Clarion Review

Historical

Naked Heart
Nicholas Smith
Trafford Press
978-1-4120-3419-7
Three Stars (out of Five)

Loyalty, love, and what constitutes duty to country and family are the great themes of *Naked Heart.* Going into the minds of all the characters and using the frame of a twenty-first century failed businessman who inherits a historical farm in Pennsylvania, Nicholas Smith takes the reader on a trip across the world and across time.

Dan Clements' life takes a wild turn as he looks into the journals of his ancestor, Joshua Clements. Dan finds escape from his depression over losing his dot-com business, his money, and his long-term girlfriend by searching for details about Joshua. He borrows money and flies to Paris. While walking in front of the Place de la Concorde, he gets a blinding headache and falls into traffic. When he wakes he sees horses and buggies, understands French, wears a blue military uniform, and is being assisted by two beautiful women dressed in nineteenth-century clothes. He begins to live the life of Joshua, a military attaché assigned to the French army. Perplexed, he wonders "[Is this] a time portal, a past life, or was this just a bizarre dream…."

The bulk of the novel pertains to Colonel Joshua Clements, who rages against his own demons. He has lost two brothers during the Civil War. He also has been deeply in love, with both affairs ending in heartbreak. When he meets Madame Barbe Kolbassov, he compares love to a field of battle—he resists her, capitulates, and then resists again before surrendering to her completely. The author often shows similarities between the two men, Dan and Joshua, weighing each one's sense of failure at career and love.

It's obvious that a great deal of research went into the creation of *Naked Heart*. The section on war is markedly better written, yet the reader is fully engaged by many finely wrought details of life in Paris and the surrounding cities in the late 1800s. Smith describes dashing uniforms, polished boots, ball gowns, etiquette, and elegant lifestyles of the rich, contrasted with brothels and street life of the poor. The heartbreak, fear, hunger, and unsettled

lives during the period of the Franco-Prussian War are well rendered. Although the text cries out for a revision to alleviate awkward transitions, clichés, duplicated language, and introspective narration, the content overcomes the flaws and holds interest throughout.

Historical figures and events fill the story—the revolutions in both America and France, Napoleon III and Empress Eugenie, and battles during the Civil War of the United States. This novel will be significant to those who seek an in-depth look at the Franco-Prussian War and at war in general. Smith eases the tension of battle and loss with an amazing story of great love.

Mary Popham