

# HARPER'S RESCUE

## A Novel of Redemption in the Civil War

Sean Kevin Gabhann

CreateSpace (398 pp.)

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## BOOK REVIEW

Lt. James Harper returns in this new edition of the second book in Gabhann's trilogy of historical novels set during the American Civil War.

Paducah, Kentucky, 1862. When an entire Union company is wiped out while camped 15 minutes outside of town, Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's intelligence officers suspect there is a spy at work in the small city occupied by soldiers in blue. Only a week back from a short stint in Confederate prison, Lt. Harper of the 1st Iowa Volunteer Mounted Infantry takes it upon himself to figure out that the spy is Franklin Bosley, Paducah's wealthy restaurateur and brothel owner. He soon meets Maggie Warren, a war widow and prostitute in Bosley's employ, to whom he develops a quick and potentially dangerous attachment. Meanwhile, Katie Malloy volunteers in a hospital when not doing sex work, and hopes to one day get away from Bosley, to whom she owes a great deal of money. Katie's mother visits her daughter in recurring dreams and tells her a soldier will come along and save her from her plight. Nineteen-year-old Corp. Gustav Magnusson, who previously thought Harper to be a reckless careerist, has come to trust his commanding officer following their time as Confederate prisoners. As Harper investigates the spy ring at Grant's request, he and Magnusson become involved in a web of intrigue of both personal and military importance. Gabhann's prose is suitably textured for his task, combing the grit and blood of war fiction with the stilted manners of the time period. Harper feels self-conscious about the state of his uniform at a party with officers and prostitutes: "Under the scrutiny of the major and his escort, Harper resisted the instinct to brush at his uniform. Nothing he could do now would remove the blood stains and the powder burns." The first novel in the Shiloh trilogy, Harper's Donelson (2020), was already fairly prostitute-heavy for a Civil War novel, and this volume's plot sometimes feels as though it was contrived purely to up the prostitution content. Fans of espionage novels may enjoy its sudden diversion into the world of spycraft, but those looking for epic battles will be disappointed.

A gritty if not completely realistic installment in a Civil War trilogy.

# PW/Booklife Review

Lieutenant James Harper perseveres and takes on an urgent new mission in the second installment of Gabhann's ambitious Shiloh Trilogy, which continues to bring the Civil War era to vital life and showcase what it took to live through it. This entry finds its hero fresh out of a Confederate prison. Lieutenant Colonel Monroe, his commanding officer, is doing his best to sway an inquiry into Harper's escape into a potential court-martial, thanks to his longstanding grudge, and Harper has other challenges brewing, too: he's convinced a local house of ill repute is sending classified information to the Rebs, and he's determined to take down its owner, Franklin Bosley.

Harper's zeal to stop Bosley drives the story, as the lieutenant takes an undercover assignment to pose as a disgruntled Union soldier in Bosley's establishment, in hopes of infiltrating a spy ring. Gabhann finds suspense in this story while also capturing the texture of these lives and their era, especially as Harper starts to fall for one of Bosley's workers, Maggie, who has her own reasons to hate the Confederates— she lost her husband and son in the war, a tragedy that Harper can relate to, as his wife and child were murdered by outlaws. That sense of urgent loss in a violent world keeps the story tense as Harper and Maggie find themselves caught up in Bosley's net, facing fresh danger, unsure if anyone can really be trusted.

Readers will find Harper more likable in this entry; his softness with Maggie, and newfound respect from his men, particularly Corporal Gustav Magnusson, gives this now-seasoned character welcome warmth and gravity. Harper's motivations are mostly admirable, despite some rash actions, and the addition of Gustav's sweet courtship with sex worker Katie lightens the mood. That, combined with General Grant's return to favor and Harper's seeming exoneration, sets up readers for more action—and maybe some romance—in the dark days ahead.

**Takeaway:** Undercover spies, betrayals, and a dash of romance heat up this vivid Civil War novel.

**Great for fans of:** Gwen Bristow's *The Handsome Road*, Bernard Cornwell's *The Bloody Ground*.

## **Production grades**

Cover: **A**

Design and typography: **A**

Illustrations: **N/A**

Editing: **A**

Marketing copy: **A-**