



## The Name of the Nearest River

*Alex Taylor*

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**The Name of the Nearest River** Alex Taylor

“Alex Taylor is a fresh new voice, not just in Kentucky, but in American literature.”Chris Offutt

Like a room soaked in the scent of whiskey, perfume, and sweat, Alex Taylor's America is at once intoxicating, vulnerable, and full of brawn. These stories reveal the hidden dangers in the coyote-infested fields, rusty riverbeds, and abandoned logging trails of Kentucky. There we find tactile, misbegotten characters, desperate for the solace found in love, revenge, or just enough coal to keep an elderly woman's stove burning a few more nights. Echoing Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner, Taylor manages fervor as well as humor in these dusky, shotgun plots, where in one story, a man spends seven days in a jon boat with his fiddle and a Polaroid camera, determined to enact vengeance on the water-logged body of a used car salesman; and in another, a demolition derby enthusiast nicknamed "Wife" watches his two wild, burning love interests duke it out, only to determine he would rather be left alone entirely. Together, these stories present a resonant debut collection from an unexpected new voice in Southern fiction.

**Alex Taylor** has worked as a day laborer on tobacco farms, as a car detailer at a used automotive lot, as a sorghum peddler, as a tender of suburban lawns, at various fast food chains, and at a cigarette lighter factory. He holds an MFA from the University of Mississippi and now teaches at Western Kentucky University. He lives in Rosine, Kentucky.

## The Name of the Nearest River Details

Date : Published April 1st 2010 by Sarabande Books (first published February 19th 2010)

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Author : Alex Taylor

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## From Reader Review The Name of the Nearest River for online ebook

### Shelly says

3.5 stars, great southern short stories

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### Richard says

I loved the potential of these stories, particularly the one about the man and boy chasing the accelerating winter train to steal a bit of coal to keep warm. Adventure, poverty, ethics. This story, and each story after, quickly dwindled into a more disgusting, violent, unlikely thing I could not appreciate. Taylor's writing style is pretty good, reminds me of O'Connor and Steinbeck, but became tiresome, overdone. Certain unnecessary phrases repeated themselves, like women folding their arms "over their breasts," and a younger one folding hers "over her small breasts," even though her age was already established and the scene was murderous and we couldn't benefit from anatomizing her nor from sexualizing the situation, if that was the goal. As I went along, I got the impression I was reading a high school student's somewhat matured, literaturized fantasies. I think Alex Taylor is capable of writing something very, very good. This is not it.

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### A.C. Collins says

Alex Taylor's first collection of short stories covers rural Kentucky and doesn't leave out a single myth or preconception. Part Flannery O'Connor, part *Deliverance*, part original voice, these stories amuse, shock and sympathize. No fear of language, violence, or hurt blankets each picture of a life few of us know.

*Winter in the Blood*, *The Evening Part of Daylight*, and *The Coal Thief* are favorites.

So proud to have Mr. Taylor's signature in my book.

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### Eldonfoil TH\*E Whatever Champion says

Talented fellow. Great use of language and it's hard to find much to criticize here. When he starts painting the weeds of the land, there's smoke almost reminiscent of Pancake and Richard Currey. When he gets heavy and somber and existential, I can see that ghostly breath I'd lie down for: "...but I will tell you there are words in the flesh that the tongue cannot know. I have spoken them many times, quietly, and their noise is enough." And "The Coal Thief?" Somber throughout, perhaps THE Appalachian metaphor of the past 200 years. Put it in the anthology to teach during Appalachian Lit/Culture classes now, before it gets lost in the shuffle.

He does the other things well, too: the odd-birds, odd-tales, odd-conflicts that are quirky, living, and enjoyable---reminding of Lisa Koger or Lex Williford's stories---not that these are by any means bereft of serious matters.

My only bias: I wish there was more of the former at the expense of the latter. But haggard hills a callin', "The Coal Thief" wore Tolstoy to our land.

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### **Jamie says**

Halfway through the book I jotted down, "these stories are my favorite kind of stories, wild with a half-life of violence and beauty." That holds, or doubles, and then some.

Nearly every one of these is sticking with me, but the last three punched my breath away. Alex Taylor, write so much more.

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### **Megan Stulz says**

I had the pleasure of having Alex Taylor as my English professor at WKU a few years ago. His stories are just as beautifully written as he is well spoken. I expected nothing less.

One of my favorite pieces of advice he gave to our class: "I want you to put a splinter under the fingernail of America, watch the facial expressions that follow and put that into words to create your paper."

Incredible man, incredible book.

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### **Denton says**

This is one of the best collections of short stories I've read in a very long time. Taylor's muscular language is seconded only by his imagination. Each story was a joy to read.

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### **Andrew says**

Got this at a college bookstore in Grinnell, Iowa. Absolutely fantastic, what a gem! Shades of Hunter S. Thompson, but darker and more haunting.

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### **Caroline says**

"Now the sunken highway is still there. Drive past it someday and you'll see what it is. It is a span of concrete lost amid dirty waters, the way of all terminal journeys, and it is profitable to consider, just for a single moment, the way we settle into the want of things and that perhaps, given the bitter nature of life, what we are really after is to be stolen from, to be beset by thieves and have all our struggle end in bereavement. It's lesser and more ignoble things that bring most men to tears."

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## Adam says

Really loved this. Any book that includes noodling and multiple homicides is ok in my library.

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## Eli Cranor says

This is as good a collection of short stories as you'll find. Fans of Breece "DJ" Pancakes and Thom Jones will delight in Taylor's rendering of the downtrodden and the misunderstood.

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## Jessie says

Equal parts lyricism and grit; Taylor's Kentucky dialog gets in yr bones (maybe especially my WV bones); something classic about these stories, like I'm really being told a tale and it's being spun right here, tonight, right in this room.

Here is a voice that really defines a world - esp. the world of the demolition derby, of rivers of mythic catfish, of lonesome forgotten places. I think of Proulx, of Junot Diaz, Breece Pancake, Jayne Anne Phillips, Giardina, and of course Faulkner and O'Connor; maybe Pancake is closest, though I don't see Pancake's ache and darkness in Taylor. Taylor keeps all this company, but he holds his own.

I'm struck by how often his characters are near death, how they (and their loved ones who may or may not be that loving or loved) look at death without sentimentality and even with some satisfaction or expectation, resignation and calm.

I like that these stories hover in a contemporary, outmoded rural Appalachian experience, except for the penultimate story, my least favorite, "A Courier Among Green Trees," which is well-crafted but wooden in its language for me, more caricatured with the revenge-seekers on horseback, I suppose; although a few other stories rub shoulders with caricature, this is the only one that hits it head-on for me. For the most part, Taylor's Kentucky folks live and breathe. (The final story, too, misses a note for me, echoing O'Connor's "Good Man Is Hard to Find" -- killers out and about ready to kill out of craziness -- but the drama leans too far into the territory of horror, like a few of of B Pancake's.)

I note "This Device Must Start on Zero" for how skillfully it handles its large cast of "crash derby" participants, each member very particular; it's as if they all make up a clunky choir that somehow pulls off a terrific number.

I've had in mind lately the idea that, tooling away on our stories, we are somehow working out our salvation. That phrase came to mind many times as I read Taylor's stories by the wood stove.

(Thanks for this recommendation, Caroline.)

Here's one of the best story openers I've ever read; it gives you a taste:

It opens "Equator Joes' Famous Nuclear Meltdown Chili":

"Across the road from the Sinking Star drive-in was a field of mown hay where the maligned and bereft had gathered. This was the widower Clay Gaither and his six boys, ages five to twelve, and they had been warned from that place before. Now their truck sat ragged in the fescue, its radiator wheezing as they mounted a Dutch oven over a fire of hickory kindling...." 43

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## Charles White says

A fine, powerful debut bursting with language and metaphor that reminds me of Barry Hannah's AIRSHIPS. I look forward to what might follow from this impressive young author.

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### **Rusty says**

This is quite a book, roundhousing its way around some familiar tropes to build a work that is original yet completely familiar, if that makes sense. Five stars for sure.

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### **Andrea says**

This book is amazing. It was recommended by Frank Bill, who is another great author. The final story, "Winter in the Blood", was so good it gave me chills. I look forward to reading more by Alex Taylor.

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