

The Storytellers

John F. Corrigan

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Featuring an unrelenting search for more knowledge, regardless of the cost, The Storytellers is a vibrant, ghostly historical novel.

In 1877, a year after the Battle of Little Bighorn, a team of soldiers and assistants returned to the scene. John F. Corrigan's haunting, myth-defying historical novel, *The Storytellers*, concerns this event.

DelCol, the son of one of Custer's top officers during the Civil War, wants to write a book about the Little Bighorn battle. He joins the squadron headed there to bring bodies back to their families. On the way, he meets a host of colorful characters. What Native Americans, rich men, heroes, outlaws, and fearless women tell him about the battle does not fit with what he knows about it, though. The more information he receives, the more he senses that someone, or something, hopes to prevent him from telling the true story.

Concerned both with the battle itself and DelCol's efforts to tell its story, the novel is harrowing through and through. Within it, the Sioux are still on the prowl, and threats against DelCol's fact-finding mission emerge. Dread surrounds the battlefield, which some say is haunted, though they don't want to say much more for fear of unleashing the spirits roaming the site.

Both a mystery and a thrilling Western, the novel reads like a movie script. Action moves it, as do conversations between distinctive characters. DelCol, from the North, speaks in a mannered way, while Herendeen, a scout and DelCol's best friend on the trip, speaks with a twang. Among the Sioux, who invite DelCol to parlay with them, graphic metaphors are employed.

DelCol is the novel's unsung hero, notable because of his careful listening. He pieces together the clues surrounding Little Bighorn using his dreams and detective skills. Other characters develop most as they tell DelCol their stories, establishing friendships and traveling together, and romance sparks between Herendeen and Abby, a Deadwood store proprietress and Little Bighorn widow. Custer's reputation is fleshed out through the cast's stories about his gambling and "bad omens" leading up to the battle. Multiple perspectives not only solidify the order of events, but shed new light on why things happened the way that they did.

Swift and steady, each of the novel's chapters presents a fresh adventure, though the conclusion is a long time coming. False endings arise before the final, surprise conclusion. Drawings and paintings from the time period are included to enhance the setting, and an old-fashioned font used for the chapter headings accomplishes this, too. Extensive footnotes help to put the book's events into broader context.

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MARI CARLSON (December 4, 2019)

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