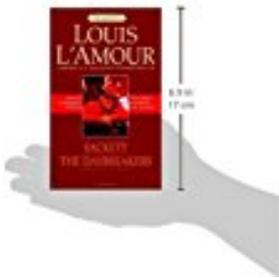


[PDF] The Daybreakers/Sackett (Sacketts)

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Description:

About the Author Louis L'Amour is undoubtedly the bestselling frontier novelist of all time. He is the only American-born author in history to receive both the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the Congressional Gold Medal in honor of his life's work. He has published ninety novels; twenty-seven short-story collections; two works of nonfiction; a memoir, **Education of a Wandering Man**; and a volume of poetry, **Smoke from This Altar**. There are more than 300 million copies of his books in print worldwide.

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. *Chapter One*

MY BROTHER, ORRIN Sackett, was big enough to fight bears with a switch. Me, I was the skinny one, tall as Orrin, but no meat to my bones except around the shoulders and arms. Orrin could sing like an angel, or like a true Welshman which was better than any angel. Far away back and on three sides of the family, we were Welsh. Orrin was a strapping big man, but for such a big man he was surprising quick.

Folks said I was the quiet one, and in the high-up hills where we grew up as boys, folks fought shy of me come fighting time. Orrin was bigger than me, fit to wrassle a bull, but he lacked a streak of something I had.

Maybe you recall the Sackett-Higgins feud? Time I tell about, we Sacketts were just fresh out of Higginses.

Long Higgins, the mean one, was also the last one. He came hunting Sackett hide with an old squirrel rifle. It was Orrin he was hunting, being mighty brave because he knew Orrin wouldn't be packing anything in the way of sidearms at a wedding.

Orrin was doing no thinking about Higginses this day with Mary Tripp there to greet him and his mind set on marrying, so I figured it was my place to meet Long Higgins down there in the road. Just as I was fixing to call him to a stand, Preacher Myrick drove his rig between us, and by the time I got around it Long Higgins was standing spraddlelegged in the road with a bead on Orrin.

Folks started to scream and Long Higgins shot and Mary who saw him first pushed Orrin to save him. Only she fell off balance and fell right into the bullet intended for Orrin.

"Long!"

He turned sharp around, knowing my voice, and he had that rifle waist-high and aimed for me, his lips drawn down hard.

Long Higgins was a good hip shot with a rifle and he shot quick . . . maybe too quick.

That old hog-leg of mine went back into the holster and Long Higgins lay there in the dust and when I turned around, that walk up into the trees was the longest I ever did take except one I took a long time later.

Ollie Shaddock might have been down there and I knew if Ollie called I'd have to turn around, for Ollie was the Law in those mountains and away back somewheres we were kin.

When Ma saw me cutting up through the woods she knew something was cross-ways. Took me only a minute to tell her. She sat in that old rocker and looked me right in the eye while I told it. "Tye," she was almighty stern, "was Long Higgins looking at you when you fetched him?"

"Right in the eye."

"Take the dapple," Ma said, "he's the runningest horse on the mountain. You go west, and when you find a place with deep, rich soil and a mite of game in the hills, you get somebody to write a letter and we'll come down there, the boys an' me."

She looked around at the place, which was mighty rundown. Work as we would, and us Sacketts were workers, we still hadn't anything extra, and scarcely a poor living, so Ma had been talking up

the west ever since Pa died.

Most of it she got from Pa, for he was a wandering and a knowing man, never to home long, but Ma loved him for all of that, and so did we younguns. He had a Welshman's tongue, Pa did, a tongue that could twist a fine sound from a word and he could bring a singing to your blood so you could just see that far land yonder, waiting for folks to come and crop it.

Those old blue eyes of Ma's were harder to face than was Long Higgins, and him with a gun to hand. "Tye, do you reckon you could kill Ollie?"

To nobody else would I have said it, but to Ma I told the truth. "I'd never want to, Ma, because we're kin but I could fetch him. I think maybe I can draw a gun faster and shoot straighter than anybody, anywhere."

She took the pipe from her lips. "Eighteen years now I've seen you growing up, Tyrel Sackett, and for twelve of them you've been drawing and shooting. Pa told me when you was fifteen that he'd never seen the like. Ride with the law, Tye, never against it." She drew the shawl tighter about her knees. "If the Lord wills we will meet again in the western lands."

The way I took led across the state line and south, then west. Ollie Shaddock would not follow beyond the line of the state, so I put Tennessee behind me before the hills had a shadow.

It was wild land through which the trail led, west out of Tennessee, into Arkansas, the Ozarks, and by lonely trails into Kansas. When I rode at last into the street at Baxter Springs folks figured me for one more mountain renegade coming to help keep tick-infected Texas cattle out of the country, but I was of no such mind.

It was eight miles to where the Texas men held their cattle, so there I rode, expecting no warm welcome for a stranger. Riding clear of the circling riders I rode up to the fire, the smell of grub turning my insides over. Two days I'd been without eating, with no money left, and too proud to ask for that for which I could not pay.

A short, square man with a square face and a mustache called out to me. "You there! On the gray! What do you want?"

"A job if one's to be had, and a meal if you've grub to spare. My name is Tyrel Sackett and I'm bound westward from Tennessee toward the Rockies, but if there's a job I'll ride straight up to it."

He looked me over, mighty sharp, and then he said, "Get down, man, and come to the fire. No man was ever turned from my fire without a meal inside him. I'm Belden."

When I'd tied Dapple I walked up to the fire, and there was a big, handsome man lying on the ground by the fire, a man with a golden beard like one of those Vikings Pa used to tell of. "Hell," he said agreeably, "it's a farmer!"

"What's wrong with farming?" I asked him. "You wouldn't have your belly full of beans right now if they'd not been farmed by somebody."

"We've had our troubles with farmers, Mr. Sackett," Belden said, "there's been shooting, the farmers killed a man for me."

"So," said a voice alongside, "so maybe we should kill a farmer."

He had an itch for trouble and his kind I'd met before. He was a medium-tall man with a low hanging shoulder on his gun side. His black brows met over his nose and his face was thin and narrow. If it was trouble he was hunting he was following the right trail to get it.

"Mister," I told him, "any time you think you can kill this farmer, you just have at it."

He looked across the fire at me, surprised I think, because he had expected fear. My clothes showed I was from the hills, a patched, old homespun shirt, jeans stuffed into clumsy boots. It was sure that I looked like nothing at all, only if a man looked at the pistol I wore he could see there'd been a sight of lead shot out of that barrel.

"That's enough, Carney!" Mr. Belden said sharply. "This man is a guest at our fire!"

The cook brought me a plate of grub and it smelled so good I didn't even look up until I'd emptied that plate and another, and swallowed three cups of hot black coffee. Up in the hills we like our coffee strong but this here would make bobwire grow on a man's chest in the place of hair.

The man with the golden beard watched me and he said to Mr. Belden, "Boss, you better hire this man. If he can work like he can eat, you've got yourself a hand."

"Question is," Carney broke in, "can he fight?"

It was mighty quiet around that fire when I put my plate aside and got up. "Mister, I didn't kill you before because when I left home I promised Ma I'd go careful with a gun, but you're a mighty tryin' man."

Carney had the itch, all right, and as he looked across the fire at me I knew that sooner or later I was going to have to kill this man.

"You promised Ma, did you?" he scoffed. "We'll see about that!" He brought his right foot forward about an inch and I durned near laughed at him, but then from behind me came a warm, rich voice and it spoke clear and plain. "Mister, you just back up an' set down. I ain't aimin' to let Tyrel hang up your hide right now, so you just set down an' cool off."

It was Orrin, and knowing Orrin I knew his rifle covered Carney.

"Thanks, Orrin. Ma made me promise to go careful."

"She told me . . . an' lucky for this gent."

He stepped down from the saddle, a fine, big, handsome man with shoulders wide enough for two strong men. He wore a belt gun, too, and I knew he could use it.

"Are you two brothers?" Belden asked.

"Brothers from the hills," Orrin said, "bound west for the new lands."

"You're hired," Mr. Belden said, "I like men who work together."

So that was how it began, but more had begun that day than any of us could guess, least of all the fine-looking man with the beard who was Tom Sunday, our foreman on the drive. From the moment he had spoken up all our lives were pointed down a trail together, but no man could read the sign.

From the first Orrin was a well-loved man. With that big, easy way of his, a wide smile, as well as courage and humor enough for three men, he was a man to ride the trail with. He did his share of the work and more, and at night around the fire he would sing or tell yarns. When he sang to the cows in that fine Welsh baritone of his, everybody listened.

Nobody paid me much mind. Right off they saw I could do my work and they let me do it. When Orrin told them I was the tough one of the two they just laughed. Only there was one or two of them who didn't laugh and of these one was Tom Sunday, the other Cap Rountree, a thin, wiry old man with a walrus mustache who looked to have ridden a lot of trails.

The third day out, Tom Sunday fetched up alongside me and asked, "Tye, what would you have done if Reed Carney had grabbed his gun?&q...

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