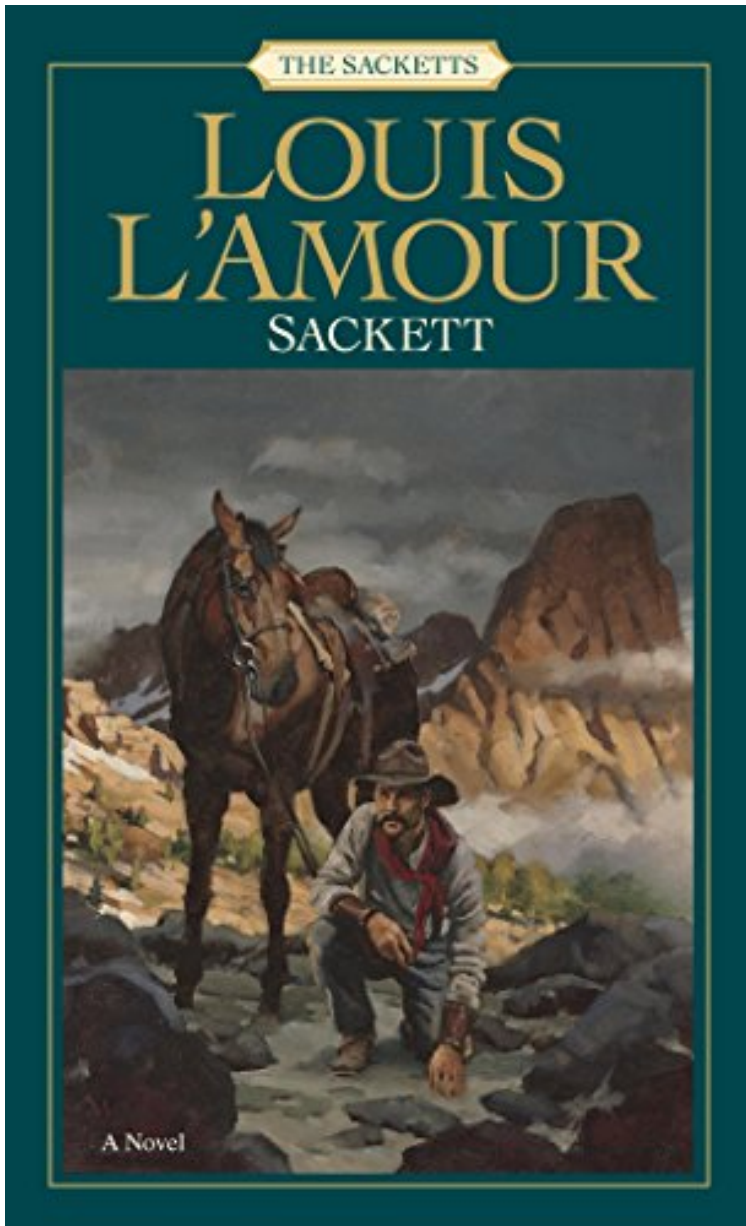


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Sackett



Par Louis L'Amour
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn Sackett, Louis LAmour introduces readers to a wandering man with a desire to settle down and build a good life. Hard circumstances have made William Tell Sackett a drifter, but now he hungers for a place he cant name yet knows he has to find. South of the Tetons he comes upon a ghost of a trail that leads him through a keyhole pass into a lonely, alien, yet beautiful valleya valley that holds a fortune in gold.Then he finds an even greater treasure: beautiful Ange Kerry, a courageous and resourceful woman. Yet the harsh ways it takes to preserve his claim and his life could be the one thing that drives Ange

away forever. From the Paperback edition. Extrait Chapter One IT WASN'T AS if he hadn't been warned. He got it straight, with no beating around the mesquite. "Mister," I said, "if you ain't any slicker with that pistol than you were with that bottom deal, you'd better not have at it." Trouble was, he wouldn't be content with one mistake, he had to make two; so he had at it, and they buried him out west of town where men were buried who die by the gun. And me, William Tell Sackett, who came to Uvalde a stranger and alone, I found myself a talked-about man. We Sacketts had begun carrying rifles as soon as we stood tall enough to keep both ends off the ground. When I was shy of nine I fetched my first cougar . . . caught him getting at our pigs. At thirteen I nicked the scalp of a Higgins who was drawing a bead on Pa . . . we had us a fighting feud going with the Higginses. Pa used to say a gun was a responsibility, not a toy, and if he ever caught any of us playing fancy with a gun he'd have our hide off with a bullwhip. None of us ever lost any hide. A gun was to be used for hunting, or when a man had a difficulty, but only a tenderfoot fired a gun unless there was need.

At hunting time Pa doled out the ca'tridges and of an evening he would check our game, and for every ca'triddle he'd given us we had to show game or a mighty good reason for missing. Pa wasn't one to waste a bullet. He had trapped the western lands with Kit Carson and Old Bill Williams, and knew the value of ammunition. General Grant never counted ca'tridges on me, but he was a man who noticed. One time he stopped close by when I was keeping three Rebel guns out of action, picking off gunners like a 'possum picking hazelnuts, and he stood by, a-watching. "Sackett," he said finally, "how does it happen that a boy from Tennessee is fighting for the Union?" "Well, sir," I said, "my country is a thing to love, and I set store by being an American. My great-grandpa was one of Dearborn's riflemen at the second battle of Saratoga, and Grandpa sailed the seas with Decatur and Bainbridge." "Grandpa was one of the boatmen who went in under the guns of the Barbary pirates to burn the Philadelphia. My folks built blood into the foundations of this country and I don't aim to see them torn down for no reason whatsoever." Another Rebel was fixing to load that cannon, so I drew a bead on him, and the man who followed him in the chow line could move up one place. "Come fighting time, General," I said, "there'll always be a Sackett ready to bear arms for his country, although we are peaceful folks, unless riled." And that was still true, but when they buried that gambling man out west of Uvalde it marked me as a bad man. In those days what they called a "bad man" was one who was a bad man to have trouble with, and a lot of mighty good men were known as bad men.

The name was one I hadn't hankered for, but Wes Bigelow left me no choice. Fact of the matter was, if it hadn't been me it would have been somebody else, because Bigelow's bottom deal was nothing like so good as I'd seen on the riverboats. Nevertheless, I had got a reputation in Uvalde, and this seemed a good time to

become a wandering man. Only I was fed up with drifting ever since the war, and wanted a place to light. Outside of town I fell in with a cow outfit. North from Texas we rode, driving a herd to Montana grass, with never a thought of anything but grief while riding the Bozeman Trail. North of the Crazy Woman three men rode into camp hunting beef to buy. The boss was not selling but they stayed on, and when my name was mentioned one of them looked at me. "Are you the Sackett who killed Bigelow?" "He wasn't much good with a bottom deal." "Nor with a gun, I guess." "He was advised." "Unless you're fit to handle his two

brothers, you'd best not ride into Montana. They come up by steamboat and they're waiting for you." "I wasn't planning on staying around," I said, "but if they find me before I leave, they're welcome." "Somebody was wondering if you were kin to Tyrel Sackett, the Mora gunfighter." "Tyrel Sackett is my brother, but this is the first I've heard of him gunfighting. Only, if he was put to it, he could." "He cleaned up Mora. He's talked about in the same breath with Hickok and Hardin." "He's a hand with any kind of shooting iron. Back to home he used to outshoot me sometimes." "Sometimes?" "Sometimes I outshot Tyrel . . . but I was older

than him, and had done more shooting." We drove our cattle to Gallatin Valley and scattered them on Montana grass, and Nelson Storey, whose cattle they were, rode out to camp with the mail. There was a letter for me, the first one I ever got. All through wartime I watched folks getting letters and writing them, and it was a hard thing, a-yearning to have mail and receiving none. Got so when mail call came around that

I used to walk away and talk with the cook. He had lost his family to a war party of Kiowas, out Texas way. This letter that Storey brought me from town looked mighty fine, and I turned it in my hands several times, sizing it up and wishing it could speak out. Printing I could read, but writing was all which-ways and I could make nothing of it. Mr. Storey, he stopped by, and noticed. "Maybe I can help you," he suggested. Shame was upon me. Here I was a grown man and couldn't read enough to get the sense out of a letter. My eyes could make sense of a Cheyenne or Comanche war trail, but reading was something I couldn't handle. Mr. Storey, he read that letter to me. Orrin and Tyrel each had them a ranch, and Ma was living at Mora in New Mexico. Tyrel was married to the daughter of a Don, one of those rich Spanish men,

and Orrin was in politics and walking a wide path. All I had was a wore-out saddle, four pistols, a Winchester carbine, and the clothes I stood up in. Yes, and I had me a knife, an Arkansas toothpick, good for hand-fighting or butchering meat."Your brothers seem to have done well," Mr. Storey said. "I would learn to read, if I were you, Tell. You're a good man, and you could go far."So I went horse-hunting and wound up making a dicker with an Indian. He had two appaloosa horses and he dearly wanted a .36-calibre pistol I had, so we settled down to outwait each other. Every boy in Tennessee grows up horse-trading or watching horse trades, and no Red Indian was going to outswap me. He was a long, tall Indian with a long, sad face and he had eyes like an old wore-out houn' dog, and I could only talk swap with him when I didn't look him in the eye. Something about that Indian made me want to give him everything I had. However, he had a thirst on and I had me a jug of fighting whiskey. So I stalled and fixed grub and talked horse and talked hunting and avoided the subject. Upshot of it was, I swapped the .36 pistol, twenty ca'tridges, an old blanket, and that jug of whiskey for those two horses. Only when I took another look at the packhorse I wasn't sure who had the better of the swap. That letter from home stirred me to moving that way. There's folks who don't hold with womenfolks smoking, but I was honing to see Ma, to smell her old pipe a-going, and to hear the creak of that old rocker that always spelled home to me. When we boys were growing up that creak was the sound of comfort to us. It meant home, and it meant Ma, and it meant understanding . . . and time to time it meant a belt with a strap. Somehow, Ma always contrived to put a bait of grub on the table, despite drouth that often lay upon the hills, or the poor soil of our side-hill farm. And if we came home bear-scratched or with a bullet under our skins, it was Ma who touched up the scratches or probed for the bullet. So I lit a shuck for New Mexico, and the folks. That's an expression common down Texas way, for when a man left his camp to walk to a neighbor's, he would dip a corn shuck into the flames to light his path, and he would do the same when he started back. Folks came to speak of anybody who was leaving for somewhere as "lighting a shuck." Well, most of my life I'd been lighting a shuck. First, it was hungering for strange country, so I took off down the Natchez Trace for New Orleans. An other time I rode a flatboat down river to the same place. Had me a time aboard those flatboats. Flatboat men had the name of being tough to handle. Lean and gangling like I was, they taken me for a greener, but away back of yonder in the hills boys take to fighting the way they take to coon dogs or making 'shine, so I clobbered them good. I'm named for William Tell, whom Pa held in admiration for his arrow-shooting and his standing on principle. Speaking of standing, I stand six feet and three inches in my sock feet, when I have socks, and weigh one hundred and eighty pounds, most of it crowded into chest and shoulders, muscled arms, and big hands. Back to home I stood butt of all the funning because of my big hands and feet. No Sackett was ever much on the brag. We want folks to leave us alone and we leave them alone, but when fighting time comes, we stand ready. Back in the mountains, and in the army, too, I threw every man I tackled at wrestling. Pa raised us on Cornish-style wrestling and a good bit of fist work he'd learned from an Englishman prizefighter. "Boys," Pa used to say, "avoid conflict and trouble, for enough of it fetches to a man without his asking, but if you are attacked, smite them hip and thigh." Pa was a great man for Bible speaking, but I never could see a mite of sense in striking them hip and thigh. When I had to smite them I did it on the chin or in the belly. It is a far piece from Montana to New Mexico astride of a horse, but I put together a skimpy outfit and headed west for Virginia City and Alder Gulch. A day or two I worked there, and then pulled out for Jackson's Hole and the Teton Mountains. It came over me I wanted to hear Orrin singing the old songs, the songs our people brought from Wales, or the songs we had from others like us traveling from Ireland, Scotland and England. Many happy thoughts of my boyhood time were memories of singing around the fire at home. Orrin was always the leader in that, a handsome, singing man, the best liked of us all. We held no envy, being proud to call him brother. When I started for New Mexico the last thing I was hunting was gold or trouble, and usually they come as a pair. Gold is a hard-found thing, and when a man finds it he's bound to fetch trouble a-keeping it. Seems like a man finds gold only when he ain't hunting it. He picks up a rock to throw at something and that rock turns out to be mostly gold, or he trips over a ledge and finds himself sitting astride the Mother Lode. This whole shooting match of a thing started because I was a curious man. There I was, dusting my tail down a south-going trail with no troubles. A time or two I cut Indian sign, but I fought shy of them. Back in my army days I heard folks tell of what a bad time the Indians were getting, and some of them, like the Cherokee, who settled down to farming and business, did get a raw deal; but most Indians would ride a hundred miles any time to find a good fight, or a chance to steal horses or take a scalp. When the war ended I joined up to fight the Sioux and Cheyenne in Dakota after the Little Crow massacre in Minnesota. The Sioux had moved off to the west so we chased them, and a couple of times we caught them . . . or they caught us. Down Texas way I'd had trouble with the

Kiowa, Comanche, Arapahoe, and even the Apache, so I had respect for Indians. It was a slow-riding time. Of a morning the air was brisk and chill with a hint of frost in the higher altitudes, but the days were warm and lazy, and by night the stars were brighter than a body would believe. There's no grander thing than to ride wild country with time on your hands, so I walked my horses down the backbone of the Rockies, through the Tetons and south to South Pass and on to Brown's Hole. Following long grass slopes among the aspen groves, camping in flowered meadows beside chuckling streams, killing only when I needed grub, and listening then to the long echo of my rifle shot believe me, I was having me a time. Nothing warned me of trouble to come. Thinking of Orrin's mellow Welsh voice a-singing, I came fresh to hear my own voice, so I took a swallow from my canteen and tipping my head back, I gave out with song. It was "Brennan on the Moor," about an Irish highwayman, a song I dearly loved to hear Orrin sing. I didn't get far. A man who plans to sing while he's riding had better reach an understanding with his horse. He should have him a good voice, or a horse with no ear for music. When my voice lifted in song I felt that cayuse bunch his muscles, so I broke off short. That appaloosa and me had investigated the capabilities of each other the first couple of times I got up in the saddle, and I proved to him that I could ride. That horse knew a thing or two about bucking and pitching, and I had no notion of proving myself again on a rocky mountainside. From the Paperback edition. Presentation de l'diteur In Sackett, Louis L'Amour introduces readers to a wandering man with a desire to settle down and build a good life. Hard circumstances have made William Tell Sackett a drifter, but now he hungers for a place he can't name yet knows he has to find. South of the Tetons he comes upon a ghost of a trail that leads him through a keyhole pass into a lonely, alien, yet beautiful valley a valley that holds a fortune in gold. Then he finds an even greater treasure: beautiful Ange Kerry, a courageous and resourceful woman. Yet the harsh ways it takes to preserve his claim and his life could be the one thing that drives Ange away forever. From the Paperback edition.