



By the Red Glare: A Novel (Story River Books)

John Mark Sibley-Jones

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Fear and brutality grip Columbia, South Carolina, in the harsh winter of 1865 as General William Tecumseh Sherman continues his fiery march to the sea and advances on the capital city where secession began. John Mark Sibley-Jones's *By the Red Glare* takes us into the lives of representative citizens—black and white, men and women, Confederates and Unionists, civilians and combatants, freed and shackled, sane and insane—on the eve of historic destruction.

The Columbia hospital is overcrowded with wounded soldiers from both sides. As word of Sherman's advance spreads, old animosities threaten an outbreak of violence in this place of healing. Less than two miles from the hospital stands the Lunatic Asylum, whose yard is occupied by more than twelve hundred federal prisoners guarded by old men and boys too young to join the Confederate army. The most violent madman in the asylum hatches an escape plan that requires the aid of prisoners who, knowing they cannot trust him, nevertheless will risk their lives to gain freedom. In the heart of the city, Confederate leaders gather around a table in the home of General James Chesnut to study a tattered map and plan a battle strategy, only to stare at one another in disbelief as the first sound of cannon fire announces the imminent arrival of Sherman's troops.

Sibley-Jones's riveting story of the collapse of the Confederacy includes a cast of memorable characters: General Wade Hampton, stoic but fierce in his rage; Mary Boykin Chesnut, brilliant but suffering from bipolar disorder, who records the events of the war with eerie devotion; Louisa Cheves McCord, who maintains that slavery is God's will and who promises to do all in her power to abet the war that took the life of her only son; a slave who vows to kill the man who beat him mercilessly at the whipping post in the town center; two sworn-enemy soldiers who must assist each other in their jaunts to the brothel district at the city's edge; and Joseph Crawford, the hospital steward troubled by his own shifting allegiances as he wonders whether these are the end of days.

Rife with literary and historical merits, *By the Red Glare* is published on the eve of the sesquicentennial of the burning of Columbia, as monumental an episode in Civil War history as any other in the lore-soaked South. The novel includes a foreword by historian Marion B. Lucas, author of *Sherman and the Burning of Columbia*.

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