



## Eat and Get Gas: A Novel

**J. A. Wright**

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*A teenager forges new bonds with people who help her to survive her troubled times in the poignant novel Eat and Get Gas.*

A teenager navigates life in *Eat and Get Gas*, J. A. Wright's endearing novel about love, family flaws, and change.

When Evan's brother is drafted into the Vietnam War, their socialist mother takes him to Canada to evade service. Gene, Evan's hapless father, is a veteran who is angrier and testier than ever, having gone back and forth for more than one tour of duty. He takes Evan and her younger brother Teddy to their grandmother's Washington café and gas station, *Eat and Get Gas*, which is situated at the edge of the woods. Here, Evan meets her extended family and their gallant piano virtuoso neighbors.

The cast is made up of vibrant personalities. Evan's grandmother is an anchor and a sensible influence on others; her Aunt Vivian is a brash and amusing waitress whose practiced banter sometimes strikes Evan as too harsh. Both women help Evan to understand some of the traumas that the veterans around them experience, and why her Uncle Frankie's personality, like Gene's, has changed. Such PTSD fuels tragedies in the novel too.

The book is pithy, skipping through Evan's concerns in a way that fast establishes its conflicts. In Washington, Evan is thrust into a caretaking role for which she's not equipped; still, she protects Teddy. She's wary about Gene's parenting skills: they dig for clams before school (he deems it a survival skill), and his views about other people differ from her own. But despite being aware of such tensions, Evan also finds *Eat and Get Gas* and its surroundings to be a warm haven for her family as it deals with her mother's continuing absence.

As Evan comes to better understand her family members, she matures, realizing that she can't return to the past. She finds her own path despite the uncertainties that surround her. She helps with a rural mail route, makes a friend, absorbs the stories of others, and learns how to sew and roller skate. This coming-of-age is somewhat interrupted by a devastating revelation late in the text, though; the effect is jarring.

Tender moments of genuine connection mix with hard truths in *Eat and Get Gas*, a poignant coming-of-age novel in which a teenager from a complicated family forges new, life-giving bonds.

KAREN RIGBY (January 10, 2023)

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