



Sarafina

Philip Fracassi

CLASH Books (Apr 7, 2026)

Softcover \$23.99 (354pp)

978-1-968043-04-9

Three Mississippian brothers abandon their Confederate posts, only to encounter fresh miseries on the road home, in Philip Fracassi's riveting horror novel *Sarafina*.

Ethan, a twin and the youngest of three brothers, tires of the Civil War's senseless violence by the Battle of Shiloh. Amid the bloodshed, he and his brothers decide to flee. There are three hundred miles between them and home, across which they evade capture to spare their necks, "tromp[ing] forward [as] criminals, cowards, deserters."

For Ethan, the lives he took during the war, and his subsequent desertion, prompt internal reckoning. He notes that "we've all lost a small part of who we are; some element piece I can't define." He is thus underprepared for—and feels undeserving of—the form of rescue they find: a protected cabin in the woods, the home of beautiful, mysterious Sarafina and her son, Titus. Despite the respite that Sarafina offers, though, Ethan worries: "It feels like sitting on the edge of salvation, and then discovering a surprising wariness to proceed."

Ethan assumes the bulk of the narrative duties, often appealing to his twin, Ellie, in his head. For a few pages across the book, her voice is also centered. While at first the twins seem matched in their inherent innocence, it becomes clear over time that few in the tale are free of deep moral scars.

Within the sumptuous prose, the seductive, violent appeal of Sarafina's home is well-attended to, with mentions of fruit trees blossoming out of season, folk medicine used to repair the injured brothers, and seclusion from the din of the war. But Sarafina's dogs also rip people apart, and Ethan's sense that they have been trapped, not rescued, is increasingly validated. The agonies that the brothers face in the course of their stay include vicious transformations and potential deals with the devil. And while the book leans into a few worn tropes about women and witchcraft (people invoke *Malleus Maleficarum* for protection; Lilith is maintained as demonic), and while its first, false ending offers satisfactions that are undone by its lengthier, troubled, but also more nuanced second, the nightmares that are given shape throughout the book are enthralling.

Themes of honor, family sacrifice, and lateral moves couched as redemption make *Sarafina* an engrossing horror novel.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (July / August 2026)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.