



Scarred: A Civil War Novel of Redemption

Michael Kenneth Smith

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Zach's journey shows that while war may be hell, the path out of it can be followed by seeking forgiveness.

A desperate act in the heat of war sends a young man deep into enemy territory to search for forgiveness. Michael Kenneth Smith's *Scarred* is part history, part romance, and all adventure.

A reporter from the *New York Herald* arrives in Knoxville, Tennessee, looking for Zach Harkin, a Civil War hero who stopped a Confederate sniper with his own sharpshooter skills. As Zach reluctantly opens up to the reporter, he recounts an incredible journey from his past.

As a young man, Zach leaves home to find his victim's widow, only to end up being captured by Confederate soldiers and taken to a prison camp in Andersonville, Georgia. After a daring escape by train, he meets Martha, the widow of the Confederate soldier whom he shot. Can Zach tell her the truth about who he is and why he is there? And can he protect her as the Union makes its destructive final march through Georgia?

Scarred is an eloquent tale told through vividly fleshed-out characters. Even in a world torn apart by war, Zach is a man who lives by his own moral code. He is strong, independent-minded, and tough, but there is a deep tenderness beneath his actions.

This kindness is offered in many moments throughout the narrative. While at Andersonville, Zach meets an orphaned young bugler and protects him, even fighting another prisoner who tries to take advantage of the boy. After he escapes, Zach meets a free farmer and his family. As the farmer and his wife help him, Zach plays with the farmer's very young daughters.

In addition to its characters, the setting is detailed and imaginative. Zach's journey weaves through a war-torn land where marauders and Union soldiers can take advantage of the helpless. Yet there are moments of comfort, such as when Zach enters a room that smells of cooked bacon and lilacs.

While Zach's killing of the Confederate sharpshooter is at the center of the story, the scene is referenced but never shown; Zach only talks about it when he confesses who he is to Martha. Without this scene to set the stakes, the interview and Zach's journey are the only elements propelling the story forward. Nonetheless, the engaging writing style, along with the novel's strong characterizations and attention to detail, help maintain a driving pace.

Scarred is enjoyable historical fiction with a romantic twist. Zach's journey shows that while war may be hell, the path out of it can be followed by seeking forgiveness.

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