin' and pitchin' when a jack sails high. Sunrise time, and the night-frost steamin' from the sage—say, can't you just smell it, ma'am?"

"Can't I just?" sighed Letty Makin.

It seemed to Wes that they had known each other a lifetime. They

dreamed on in their talk until a twist of his bandaged ankle reminded him that home was far away. He lapsed into gloomy silence.

"Thinking of rainbows?" said Letty. "Rainbow mornings?"

"Kind of," he muttered.

"You kept ringin' rainbows into your story back yonder in the canyon. I've been wondering what you meant."

"I'll tell you, ma'am," said Wes grimly. "Mean misfortune, you betcher. This here wasn't the first time. Why, it was a rainbow mornin' chased me out of the John Day. Right on the tail of the purtiest rainbow you ever laid eyes on come a cloudburst. Washed out shack, sheds, corral, feedyard and four stacks of winter hay from my canyon ranch slick as a willer whistle.

"I already owed the limit on my little bunch of beef. So I had to trail out broke, and—well, here I am. And that was only one rainbow mornin'."

"And this is another, cowboy. Things like that just happen. They don't mean anything unless you let 'em rope you in."

Wes didn't argue the point. His brooding gaze had wandered to the window again. And again he was startled by a stir of the tarpaulins on the flatcar. He still didn't trust his eyes, so he said nothing. Besides, Letty Makin was giving him explicit directions about playing the part of Mike Hrbacek, Hunyok bullcook.

WES had little trouble playing the part until twilight clouded down on the woods. Then, with supper over and the camp settling for the night, Deputy Cully Hatch and Mournful Eyes dragged in. They bore with them a sheepskin coat, a ten-gal-

lon hat, and a load of suspicion. Wes had a hunch that they had been keeping cases on the Makin camp all afternoon.

If so, they had certainly seen nothing from him that violated the character of Mike Hrbacek. With a pair of blankets, he had made himself a bunk in the feed shed of the stable. There he rested his sorely tried leg. Now and again he dozed off, but it was always to awaken in a nightmare riot of threatening danger. Some warning thing was sleepless in him. It kept him peering through the open shed door, pulling his gaze toward the flatcar tarpaulins. A breeze had blown up, and in it the canvas flapped and billowed. The notion that something alive could have been lurking under there all this time seemed a foolish notion, but it haunted Wes just the same.

At quitting time Ed Makin looked in on him. Makin was a grizzled, hawk-faced man whose eyes were hedged by weather-graven lines. He asked Wes a few questions, mainly about the location of his ranch in the John Day and about certain cowmen and their brands. The answers apparently satisfied him.

"We'll back you up, I reckon," he said quietly. "Till they cool off down in Salal, anyhow. They'd lynch you now before you could put in a word for yourself. Did you know one of the real bandits outslickered Cully Hatch and made his getaway?"

"No!" Wes sat up, staring. He remembered the bit of argument between Hatch and Mournful Eyes. "I thought they meant—but how'd it happen?"

"Don't know. Just heard it from the Cawley loggers. Well—you keep on bein' a dumb hunk of a bullcook. We'll stick."

Wes forgot his manners. He was wordless as the old rancher drifted out of the shed. Wes was not even seeing

Ed Makin now. He was only looking out through the sunset shadows at the flapping tarpaulins. The canvas was a darkening bulge against the black boughs of hemlocks that lifted in a thick spread beyond the tracks. Wes let his hunch rise up and grip him. He would, he vowed, keep close cases on the car yonder until it was mighty deep night.

TWILIGHT clouded swiftly into black darkness, with an overcast sky that promised another spring rain. While the crew was eating, Letty brought a plate of supper to the feed shed.

"I mustn't stay," she said, speaking in a whisper. "Some of the boys are suspicious of you. It's natural for them to be suspicious of anybody, with two supposed killers prowling loose in the woods."

"Am I still Mike Hrbacek?" Wes wanted to know.

"You bet you are, cowboy. I've sure raveled out the truth on your account. I just said you come along, looking half-starved, and you helped me hunt Scatter and Bunch. You saved Bunch, I said, and hurt yourself, so I figured the least I could do was to keep you on for a spell as roustabout bullcook."

"That's not bustin' truth so bad."

"It's wearing it kind of thin, I'm afraid. But I don't care. I won't see these webfooters string up a neighbor. Now I've got to get back. If the boys snoop around, you just be dumb."

"Honh," grunted Wes, with a grin. "I don't spik motch."

Two of the teamsters drifted into the shed after supper. They failed to pump anything out of Wes but grunts and groans. At last, as deep night fell, the camp was quiet. Wes eased from

the bunk and limped to the shed door. Some forty feet before him the flatcar and its load made a bulging black shadow. The ground sloped gently from the sidetrack, so that a level gaze from Wes struck fairly under the car's floor.

Looking on under the car, Wes could see two parallel gray streaks in the black shadows. They were the well-worn rails of the main line.

For a spell Wes Harney ruminated on the black shape that bulged above the sidetrack and on the gray streaks below and beyond the shape. Then he regarded the row of tar-paper shacks. All but one was darkened. This was the Makin office and living quarters. Two windows were squares of light in the black shadows. Now and again Wes had a fleeting vision of a girl's head and shoulders moving across the light squares. The glimpses of Letty Makin put iron in his resolution. She had trusted him on sight. A girl from home—whatever his luck, Wes Harney was fiercely resolved to clear himself or die a-trying.

If this here hunch wasn't just a fool notion, a straw of a chance was in his grip. But it was only a straw, and in his condition he was in poor shape to make much of it. The leg was pretty bad. Wes had to grip the door post with his left hand to hold his weight from it. Every hobble was a shot of torture.

Wes stood on there, and figured the trail his hunch should follow. He had kept it to himself for two reasons. For one thing, a search under the tarps that revealed nothing but baled hay would have left him looking considerably silly. But the main reason was his certainty that heavy shooting would greet any searcher, if the hunch was good.

Nope. That flatcar and whatever it sheltered were Wes Harney's responsibility. He had taken it on, and he would hold it, even if he had to night-herd the flatcar until daylight.

Whatever happened, about the best he could do would be to let out a yell, Wes mused dismally. And that would likely start shooting. With shooting he was fed up for the day, and some over.

The gray streaks that showed under the flatcar floor again caught his gaze. Another hunch struck Wes Harney. He remembered his best range trick. It might work—anyhow, it was another grip on the straw of a chance. He hobbled back into the shed.

The feed shed also served as a storage place for harness and skid-rigging. A battered saddle was slung from a corner peg, and with it a rawhide rope. Wes groped for that rope now and fetched it down. The feel of the rawhide braids to his hands was something like the flavor of hot meat to a starving man.

As he limped back to the doorway, Wes Harney almost forgot his game leg.

Then things began happening again, in a sort of stampede. Wes was hardly settled into night-herding the flatcar once more, when a large, rumbling voice carried to him from the Makin shack. He stared that way, recognizing the bull tones of Deputy Hatch. The door opened. Lamplight sifted out, around the shadowy figure of Letty Makin. In the glow Hatch and Mournful Eyes stood revealed. Hatch packed a bundle. His rumble boomed along—

"We found this sagebrusher rig when we come back down the canyon, Miss Makin. And we found no other sign of that cowpoke driver of the ban-

dits' car. We crave to know some more about that there bullcook of your'n."

LETTY was inviting them inside. The door closed on Hatch's angry rumble. Wes Harney moved. The time was done for watchful waiting. He had to play his hunch in sudden action. It was that, or else hole up in the bunk again and try to put on a dumbwitted show, with Hatch bullying him, Letty Makin trying to shield him—nope, he just couldn't hack that some more—hiding behind a woman, a home girl.

He crouched down in the cloudy darkness, and crept for that black shape above the tracks. If it was only a shape there, he thought bleakly, well, he'd just keep heading on. No more hiding around, maybe pulling the Makins into bad trouble with the law—

But it was more than a shape of tarps there, bulging from a pile of baled hay. Wes had lifted noises as he crouched along, his bad leg sort of dragging. He now came to a dead halt, the rawhide coils gripped in his left hand, his right idling the loop, as sounds of hurried movement broke through the shadows from the car. Then, in the click of seconds, sundry events violently happened.

The two gray streaks that showed dully under the car were shadowed by two elongated, vertical shapes. In Wes Harney the shapes were instantly registered as human legs. In the same instant, his hands and arms, his entire body, reacted automatically. An underhanded, whiplash sweep of his right arm, a flipping snap of the right wrist, and the loop of braided rawhide snaked for the shadowy legs. From Wes Harney's left hand the coils ran free. He sensed the strike. An upward yank,

then a haulback with both hands, legs braced, the fiery pains that shot through his nerves unheeded—and Wes Harney had roped another slick-ear.

But this one was an outlaw with a gun. The first yanking haul on the rope was followed by a thud and a snarling yell. Then, as Wes hauled hard, hand over hand, the sharp explosion of a gunshot crashed from the shadowy shape that struggled in the loop. Two more blazed and roared, the last fairly in Harney's face as he dragged his captive close. But the jerking rope sent all three shots wild. As the last one flared Wes lunged, throwing slack into the rawhide, looping it into a large half-hitch. The loop dropped to taw, over a head and shoulders. In another second the bandit killer was disarmed and hog-tied.

The spot of a flashlight jiggered around. As it struck a battered, distorted face, Wes exultantly knew that his hunch had proved true. But there was another job to do. His own name had to be cleared of the robbery. Wes spotted the gun. He swooped for it, crouching over his capture.

Wes shifted so that the light streamed over his gun hand and into the bandit's eyes. He had only the thought that Deputy Hatch and Mournful Eyes had horned into the play. They should hear facts.

"You talk turkey," he rasped. "Now. You do, and I'll stand by you against the lynchers. You don't, and I'll make 'em a gift of your neck. Tell the truth of that hold-up, and tell it short."

With a gun in his hand, the bandit was a tough yegg. Without one, and roped down, he was meek and tame. He talked. He told the story Wes wanted Hatch and Mournful Eyes to

hear. He told more, which should have reddened up their ears.

"Them saps was easy." The shake of fear in the bandit's tone steadied into a boastful note. "When they come on the wreck they went huntin' eggs or sompin in the bush. I come to and scrambles after that wild farmer for the culvert. But they was huntin' that way. So I snakes up on the main line and crosses to the head of the log train. I hides out in the car of baled hay. The clowns thinks I gets away wit' the farmer on the speeder, and damn' if they don't ride the same train wit' me to the woods, and never tumbles! Jeez!"

Wes straightened triumphantly to face Mr. Hatch and Mournful Eyes. Instead, the joyful gaze of Letty Makin shone above the flash. Mr. Hatch was keeping distant and quiet

until he was sure the shooting was over.

"Oh, Wes!" Her voice was a shaky whisper. "Oh, cowboy—"

Then, for a moment they could only sort of stare at each other. Things were whirling crazily in Wes Harney's head. In the center of the whirl was a sense of being his own man again, the Wes Harney who had stood up to anybody before bad luck bulldogged him for a fall. At last that luck was licked.

"Rainbows," said Wes Harney softly to the girl from home. "Rainbows on the range will shine for us soon. A rainbow mornin' made us meet up. From now on me and rainbows are fine friends."

"Jeez!" They were startled by a groan from the hog-tied bandit. "What a finish! I been pinched by a nut! Rainbows—jeez!"


THE END

Yellow Clothes Defy Mosquitoes

YELLOW clothes may soon be prescribed for holidays in the tropics. It has just been discovered that mosquitoes are not color blind and simply detest yellow.

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