



This Side of the River

Jeffrey Stayton

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This Side of the River is a novel set in Georgia in the summer of 1865, after Confederacy has collapsed. A contingent of war widows who have survived Sherman's March have armed themselves and rallied around a teenage Texas Ranger named Cat Harvey in order to ride north to Ohio and burn Gen. Sherman's home to ashes. It is a story about trauma, revenge and redemption. What happens when they light out for Ohio is a terrible, doomed odyssey that forces these young women to ask the darker questions of the human condition.

This Side of the River Details

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From Reader Review This Side of the River for online ebook

James says

This Side of The River is breathtaking, precise and poignant. Its unique cadence satisfies, and the beats are measured to precision. A Civil War Revenge tale isn't automatically compelling. The power of this novel, and this can't be understated, comes not from the plot alone, but more from how Stayton treats revenge in the hearts of his characters.

The best writers show us what the human condition looks like by showing us the outward expression of all its symptoms. Stayton has done precisely that. He delivers with This Side Of The River, as well as an truly engaging narrative, an expert analysis of justice as a retributive force. And, equally worth mentioning, is how each voice within the narrative, and there are many, represents an unique idea about reprisal, and seeks to exact it in their own way.

Discovering the fate of the widows on their ride north will do more to calibrate your moral scruples than perhaps you'd like it to, and it's powerfully rewarding. Following Darkish, Handsome, Cat and the rest to General Sherman's, you'll learn how the specific things they believe about life, love, God, revenge and what is "just" make them all unlike the hero's or villains you're used to.

This Side Of The River is more than a Civil war story. It's more than a revenge tale. It's more than period fiction. The sum of all of its complicated parts reaches moral peaks as high as ones reached by Smerdyakov with his declaration that "If God is dead, anything is permitted". And it does so with a lyricism clearly forged in a furnace of traditional Southern style and wit.

Diane Coto says

The War Between the States was technically over. General Lee had surrendered at Appomattox Court House April 9, 1865. This story began in May 1865 as twenty and more widows began to follow behind a very young Captain Cat Harvey of the Texas Rangers. They were widows because General Tecumseh Sherman led some 60,000 soldiers in his "March to the Sea" from Atlanta to Savannah, burning houses and barns of Confederate fighters. This was from November 15 to December 21, 1864. The widows became determined, under Cat Harvey, to ride northward to Ohio to burn Sherman's house to the ground just as he had done when he ravaged the homes of the south. Cat Harvey had ridden in from Texas to Georgia, toting a Gatling gun.

By the author's note, we realize that he is expressing that Cat Harvey must have suffered from PTSD. Of course, that term was not known during / after the Civil War. Before the twentieth century, they "were said to be suffering from 'nostalgia' or 'soldier's heart.'" The narrators of this fictionalized account are numerous. Primarily, it is the widows speaking their minds to us of their loss and their will to avenge themselves and their husband's untimely deaths. One of the first narrators, widow Metta Dahlgreen, said "I heard that there was a Texican still fighting Yankees, even after the last army had surrendered." However, I cannot for the life of me determine just how Captain Harvey had actually come to be known, nor how it was assumed he suffered from PTSD.

The premise of this story intrigued me greatly, but unfortunately, the story didn't live up to what I expected.

Instead it was very bizarre. I can even understand realistically that Cat Harvey would have raped some of the widows. After all, rape is not a new thing. They were his followers and we've all heard the term, "absolute power corrupts absolutely." That is primarily the case here. Some of the widows, for whatever reason, began to leave the group. Eventually, he found that to be unacceptable and any who were found guilty of trying to leave would be hung. During their travels, they came across a circus and many of the circus employees began to follow him. He took and rode their elephant from that point. He dressed in widows dresses, and wore clown paint. Even still, he gained followers as if the very site of him was normal. I rated This Side of the River at 2.5 out of 5.

Carole Landry says

Should be read with a strong Southern accent and a sense of humor!

Lauralee says

A group of Confederate widows are filled with hatred against General Sherman for what his army had done to them. In order to satisfy their lust for revenge, they get together, grab their guns, and march north to Ohio to burn down General Sherman's home. Their chosen ringleader is Captain Cat Harvey, a Texas Ranger with a dark side. When the widows start to see Cat Harvey's sinister side, they soon begin to wonder what price they have to pay for their common cause.

The story is told from many points of view from both genders male and female. But the main characters are the widows and their leader with Cat Harvey. At first, the widows are full of fire, hope, and happiness that they are marching north. They also admire their ringleader, Cat Harvey, for they fall in love with him and compete for his affections. Yet, the story takes a dark turn when they are abused by Cat Harvey. They feel ashamed of themselves and come to despise him. However, it is through Cat Harvey's abuse that these women become stronger and are more of a sisterhood. They take care of each other and make their own decisions. I admire these women because they are tough-as-nails and men are proven to be fools for underestimating them.

Cat Harvey is an interesting character. At first, he seems to be the hero in the story, but in actuality he is the villain. He is haunted by a dark past and doesn't believe he can be redeemed. I really disliked his character, but I found him funny when he cross-dresses as a widow and wears clown make-up and rides an elephant. This is because he considers himself a widow of the cause because he has lost his wife and daughter.

Overall, this book is filled with betrayal and revenge, but also friendship, hope, redemption and choices. This book questions the meaning of justice. The characters and setting are well-developed. The writing is lyrical and heart-breaking. There are some adult scenes in this book for there are graphic details about Captain Cat Harvey abuse of the widows. Yet I recommend this for fans of historical fiction and Civil Wars fans alike. (This book was given to me by the publisher in exchange for an honest review.)

Sara says

I received this book in a Goodreads Giveaway. I was really excited to read it because the plot seemed so

unique and so interesting. Southern war widows on a vengeful march north to give Sherman a bit of pay back? Awesome! I loved that each character was fully developed and that they all brought something new, different, and interesting to the story. I loved the book all the way until the end. Once it became clear that literally every widow was going to have the same... unfortunate run in with Cat... I got kind of bored. The first time it happened I was shocked! The second time... "holy moly! this is crazy!" Third time... "ok that's enough." Fourth time... "Ugh." It just kind of took away the power of the initial reveals. I felt like the story would have been much stronger without it. Im sure there was a deeper meaning and it was just lost upon me. I just didn't like that specific aspect. It was the huge dark mark on an otherwise really enjoyable tale. I also thought the ending was somewhat lacking. I loved Darkish as a character and I loved that she ended up being the one doing what she did in the end but the whole Sherman encounter? Meh.

Overall, I really enjoyed reading it. I think it is unique and it is well written. I think anyone would be able to find a character they relate to. I think the story line is pretty awesome and I think, if you like this time period or genre, that it is definitely something I'd recommend as an easy, enjoyable read.

Jameela says

Haunting and complex, *_This Side of the River_*, told through multiple narrators, highlights the sexual abuses and psychological trauma of the Civil War. It's part historical novel, part alternate history, and part magical realist. Give it a read!

Betsy Crawford says

I only read about half of this book, mostly because it was too confusing to keep up with all the characters. I was so excited to finally get a copy of this book in my hands, but it was really disappointing. The idea of a band of Civil War widows traveling together under the leadership of teenage Texas Ranger Cat Harvey to burn General Sherman's home is a great story idea. Creative idea but poor execution, IMO.

James Janke says

This is a Civil War tale relating a quixotic plan of a motley group of Confederate widows at the very end of the war who set out to burn down General William Sherman's home in Ohio, in revenge for his March to the Sea through Georgia. The widows choose a very young, tormented Texas Ranger as their leader.

This is a book that is hard to put down. Each chapter is very, very short (one is only six words long), so you feel you can always read "just one more chapter". Much of the book is written in first-person present tense, but there are multiple characters doing the talking. The characters are male and female, white and black, Rebel and Union. Stayton gives most characters a distinctive personality, using dialect very well. But some characters make only brief appearances. Yet they each get a chapter.

The book is well-researched. The plot is imaginative, so much so that the ending of the story is hard to predict.

The story is gritty, violent, thought-provoking, and unsettling. The very weirdness of parts of it demonstrates

the devastating effects of the personal losses during the war and the losing of the war itself.

Venise Settles says

This epic novel is one of the best of all time...and that's huge! When Confederate widows join forces for the sole purpose of burning Sherman's house to ashes, you better watch out! These women don't play, a real force to be reckoned with. There is something so dark but quite compelling about their journey to cross the river as one unit to take their lives back. And I mean literally. The vivid imagery and precise verbiage cleverly chosen by the author keeps you engulfed in the constantly developing storyline. A page turner for sure!!!!!! One of the best written historical plots I have seen to date. It's a must read and I mean that from the depths of my soul. Sighing with happiness. Oh and I can't tell you which character's my favorite. You'll have to read it; be your own judge.

Julie Schoerke says

It seems that a book about a group of Civil War widows marching en masse to Sherman's house up North to burn it down would be absurd and funny. But, it's not. Meticulously researched, this novel is an emotional journey, told from various perspectives, as well as a geographic march across the United States. I get why Southern Living Magazine chosen it as it's cultural pick of the month. A great "alternative history" read!

Angelle says

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the end of the Civil War, so I felt like this was the perfect time to read "This Side of the River." From the detailed descriptions of the landscape to the authentic personalities of his characters, I can tell Jeffrey Stayton put a lot of thought into this story. Very nicely done!

Amanda Mae says

The premise of Confederate widows banding together to march north and burn Sherman's house in retribution is one of the best alt history plots I've ever come across. And the crazy doesn't stop there! The bizarreness of the novel just builds, and you can't put the book down. Every page leads to another twist, another gasp-worthy moment, another shock. It's as if Stayton took an album of Civil War-era murder ballads by the Decemberists and wrote a novel involving them all. This is modern Southern Gothic and its eerie best. Keep in mind, it's one intense and dark ride, but you'll love it the whole way.

I received an ARC from the publisher. They were very gracious!

Carolyn Williams-walker says

I read a galley of this after meeting the author at a SIBA convention. The premise of the story intrigued me - Southern widows who decided to march north to burn down Gen. William Sherman's home in retribution for his torching Confederate homes on his infamous March to the Sea. Stanton presented the story in a very intriguing way - each chapter was "told" by a different character, and many had their own "voice." Such treatment compelled me to read on, wondering what would happen to everyone. While I enjoyed the story overall, there were times that things were introduced that seemed to be from left field and caused some confusion as I tried to figure them out. The ending fell fairly flat to me as well. I'm left with more questions than answers having finished the book, and that generally drives me kinda crazy. Still, this was an entertaining, if abstract, take on Civil War history. Any fan of that period historic fiction should find it an interesting read.

Chris Lazinsky says

At Square Books, Jeff signed my copy saying "I hope you enjoy my wild ass book". I have enjoyed it so much that wild ass is the absolute best complement it can be given. my first thought on finishing was given that this was a relatively short book, he does so much with it, being at turns epic, clever, absurd, and ultimately horrifying. He manages to at once romanticize war and show it for the horror that is. He flows from a reenactor's loving attention to detail to an absurdity that throws any notion of reverence out of the window. All while maintaining a dense, brooding southern gothic tone. Oh, and what the hell, why not multiple narrators that reveal the story at a pitch perfect pace.

Thank you Jeff, and thank you Andrew at Square Books for insisting I read it.

Brandi says

Interesting book. Not sure exactly how I feel about the way it jumped from character to character, though. It made it a little difficult to keep up with who was who and who had done what. That being said, the story itself was engaging and imaginative. Bleak, at times, but it WAS the end of the Civil War. Not a happy time for anyone. Many lives lost and those left behind had to try and pick up the pieces. Widows seeking revenge with a mad man.....I guess that's one way to do it. The ending left me wishing there was a little more closure- quite a few unanswered questions. But, overall, a good read.
