The Deer in the Mirror

Holladay, Cary

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“Holladay’s main characters lead complex lives from 1791 to 1900, within historical detail so subtly interwoven with their personal stories that their emotions are rendered pitch-perfect and wholly intriguing. Not a word is wasted, none is excessive. Sly humor abounds: what other writer would imagine in the reflection of interior mirrors deer free to roam a woman’s house. Holladay’s fiction is a unique treasure.” —Eve Shelnutt, author of Where We Were Cherished: Poetry

“Cary Holladay, historical fiction writer extraordinaire, brings the lost world of early Virginia—towns like Rapidan, Culpeper, and Raccoon Ford—blazingly to life in times not only of human slavery, war, flood, fever, mayhem, and treachery, but also of loyalty, passion, true love, and unbelievable personal courage in this lush new world of mountains and forests that stretch out beyond imagining. It is a world where human law has only a slight hold upon human nature, and wilderness reigns, especially in Holladay’s prizewinning novella ‘Heart on a Wire,’ set in the Alaska Territory of 1898. Time past is present even in the few contemporary stories such as ‘The Days of the Peppers,’ a story about longing, about how the past bleeds into the present as the generations pass through one town, told from the point of view of a woman whose mother has fallen in love with a bar singer specializing in Golden Oldies.

“Lover of time and place, Holladay writes with a majestic mastery of language, history, and character, telling tales both tough and true, brilliant and always surprising, like a diamond held up and turned in a shaft of sunlight. This collection deserves everything out there—our closest attention, our highest regard, and every prize in sight.” —Lee Smith

With a song-like voice and deep knowledge of the history and folklore of her native Virginia, Cary Holladay creates dazzling stories of hardship and ecstasy. A young widow romances a German immigrant while weighing a proposal from the colonial governor. Convicted of murdering her master, an enslaved woman is burned at the stake. A breakneck stagecoach ride gives a bricklayer’s apprentice the power to save or destroy his fellow passengers. An aging bachelor despairs of his marriage to a Confederate orphan. A beautiful adventuress joins the 1898 Alaska Gold Rush, charms a violent gangster, and figures out the secret of his fabulous wealth.

This seventh book from an award-winning author spans 300 years in the Old Dominion. Holladay’s people fight the wars, battle the floods, and wrest a living from a wilderness where “Time is God’s, not ours”—so says a reformed prostitute whose obsessive love for an amnesiac Yankee soldier defines her life. With a sensuous, lyrical style, Holladay holds a distinctive place in contemporary fiction.

All of these stories have appeared in major literary journals and anthologies, including Tin House and New Stories from the South: The Year’s Best.

Cary Holladay teaches at the University of Memphis.