

Sons of Missouri
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Fiction; first three pages of 6 pages; email me:
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“Bett’a ta’ lure a skunk out of his hole,” Ethan mutters aloud, “than to crawl in after ‘im.” He mixes the pork rinds and grits on the campfire and moves the coffee pot over a flame. Adjusting his blue, Union Calvary cap, reveals red hair tumbling over a freckled face. His Army issued six-shooter straps his waist.

The bushes up on the hill stir and a Confederate Kipi raises out of a small rock shelter. Dalton Robinson brushes the dust off his tattered outfit and adjusts his gun belt.

“Dang, they sent Ethan.” He clambers down the slope in his ripped riding boots.

“Have a seat, Dalton, and help yourself.”

“Thank ya, Ethan. Best smellin’ grub this here side of the Mississippi.” Dalton sits, fills a plate, and sips a cup of coffee.

Ethan stands and smokes his pipe. “Colonel tells me since the war you been robbin’ banks, trains, and stuff.”

“We lost everything, Ethan, all my family, friends, the whole town burned down and gone.”

“War brought out the bad in people,” Ethan says and loosens the buttons on his Yankee blue-belly jacket.

“I know it brought out the worst in me,” Dalton agrees and shakes the dust off his Dixie cap, his thick, black curly hair springs up.

“I never wanted to kill no one, ‘specially not friends and neighbors.” Ethan shuffles to relight his pipe.

“We never owned no slaves, either of us,” Dalton takes a bite and sips his coffee. “And looky here, we fought on opposite sides as though it mattered to us either way.”

“Yep.” “I told the Colonel I’se knows were the shelter was, that I could bring you in myself, Dalton. Save some lives.”

“The troop close by?”

“Down around the river bend, Dalton, waiting on me and you. Where’s Amy?”

“Gone to Texas with the gang. She’s with my child. I didn’t want to endanger her by travelin’ among ‘em. A-fixin’ to leave when you showed up.” Dalton smudges the ashes with his worn-out riding boot.

“I recollect when we was kids, going back in the shelter and getting’ out the old weapons and shootin’ and a’bladin’ pinecones and brush like they was’a Redlegs.”

“Yea, sur’nough, you dressed up like an Injun in war paint.”

“Yep, and then gettin’ over to the old rope swing, and splashin’ in the river with the boys.”

“And dirt clod fights.”

“Funny how you was always on the winning side, Dalton.”

“ ‘member we all hiked over to the Anderson’s farm? Burned down now, all of them shot dead in the house. He shakes his head, “and we had tasty picnics, and all’s the men talked about how the war weren’t never gonna happen.”

“Recall every word, Dalton. Said there’d be a compromise or such, and Lincoln never would get President.”

“Seems like a lifetime ago now, don’t it, Ethan?”

“Gone with the wind.”

“I remember the day we split up company, you, me, and Joe.”

“Sure, that’d be the day we visited Mrs. Perkin’s plantation, Dalton. It’s all burned up now, too. Fields a squandered, slaves ran off.”

“Yep, all gone now. I recall you was a-talkin’ to Joe out in the yard and I was on the porch with Mrs. Perkins, Amy, and the Colonial.”

“Miss Amy was lookin’ fine that day, as I recall.”

“Yep, in her summer dress and bonnet,” Dalton agrees.

“That’s when the Colonel recruited Joe and me to join up with the Calvary and ride out west to patrol the Injun territories.”

“And I formed up my own militia, Dalton Robinson’s Sons of Missoura” and we rode out to Lawrence Kansas and shot up the town.”

“Heard about that, Dalton. Sad to know you was part of it.”

“Yeah, well afterwards I joined up with the regulars and guarded a fort overlooking the Illinois side of the river.”

“Joe and I rode out west and got in a mess with the Indians. Near got scalped, mauled by a Griz, stampeded by a herd, and kil’t some gunfighters. Just everyday stuff nowadays, Dalton.

“Yes, sir, I deserted the Army, raided cargo rafts, held up banks, robbed trains, and been shot, beat, stabbed, and jailed.”

“I quit the Army for a spell, herded cattle, ran a liquor-smoke store, and lived with an Indian squaw.”

“Wow, where’s she now, Ethan?”

“The Saloonkeeper attacked my store for sellin’ liquor to white men. His gunners murdered her and burned out my place.”

“Sorry to hear that Ethan, if I’d a known me and the boys would ‘ave gone after him.”

“Joe and I took care of that problem, Dalton.”

“Reckon you did.”