



## **Me and Mr. Booker**

*Cory Taylor*

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Looking back, Martha could've said no when Mr. Booker first tried to kiss her. That would've been the sensible thing to do. But Martha's sixteen, she lives in a small dull town—a cemetery with lights—her father's mad, her home's stifling and she's waiting for the rest of her life to begin. Of course Martha would kiss the charming Englishman who brightened her world with style, adventure, whisky, cigarettes and the promise of sex. But Martha didn't count on the consequences.

Me and Mr. Booker is a story about feeling old when you're young and acting young when you're not.

## **Me and Mr. Booker Details**

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Author : Cory Taylor

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# From Reader Review Me and Mr. Booker for online ebook

## Bill Kidd says

Boys and girls are very different creatures. There is so much about this book that I love, but above all I love the pace of it. It so remind me of the endless, endless days of teenager years and the vague dreaming of that time. And it is written in such an Aussie voice. Lovely.

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## Sam Quixote says

Set in a small Australian town, “Me and Mr Booker” is about an affair between 16 year old schoolgirl Martha, the book’s narrator, and a 32 year old married university teacher from Britain called Mr Booker. Cory Taylor captures the voice of a 16 year old and the frustration she feels at living in a small town very well. That restless yearning to grow up, move out, and see the world is something a lot of people can relate to and Martha is a convincingly real person.

The novel explores the angle that young people, particularly teenagers, feel that they know everything and see things more clearly than their elders. Through Martha’s narration, we see a more complex relationship between Mr and Mrs Booker than the simplistic “he’s unhappy with his wife” motif that Martha imagines. Martha’s naivety is highlighted through her constantly asking Mr Booker when he will leave his wife, when they will start their new life together, and it’s painfully clear to the reader that Martha really doesn’t understand the nature of their relationship or much at all about Mr and Mrs Booker’s.

But the novel is too long. At 220 pages, it’s not a long book but despite this brevity the book felt overlong by half. Once Taylor establishes the main characters, they continue in their way straight through until the end with little variation. Martha doesn’t seem to change much and neither do the other characters. This stasis isn’t helped by a lack of plot, and the novel meanders aimlessly repeating sex scenes, clandestine meetings, and secrets hidden in public appearances. It gets very tired after a while.

There also isn’t a single likeable character in the book. Martha is bratty, deluded and a tool. Mr Booker is worse because he’s just a loser. He drinks, says horribly boring things which he and Martha think are terribly funny – his character is such a tedious bore. Mrs Booker is a pitiful character rather than likeable, she’s used as much as Martha. And then there are Martha’s parents: her emotionally damaged mother hopelessly in thrall to her separated husband, the reprehensible sponge and intellectually vacuous Victor, Martha’s father, who spends the book pursuing one pointless venture after another, borrowing money from Martha’s mother only to waste it away. The book is well written but when you don’t like any of the characters, it makes reading it that much harder.

“Me and Mr Booker” looks at the world of adult relationships through the eyes of someone who is still a child with the body of an adult and, while this is an interesting conceit, Taylor doesn’t do enough in the novel to justify its length. The story could’ve been told much more quickly and the reader spared the company of such boring and annoying characters. They are a gallery of hopeless idiots I couldn’t begin to like and by the end of the novel I’d lost all interest in their sad lives. If you’ve not read “Lolita” by Vladimir Nabokov, I would suggest reading that if you’re interested in this kind of story but I wouldn’t recommend reading “Me and Mr Booker”.

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## **Mish says**

Narrated by a 16 year old girl, Martha tells her story of life in a small country town, living with her dysfunctional family and her affair with an older married English man Mr Booker.

Her father is a twisted individual who often abuses his wife physically and mentally. He is cold hearted, lazy and can't seem to hold down a job. Her mother had a history of giving in to her interfering ex-husband, and his lame excuses for things he was responsible for. For some reason she still felt obligated and couldn't seem to let him go.

When Martha met the Booker's she was a lonely teenage girl who didn't have any friends or someone to talk too, so the Booker's were an escape from her family life. She was fascinated by the English couple as they showed an interest in her, and really seem to enjoy her company. Initially an innocent friendship was formed between the Booker's and Martha. It was when Mr Booker kissed Martha for the first time that their relationship took a different angle. This stirred up feeling's that Martha had never experienced before and for Mr Booker it became an obsession.

What developed was an intense sexual relationship that was terribly risky. I was holding my breath the whole time, just waiting for a disaster to happen. Toward the second half I could see that Martha had grown up. She became more aware how this was affecting Mr Booker, the people around her, and an understanding where this relationship was headed.

I found this book very difficult to put down. It was additive, daring, and at times humorous. I loved it.

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## **Rachael Hewison says**

I'm not sure what it was about this book but I really felt there was something lacking. Overall I would say that it is a well written book with some interesting devices used throughout but it still felt slightly empty and left me with a sense of detachment at the end.

All the characters are to some extent lonely. Taylor describes this very well and you can see how loneliness can affect the characters in different ways. Martha's mother tries to cope with her loneliness by throwing regular parties but this still is not satisfying. Mrs Booker turns to alcohol and cigarettes to cope with any pain. Victor is wonderfully described and was the character that most came to life for me. Taylor brought some humour out through his character, providing some relief from the serious content. However whilst she describes people's loneliness and flaws brilliantly, when it came to love, I felt she was lacking.

I never really believed that Martha and Mr Booker loved each other, and as the narrative progresses it comes to be that maybe this is the point. They were more using each other to escape from their problems. Her; escaping the boredom of living in such an isolated place, her problems with her parents split and her father's actions. Him; trying to escape a marriage that on the surface looks good but deeper has many problems beset as it is by drinking and pregnancy problems. As a result though because of this lack of love I felt detached from the whole relationship and wasn't bothered whether they ended up together or not. However I did enjoy the development of Martha and her journey from being a girl to a woman and it's very clear that in the later chapters of the book, she has really grown into herself, she understood more where the relationship was

going.

I was waiting for something big to actually happen, which didn't and the ending just felt bland and so the storyline felt like it dragged. Once again perhaps this is the point of the story, with Mr. Booker giving a lecture at one point during the book on how experimental films often leave the ending purposefully at a loose end giving the audience a sense of un-fulfilment and something to discuss. It seems that Taylor was aiming for this and in a way showing that whilst Martha had grown she still had the rest of her life ahead of her and the story for her didn't simply stop.

However it was very quick and easy to read and is a good book if you just want to kill a few hours.

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## Canadian Reader says

Cory Taylor's *Me and Mr. Booker*, a novel about a sixteen-year-old Australian girl's affair with a married man in his thirties is sometimes compared to Nabokov's *Lolita*, only it presents the perspective of the younger person, not the pedophile. I wouldn't know. I haven't read Nabokov and have no intention of doing so. Recently, though, I read Taylor's exceptional memoir, *Dying*, composed at the end of a life that was being consumed by metastatic melanoma. That memorable reading experience made me curious about Taylor's two novels.

Taylor's protagonist, Martha, first encounters the alcoholic, dysfunctional Mr. and Mrs. Booker, English transplants to Australia, when they attend one of the many parties thrown by her divorced mother, Jessica. Bored by life in a backwater and chafing for adventure, Martha inserts herself into the childless couple's life as a kind of surrogate child, allowing them to take her shopping and dining. Soon Martha is engaged in a full-out affair with Mr. Booker, about which Taylor provides frank but hardly sordid or titillating details. While Martha does become rather obsessed with Mr. Booker—and, for a time, naively believes he will leave his wife for her—it is clear that her relationship with this man is not a love affair by any stretch of the imagination; rather, it's a testimony to the deadness and dullness both feel about their lot.

Taylor's prose is light, playful, easy to read, and occasionally very funny. I didn't much care about the affair, to be honest, though it struck me as extremely strange that Martha's mother—who clearly has a strong bond with her daughter and is definitely aware of the relationship—should allow it to continue. Martha is like none of the girls I knew in my teens, nor is her remarkably honest, open, and nonjudgmental relationship with her mum representative of the norm.

What interested me the most about the book was Taylor's use of autobiographical details to create Martha's family unit. Martha's family, like Taylor's own, lived a largely peripatetic existence—i.e., it was dragged all over hell's half acre because the father, Victor, (like Taylor's own) was mentally ill and could not hold a job for any length of time. When Taylor's mother finally divorced him, she still felt responsible for him, just as Jessica does in the novel. These details, recreated in *Me and Mr. Booker* are a surprising source of comedy. Martha's variously direct, ironic, flippant, and baldfaced remarks to her father, who for a time, lives in a trailer in the garden, are often laugh-out-loud funny. That's likely what I will remember most about this unusual, quirky novel.

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## Marianne says

*Me and Mr Booker*, Cory Taylor's first novel, has been described as a coming of age novel. Martha is

sixteen and tells people she is emotionally scarred from her parents' marriage break-up. She considers her unemployed (and seemingly unemployable) father, Victor, mad, and in a frightening rather than an amusing way. Her mother, Jessica, a teacher, throws parties every weekend to ward off the boredom and loneliness of weekends, and her older brother Eddie is away in New Guinea. In this dysfunctional atmosphere, Martha finds herself waiting for something to happen in her life. As luck will have it, that something is Mr Booker: English, sophisticated, charming and impossible to resist, despite the fact that he comes complete with a wife. Very little is learned about Mr Booker (and never his first name) until the last chapter: the very last line of the book reveals much.

Taylor expertly captures the feel of the dull country town, the sense of boredom and even hopelessness. She lets us inside the mind of a sixteen-year-old girl, one who feels "old" because of her parents' attitude and the way men have started to look at her. Her affair with Mr Booker seems inevitable, and Taylor builds the tension throughout the book, giving the reader a sense of "this can't end well". This tension is regularly eased by the witty repartee between the characters. As well as this, Victor's delusions and his letters to Jessica, full of inappropriately grandiloquent language, are quite a source of humour. Some of his later letters are, unintentionally, truly hilarious.

Taylor gives us believable characters and authentic dialogue. As we join Martha's journey towards adulthood and maturity, it is hard not to hope she finds her way without too much heartbreak. The last page, a touching ending, has the reader wondering who really has the power over whom? Me and Mr Booker is funny, sexy, moving: altogether a great read. Let us hope Cory Taylor has more like this one to share with her readers.

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## **PattyMacDotComma says**

Such a treat to hear an authentic Aussie voice tell a universal story.

What teen-aged girl hasn't imagined attracting the attentions of a handsome older man and escaping? And what older man (only early 30s, so not 'older' to many readers), hasn't fantasized about seducing a ripe-for-the-picking young student?

Cory Taylor stretches out Martha's boring days in a hot, dusty small town without ever dragging us into a classroom or shopping with Martha's friends, or any of the things Martha must be doing to fill her days. Instead, we hear from Martha, a fairly typical 16-year-old, bored with her life, her family, and where she lives.

And then, the exotic Bookers arrive from England. An odd, colourful pair, Mr Booker flirts with pretty much everyone, while Mrs Booker drinks to oblivion.

They 'adopt' Martha and regularly shop and lunch or dine out as a threesome, which is fine with Martha's mum. But most times, Mrs B overindulges and is taken home to be tucked in bed, leaving Mr B and Martha alone. . . probably not fine with her mum, if she knew. We're never entirely sure who knows or suspects what.

There are languid, lazy afternoons under the trees in the country and occasional steamy assignations in kind of seedy motel rooms. Although sex punctuates the story, it's not the focus, and the occasional graphic phrase or scene can appear suddenly. Which is kind of the point, I think. Little is planned.

The author captures the transition from girlhood to would-be siren as Martha begins to sense men noticing

her. That's the real coming-of-age story. Beautifully written and very satisfying. I loved it.

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## **Steve lovell says**

Although I didn't realise it way back then, it was a minefield. I was married, probably innately conservative, maybe even naive, but the thought never occurred to me. They were forward, but I never felt anything like the attraction as obviously those who succumbed did. There was still something very much unformed about them, despite, in many cases, mature curves; and there was, to me, something necessarily inviolate. A few didn't see it that way – and certainly not Mr Booker. The world was so much different then, and, of course, in their eyes, I very soon became 'old' so, if it ever was, it was no longer an issue.

In my first year of teaching, so close to where I live now in the island's south, it was tough going in the classroom. I had no time to consider anything else, only to survive. By the end of that year I was on top it all in that small school on the urban fringe of Hobart, and in 1975 I was transferred to a large provincial high. That was a very different beast indeed. That's where I encountered them, those Marthas of my experience, and, in reality, there were very few years between them and me, a callow young man out front of their classroom. Martha types - while not exactly abounding, they were there.

To me, having taught so many of them over the forty years of my career, Cory Taylor's 'heroine' is totally believable. Worldly and brazen, outwardly already a woman, but only sixteen, she was ready for the louche, alcoholic Mr Booker, a married teacher, but at least not at her place of education. He presented himself, was obviously much taken by her youthful attributes, and she was definitely not backward in committing to the affair, even if the results were not quite as disastrous as the back cover blurb may have the reader believe.

In the time setting of 'Me and Mr Booker', and when I was simultaneously operating in schools, there was less reserve between teacher and senior student than exists today. Of course the line was still there that was not to be crossed, but the hands off mantra so stringently enforced in this century, was a fuzzier notion, and rumours of overfamiliarisation were rampant. In my early years, one teacher was quietly shifted away when it became apparent he was enticing senior girls to pose 'artistically' for his camera, and another was known to be 'entertaining' some female students in his own abode. Two male colleagues were seemingly very enamoured with the same young lady, to the extent they were engaged in sparring over her, and a starting out female teacher was rumoured to be throwing parties for her senior lads. But all of that was when I too was a novice, and as the profession became hoarier and guidelines more rigidly enforced, 'issues' of that ilk diminished. So there were no Marthas for this teacher, thankfully, and that was the case for the vast number of my 'fellow' professionals.

I do remember one young lady from my early years in a vocation that was so much younger back then, and she came floating back as I perused 'Mr Booker' - not that she behaved in any way resembling Taylor's sexually overt fictional character. I took a shine to her and her to me, in a platonic fashion. Articulate, academically capable, elfin, with wonderfully twinkling eyes, she had several of the younger brigade of male teachers in a spin, as there were issues in her background that required much 'counselling'. There was no hint of fuzzy lines being crossed and she was delightful company, seemingly more at home around adults than her peers. I remember feeling quite chuffed when she chose me as a partner for a dance at socials. It wasn't uncool or sinister back then for staff to gyrate with pupils. In the end, it was my senior master and mentor who, realising her vulnerability, took her under his wing and saw her safely through her senior years, but more of him anon. All things come to an end, and the last I remember of her was a chaste kiss on my

cheek and a whispered thank you in my ear as she bade me farewell me at her leavers' dinner. I wonder now how her life panned out, if she made good use of her rich talents? There were others I vaguely remember who had 'crushes', gave me small tokens of friendship, and endearments in Christmas cards, but it was her face, rightly or wrongly, I recalled when I read this book.

In relating all this, and knowing what I know, I would never take the higher moral ground when it comes to Taylor's Mr B – if we learn his first name I missed it – and his actions with Martha. The fact remains, and I repeat, she was only sixteen. Cory Taylor handles the subject matter very well, and a highlight for me of the book was the 'screwball' repartee between the two leading characters, covering up any inner turmoil present. The author's fluid style captures the tenor of those times perfectly, of lives suffered away from, and mostly lusting for, big cities, where the 'action' was. Mr and Mrs Booker's domestic world of booze and marital emptiness, presumably pining for a child that could not be, saw them befriend Martha and her 'put upon' mother. Mr B goes one step further and carries on his not so clandestine affair, a relationship that the reader knows will have to eventually unravel, presumably big time, and unravel it does. For Martha, losing her virginity to the Englishman is her escape from tedium into a more adult world, and she handles it all with aplomb, even if she half knows it is all doomed. There is not a 'decent' male to be had in the novel, with Martha's estranged father being deeply flawed and odd, the brother only marginally less so. At least the women have excuses for being the way they were. Mostly, it seemed, they were ambivalent to the goings on, till Mrs B spits it volcanically. Nasty possibilities rear their head as to possible outcomes for the two affairées as the narrative progresses, but – spoiler alert - none are forthcoming, and the novel ends with more of a whimper than a bang, so to speak. It is decidedly a better work of fiction for that. It was not happy-ever-afters though.

And for a happy ending in similar circumstances, let's go back to the man who shepherded the aforementioned non-fictional young lady, the one who shone so brightly in my memory during my reading of this fine debut. He too fell in love with one of his senior girls during his early years of teaching but, unlike Mr B, he waited for her to reach a more acceptable age. When I knew them they were happily married and devoted. She was gorgeous, and he went on to a long and successful principalship at one of my island's prestigious schools for girls – and that's the way it should be.

Cory Taylor with this, for me, has proven her chops and I avidly await the arrival of her sophomore effort, 'My Beautiful Enemy', due for release in April '13 – a book that also deals with matters of the heart, but in very different circumstances. It's in my diary.

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## **Cher says**

### **3 stars - It was good.**

Such a strange and raw novel, full of despicable characters and set during a time that is so different from today, despite not being that far away from the present. It kept my interest throughout and would provide a plethora of discussion points for a book club.

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**First Sentence:** Everything I am about to tell you happened because I was waiting for it, or something like it.



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## Michael says

Moving, refreshing, suprising, at times disturbing, sexy and funny. All of these words can be used to describe Ozzie author Cory Taylor's debut novel. At the heart is the story of a young girl dissatisfied with her life, her family and her surroundings.

There is no suprise with Martha falling for the suave and much older Mr Booker. But what was refreshing was the frank way in wich there relationship is described. All the while Martha deals with her emotions for her new found love, her parents breakup and her brothers departure. Wich leaves Martha and her mother who fights her own battle trying to free herself of her ex husbands hold on her.

Taylor does a wonderful job of portraying the story from that of Martha as if she is narrating a movie and expertly creates a sense of boredom living in a small country town.

If you go into this with an open mind you'll be rewarded with what is a fantastic read. Taylor has done a superb job with her first novel and i cant wait to see what she comes up with next.

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## Shirley Marr says

The 60s imbued cover, the promise of a fresh and modern take on the whole "coming-of-age-story" narrated by a teenage girl who begins a relationship with an older man. This looked liked an indie-read that had "me" stamped all over it. I stared at it longingly for the longest time every time I went to the bookstore. I made plans in my head to buy it.

Unfortunately, this was the single most disappointing read of the whole year.

Let me explain to you my woes.

It all started out well. I found the tone of the prose addictively readable. We are introduced to a dull town referred to "a cemetery with lights" and there is some wonderful setting up of the story through the eyes of our doe-eyed protagonist. Then... the story goes through a back and forth, push-pull thing which kinda goes nowhere and then unfortunately a few chapters off from ending, the novel suddenly stops, starts to peter out and ends.

I know that this novel is suppose to be realistic and the overall theme is "life happens and this is the story and there are no Hallmark endings"... but maybe it might have achieved this, along with a bit more poignancy, if the story ended a few chapters earlier.

There's a great piece of writer's advice from Martha Alderson that goes... a beginning of a novel hooks readers, but it's the ending that creates fans. For me, I felt that this couldn't be more true than for *Me and Mr Booker*.

Disappointed.

Then, I am divided over the characterisations. Martha, the 16 year old narrator is likeable enough. It is hard not to see her as a real, fallible girl and to emotionally invest with her the whole way. Her father on the other hand - I can honestly say is the creepiest and most pathetic character I have encountered in recent memory. If I could give him a character award that was a shiny blue ribbon with "1st" in the middle I would. This villain pleases me.

But then there's the titular character, Mr Booker. I dislike everything about him. From him as a character, to the way he was written. He's neither a villain, nor a hero. What I can be certain is that he is boring. It's a bit of a problem if the *weakest character in the whole book is the titular character*.

And to top it all off, what worries me is that this book has been blurbed as "sexy". Not the authors fault. I thought it would translate to "exploitive" but I found the more adult scenes justified and in context of the story. What is unacceptable is that it has been allowed to be endorsed as sexy. That is completely socially irresponsible. I am not a prude, but borderline statutory rape is not about being "prudish".

Text seem to have a recurring problem with using appropriate endorsement blurbs (see All I Ever wanted).

I'm probably shooting myself in the foot (actually more like head), but I'd be a coward if I didn't call what I saw. So therefore, this review is what it is, no bones about it.

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## Text Publishing says

*'Elegant and controlled and wickedly funny.'*

**David Vann**

*'Cory Taylor's Me and Mr Booker has the heart of Lolita and the soul of Catcher In The Rye, this is one of the most assured debut novels I have ever read. These characters feel so real that they become almost family. Refreshing, surprising, sexy and ultimately very moving.'*

**Krissy Kneen**

*'A vibrant, questioning and unpredictable read.'*

**West Australian**

*'Cory Taylor's characters are magnificently created.'*

**Australian**

*'Me and Mr Booker is sharply observed and blackly comic, but it is also a tender depiction of love, sex, power and one girl's heartbreaking step into adulthood.'*

**Australian Bookseller + Publisher**

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## Michael says

Martha is a 16 year old girl stuck in a boring little town with a family that is slowly destroying her. Then one day she meets and falls in love with a married man that will change everything for her; Mr Booker. At first I thought this movie would be like Lolita or An Education, but this took a completely different turn. It turns out this was more a story about Martha discovering who she is and what she needs to do to make her life better.

Me and Mr Booker is a sexy and yet very disturbing novel, with a great sense of pacing. Cory Taylor did an excellent job at describing the boredom of living in a small town, the emotions behind being alone and having an uncontrollable love towards someone you know you shouldn't and know would end up hurting you. This debut novel was a quick and easy read which is well worth taking the time to read. The whole relationship between Martha and Mr Booker may be hard to take so I can't recommend it to everyone, but if you think it wouldn't affect you, then this book is worth reading.

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### **AmberBug \*shelfnotes.com\* says**

www.shelfnotes.com review

Dear Reader,

This was definitely a book. I'm not sure if I enjoyed it or what but I kept reading, so that's something. This has been compared to Lolita, and while I can definitely see why... I didn't have that same feeling of disgust. Martha, sixteen and bored with her small town life, meets the Bookers through one of her mother's parties. Lacking a father with any good qualities, it's hardly a surprise that Martha is taken with Mr. Booker. This couple is all glam (especially to a sixteen-year-old), with a keen interest in Martha, taking her out with them on a regular basis.

I didn't exactly have anything to gripe about but I wasn't exactly wowed either. Cory Taylor writes a great page, and you definitely get a great feel of who the cast is. I just don't have much to say about anything else. It was a book. It was a book that I read start to finish. It was a book that kept my interest. It was a book.

Happy Reading,  
AmberBug

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### **Alayne says**

I was pretty disappointed with this book, I had to force myself to finish it. I found it quite dull, not much of a story line, and none of the characters were particularly likeable. There was not much suspense or drama, they were sleeping together then they weren't, then they were, then they weren't. And I didn't particularly care too much one way or the other.

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