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CHAPTER XXV

LEROY SOUTHMAYD

EARLY in the afternoon of a cold day late in November, 1863, Leroy Southmayd, Captain Moore, and a discharged driver known as "Billy," took passage in Oliver's coach at Virginia City, for Bannack. A ruffian equally well known by the cognomens of "Old Tex" and "Jim Crow" stood near, watching the departing vehicle. As Moore's eyes alighted upon him, he said to Southmayd,

"I am sorry to see that rascal watching us; he belongs to the gang. It bodes us no good."

"Oh," replied Southmayd, laughing, "I think there's no danger. Robbery has 'played out.' These fellows are beginning to understand that the people will hold them accountable for their villainies."

Little more was said about it, the conversation turning to more congenial topics. About three o'clock, the coach, which had made slow progress, drove up in front of Lorrain's, eleven miles from town. While Tom Caldwell, the driver, was changing horses, George Ives and Steve Marshland rode up, dismounted, and asked if they could procure a change of horses. Having ascertained that they could not do so, they ordered feed for those they had been riding, Ives in the meantime carefully avoiding Southmayd. The company fell into a desultory conversation, which Ives abruptly terminated by remarking that he had heard from Old Tex.

"He is," said he, "at Cold Spring ranch. I must hasten on and overtake him."

The coach soon departed, and Ives and Marshland immediately ordered their horses, and riding rapidly, passed it a short distance below Lorrain's.

Cold Spring ranch was eight miles farther on the stage route. That Old Tex, who was watching the coach when it left Virginia City, should be there, awaiting the arrival of these two ruffians, occasioned our passengers great uneasiness. They knew almost intuitively that a robbery was in contemplation. When the coach arrived at Cold Spring, the first objects which met their gaze on alighting from it, were the three ruffians Ives, Marshland, and Old Tex in close conversation.

After a few moments' detention, Caldwell drove on to Point of Rocks, where the passengers remained until morning. Leaving at an early hour, they proceeded to Stone's ranche, and during their brief stay there, Ives, who had been joined by Bob Zachary and William Graves, known as "Whiskey Bill," made a detour, and passed the coach unperceived. The three gentlemanly solicitors of the road trotted slowly on towards Bannack. They were in complete disguise, each one incased in a blanket of green and blue. "Whiskey Bill" wore a silk hat, at that time, perhaps, the only one in the Territory. His sleeves were rolled above the elbows, and his face concealed behind a black silk handkerchief, through the eyelets in which his ferret eyes shone like a couple of stars, in partial eclipse. The gray horse he bestrode was enveloped in a blanket so completely that only his head, legs, and tail were visible. The horses of his associates were similarly overspread. Ives was masked in a piece of gray blanket, and Zachary with a remnant of hickory shirting. No one, unsuspecting of their presence, however familiar with their persons, would have recognized them.

The coach horses moved forward at their usual rapid rate, bringing the passengers in sight of the horsemen a

little before eleven o'clock. Their attention was first attracted by the peculiar costume, and the gun which each man held firmly across his saddle-bow. As they approached them more nearly, Southmayd observed to Caldwell, the driver,—

"They're queer-looking beings, Tom, anyhow."

"They're road agents, Leroy, you may depend upon it," replied Caldwell.

"Well," said Southmayd, "I believe they are, but we can't help ourselves now."

As he said this, the leaders were nearly up with the horsemen. They rapidly wheeled their horses, and presented their guns,—Graves taking in range the head of Caldwell; Ives, that of Southmayd; and Zachary alternately aiming at Moore and Billy.

"Halt!" commanded Ives; "throw up your hands," and on the instant the arms of every man in the coach were raised.

"Get down, all of you," he added.

All but Southmayd jumped to the ground. He lingered, with the hope that an opportunity might offer to fire upon them.

"Get down," repeated Ives, adding a sententious epithet to the command.

Still hesitating to comply, Ives glanced his eye along his gun-barrel as if to shoot, and in that subdued tone always expressive of desperation, once more issued the command.

Southmayd withstood it no longer, but while making a deliberate descent threw open his coat, thinking that an opportunity might offer for him to use his revolver. Ives, perceiving his object, levelled his gun, and hissed out, in words terribly distinct,

"If you do that again, I'll kill you!"

The passengers stood with upraised hands by the

roadside, under cover of the guns of the robbers. Addressing Zachary, Ives said,

"Get down and look after those fellows."

This was an unwelcome task for Zachary. Villain as he was, Southmayd says that while he was engaged in searching his person, he quivered like an aspen. Throwing Southmayd's pistol and money on the ground, he was about to renew the search, when Billy, tired of the position, dropped his hands.

"Up with your hands again," roared Ives with an oath, at the same time bringing the terrible muzzles to bear upon the person of the frightened driver. Billy, who felt that it was no time to bandy proprieties, threw them up with more speed than pleasure, realizing that the buckshot were safer in the barrels than in his luckless carcass.

Zachary now commenced searching Moore, and, taking from his pocket a sack, inquired,

"Is this all you have?"

"All I have in the world," replied Moore.

Zachary threw it on the heap and came to Billy.

"Give me your pistol," said he. Billy placed the weapon in his hands.

"Is it loaded?" inquired Ives.

"No," replied Billy.

"Give it to him again," said Ives to Zachary. "We don't want any empty weapons."

"My God!" exclaimed Caldwell, as Zachary next approached him. "What do you want of me? I have nothing."

"Let him alone," said Ives; and addressing Caldwell, he inquired, "Is there anything in the mail we want?"

"I don't think there is," answered Tom.

Zachary mounted the box, and commenced an examination, but found nothing. Caldwell scanned the villain narrowly, for the purpose, if possible, of recognizing him.

"Don't you do that, if you want to live," said Ives, rattling his gun into dangerous range.

"Well then," said Tom impudently, "may I look at you?"

The robber nodded a ready assent, as much as to say, "Find me out, if you can."

The search over, Zachary picked up his gun, and stepped back.

"Get up and skedaddle," said Ives to the plundered group. The horses had grown restive while the robbery was progressing, but Tom had restrained them.

"Drive slowly, Tom," said Southmayd to Caldwell in an undertone, as he ascended the box. "I want to reconnoitre a little," and turned his face to the robbers.

"Drive on," shouted Ives.

Southmayd still continued looking at the robbers as the coach departed, which Ives observing, the villain raised his gun, and yelled,

"If you don't turn around and mind your business, I'll shoot the top of your head off."

The three robbers then stood together, watching the coach until it was lost to their view.

"By George!" said Leroy, laughing, "I looked down into those gun-barrels so long that I thought I fairly saw the buckshot leap from their imprisonment. It would have afforded me pleasure to squander the bullets in my pistol on the scoundrel."

Southmayd lost four hundred dollars in gold, and Captain Moore one hundred dollars in treasury notes. As was usual, quite a large number of people were awaiting the arrival of the coach, when it drove up to the express-office at Bannack. Inquiries were immediately made as to the cause of its detention so much later than common.

"Was the coach robbed to-day?" inquired Plummer of Southmayd, as he jumped from the box.

"It was," replied Leroy, taking him by the arm, and by his confidential manner signifying that he was about to impart to him, as sheriff, all he knew about it. Just at this moment, Dr. Bissell, the miners' judge at Virginia City, gave Southmayd a slight nudge, and catching his eye, winked significantly for him to step aside.

"Be careful, Leroy,—very careful what you say to that man."

Leroy gave an appreciative nod, and rejoined Plummer.

"So you have been robbed," said the latter. "I'm not surprised,—and I think I can tell you who were the robbers."

"Who were they?" eagerly asked Southmayd.

"George Ives was one of them," said Plummer.

"Yes," responded Southmayd, "and the others were 'Whiskey Bill' and Bob Zachary; and I'll live to see them hanged before three weeks."

Southmayd did not know that Plummer's accusation was made for the purpose of detecting his knowledge of the robbers. Bissell, who had overheard Southmayd's revelation to Plummer, said to him soon after,

"Leroy, your life is n't worth a cent."

George Crisman, who was standing by, added,

"They'll kill you sure."

Business detained Southmayd in Bannack the succeeding three days. During that time he never met Plummer, who left him immediately after they held the conversation above narrated.

Two days afterwards, while on his way to Virginia City, Caldwell, the driver, met with "Whiskey Bill" at the Cold Spring ranche.

"Did you hear of the robbery, Bill, on my trip out?" he inquired.

"Sure, I did, Tom," replied Bill. "Do you know any of the fellows who committed it?"

"Not I," replied Caldwell, "and I would n't for the world. If I did, and told of them, I should n't live long."

"That's so, Tom," rejoined Graves. "You would n't live twenty-four hours. It's always best to be ignorant in matters of that kind. I've had experience, and I know. I'll just tell you, by way of illustration, about my being robbed in California. One night as my partner and I were riding along, two fellows rode up and told us to throw up our hands. We did so, and they took from us two thousand dollars in coin. I said to 'em, 'Boys, it's pretty rough to take all we've got.' They said so it was, and gave us back forty dollars. A week afterwards I saw 'em dealing faro. One of 'em saw me looking at him, and arose and came up to me, and said in a whisper, 'Ain't you one of the men that was robbed the other night?' 'Not at all,' says I, for I thought if I said 'yes' he would find a way to put me out of the way. 'Oh, well,' says he, 'honor bright! I want you to own up. I know you're the man. Now, I'm going to give you four thousand dollars, just for keeping your mouth shut.' And he kept his promise. So you see, Tom, that I saved my life, and got four thousand dollars for keeping still."

Tom wished somebody would treat him so, but when telling the story, said that he "lacked confidence in human nature, especially where the road agents were concerned." He even ventured the assertion that he "did not believe Graves' story, anyway."

Ives went to Virginia City the day following the robbery. While intoxicated at one of the fancy establishments, he boasted openly of having made Tom Caldwell throw up his hands, and that he intended to do it again. Talking of the robbery with one of the drivers, he said.

"I am the Bamboo chief that committed that robbery."

"Don't you believe Caldwell knows it?" inquired the driver.

"Certainly he knows it," replied Ives. "He recognized me at once."

As Ives and the driver were riding side by side into Virginia City, on their return from Nevada, the driver saw Caldwell approaching. He motioned him to keep away. Caldwell turned and went away, and was afterwards told that Ives knew he had recognized him in the robbery, and would probably kill him on sight. The driver, who expected that Ives would shoot at Caldwell, had his revolver in readiness to shoot him at the time alluded to, in case Ives manifested such a design.

Meantime, Southmayd, having finished his business at Bannack, was ready to return to Virginia City by the next coach. His friends were importunate for him to remain. On the day he was to leave, Buck Stinson and Ned Ray, on being told of it at the express-office, avowed their intention of accompanying him. The agent then searched for Southmayd, and said to him,

"For God's sake, Leroy, don't go. These fellows mean to kill you."

"I've got to go," replied Southmayd; "and if you'll get me a double-barrelled shotgun, I'll take my chances." The agent complied with this request, and the coach left Bannack with Southmayd, Stinson, Ray, and a lad of sixteen years for passengers, and Tom Caldwell the driver. The coach was an open hack. Southmayd sat on the driver's seat with Caldwell, and the boy took the back seat, and facing him were Stinson and Ray on the middle seat. Southmayd said to the boy on starting,

"If we have any trouble, do you shoot, or I'll shoot you."

"You may be sure I'll do it, too, Southmayd," said the boy. "I'm not afraid of them."

Southmayd kept watch of the two robbers. The drive through the day was undisturbed, until the coach reached

the crossing of the Stinking Water. In the three persons standing in front of the station, Southmayd recognized Bob Zachary, Bill Graves, and another noted rough known as Alex Carter. Stinson shouted, addressing them as road agents. Each was fully armed with gun, pistol, and knife. Southmayd whispered to Caldwell,

"Tom, I guess they've got us."

"That's so," replied Caldwell.

Caldwell drove on to Cold Spring station followed by the three roughs on horseback, who soon came up. This was the supper station. Two of the robbers left their guns at the door. Carter's was strung upon his back. They entered the house in a boisterous manner, with Zachary, feigning drunkenness, in their lead.

"I'd like," said that ruffian with brutal emphasis and gesture, "to see the man who don't like Stone." The banter was made for the purpose of exciting a quarrel. "Just show me the man that don't like him, or let any man here just say he don't like him, if he wants a healthy fight on his hands," blustered the villain.

No one replied. Seemingly every one present entertained a high opinion of Mr. Stone. Failing to rouse a quarrel, he ordered "drinks all round," bought a bottle of whisky, and preserved the swagger and braggadocio of a drunken ruffian through supper time.

After supper, and while preparing to leave, Southmayd said privately to Caldwell,

"Tom, I see through it all. You must take Stinson on the seat with you. I'll sit behind and watch him, and the boy can watch Ray."

When ready to start, and this arrangement was made known to Buck Stinson, he did not relish it, and said,

"I don't want to ride up there."

"Well, you will," replied Southmayd sternly, pointing to the seat.

"This is pretty rough, is n't it?" said Stinson with an oath, as he mounted to the seat.

The three mounted ruffians, Zachary, Graves, and Carter, started on in advance of the coach. Southmayd and the boy sat with their guns across their knees, watching the motions of their suspected companions. It was near night-fall. Less than half a mile distant from the station, the robbers, who had been riding at an even pace, suddenly wheeled, and gave the command to halt, simultaneously with which, Southmayd levelled his gun upon Carter, and Caldwell and the boy theirs on the other two.

Carter, stammering with alarm, made out to say, "We only want you to take a drink."

The bottle was passed around, Southmayd and Caldwell barely touching it to their lips. Handing it to the boy, Southmayd gave him an admonitory touch with his foot, — comprehending which, he did not drink. As Carter had not drunk from the bottle, Southmayd feared that the liquor had been poisoned. Returning the bottle, the roughs who received it inquired politely if they did not want any more. The three then wheeled their horses, exclaiming,

"We're off to Pete Daly's," and, clapping spurs to their horses, they were soon out of sight.

The coach went on six miles, passed Daly's ranche, and drew up at Lorrain's. From this ranche to Virginia City, the road for most of the distance is rough, narrow, and lies through the cañon of Alder Gulch. Nature never formed a fitter stretch of country for successful robbery. Of this our passengers were fully aware, and, anticipating that the designs of the robbers must culminate on this part of the route, Southmayd took Caldwell aside to consult as to the proper course to pursue.

"It's a rough night's work, Tom," said Southmayd, "but the worst is to come. If they attack us in the cañon, there is no possible chance for escape."

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"They'll do it, sure," replied Caldwell. "It's only driving into their hands to attempt to go on to-night. Let's leave the coach here and take to the brush. We may then avoid them; or if we meet, it will be where the chances are equal."

Buck Stinson, who had been on the watch for some new arrangement, overheard this conversation. Anxious as he was that the robbery and murder should take place, he knew that if the men escaped, as they assuredly would by the means contemplated, they would bring the whole community of Virginia City on the track of himself and his fellow ruffians. This must be avoided, even though they were frustrated in their design. So he stepped forward, and said to Southmayd and Caldwell in his blandest manner,

"Gentlemen, I pledge you my word, my honor, and my life, that you will not be attacked between this place and Virginia City."

"If you mean that," replied Southmayd, "we will go on; but if we are attacked, we will certainly make it hot for some of you."

Soon after the horses started, Stinson commenced singing in a very loud voice, and continued to do so without intermission until nearly exhausted. Then, at his request, Ray took up the chorus and kept it up until their arrival in Virginia City. This was a signal to the robbers to keep away. Had the singing ceased, the attack would have been made. Ray called on Southmayd the next day, and warned him, as he valued his life, to mention the names of none of those among the ruffians whom he had recognized, as the ones who robbed him while on his way to Bannack.