ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

HISTORICAL

The Inn Keeper's Daughters: A Tale of Southampton and the American Civil War
Jeffery J. Nicholas
Authorhouse
978-1-4208-8564-4
Four Stars (out of Five)

The stirrings of war from Britain's former colony arrive like ripples across the Atlantic to the Bell Inn in the port town of Southampton, England. Tom and his cousins, Rachel and Judith, find their family's quiet inn frequented by Yankees from the USS *Tuscarora* in port. But their young lives are thrown asunder when a dashing Confederate naval officer from the newly arrived CSN (Confederate States Navy) war ship *Nashville* begins to pluck the tune of "Dixie" on his banjo in the inn's pub room.

The American Civil War has come to their town, and Tom would recall that day in his memoirs years later with rage and regret. "I am sure that was the first time I ever heard Dixie and oh, damn him for it," he wrote. "And damn them all for their grey rags and their courtly manners. Damn them for their flapping soles and their rights and their slaves. And damn them, damn them for their damn war."

Amid this backdrop of distant war brought ashore, Tom's burgeoning love is not for his contemporary, Rachel, but for her beautiful younger sister Judith, she of coquettish demeanor and mercurial temperament. Through the narrator's responses to her sexual teasing, the author develops these two main characters in complex ways, as when the adolescents first discover that the sight of Judy's calico petticoat mesmerizes her male cousin, leaving him insistent on repeat performances. "The sight of Judy's underclothes was utterly new, utterly exciting. Judy would never be the same again. There were simply no words to express this earth-shattering moment."

As these relatives mature, Judy invites Tom to do more than just look, and this culminates in Judy's unexpected response to Tom's whispered marriage proposal during a passionate embrace. "'Dear Tommy, dear Tommy,'" she said, very low. "'Don't be annoyed with the inn keeper's daughter. I promise I will truly, truly think about it and I will tell you soon.'" As he impatiently awaits her decision, they argue, and Judith suddenly disappears.

The reader can empathize with lovelorn Tom's heartbreak when Judith disappears. "I believed that there was no other like her in the world. Certainly not for me. A pearl beyond any

price, she was. How could I know that she was God's slowly, carefully built snare? [sic] And I believed He would heighten her lustre!"

Tom is convinced Judith has been taken away by the Southerner, and he vows to track the couple down. With murderous thoughts for the interloper, Tom chases Judith across the sea, hoping to find her and reestablish their budding romance. But the world is vast and cruel, as Tom learns in this lugubrious tale of love lost.

The author writes skillfully in a style reminiscent of books from the nineteenth century, with intricate development of the protagonist's coming-of-age struggles—from naive sexual explorations with his precocious cousin to his precarious sea voyages, a subject with which the author has intimate knowledge—he was a member of the Royal Navy and adds touches of verisimilitude to life aboard ship in a bygone time.

The author's work breathes fresh life into the nearly forgotten confrontation of the early Union and Confederate war ships at the Port of Southampton in 1861. It is not a true action-adventure tale but rather a story of young love's innumerable and mysterious travails, set amid the backdrop of a once-distant war brought home. This book will appeal to mature teens and to adults who enjoy good historical fiction and Civil War-era stories in particular.

Alan Couture