



Upheaval: Stories (Kentucky Voices)

Chris Holbrook

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In 1995, Chris Holbrook burst onto the southern literary scene with *Hell and Ohio: Stories of Southern Appalachia*, stories that Robert Morgan described as "elegies for land and lives disappearing under mudslides from strip mines and new trailer parks and highways." Now, with the publication of *Upheaval*, Holbrook more than answers the promise of that auspicious debut. In eight interrelated stories set in Eastern Kentucky, Holbrook again captures a region and its people as they struggle in the face of poverty, isolation, change, and the devastation of land and resources at the hands of the coal and timber industries. In the title story, Haskell sees signs of disaster all around him, from the dangers inherent in the strip-mining machinery he and his coworkers operate to the accident waiting to happen when his son plays with a socket wrench. Holbrook employs a native's ear for dialect and turns of phrase to reveal his characters' complex interior lives. In "The Timber Deal," two brothers—Russell, a recovering addict recently released from prison, and Dwight, who hasn't worked since being injured in a coal truck accident—try to convince their upwardly mobile sister, Helen, to agree to lease out timber rights to the family land. Dwight is unable to communicate his feelings, even as he seethes with rage: "Helen can't see past herself, is what it is. If John James had fractured his back in two places, it'd be a different story. If he'd broke his neck, it'd be a different story told." Written with a gritty, unflinching realism reminiscent of the work of Larry Brown and Cormac McCarthy, the stories in *Upheaval* prove that Holbrook is not only a faithful chronicler and champion of Appalachia's working poor but also one of the most gifted writers of his generation.

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