

# East Fork: A Journal of the Arts

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## Fiction

[Amy Waugh](#)

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### Earl is Dead

By: Amy Waugh

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"Earl is dead."

What did she just say? I must not have heard her right, so I ask her to repeat herself.

"Earl is dead."

The same words. She really said them. My hands begin to shake and my heartbeat speeds up to match my mind as it races around trying to decipher what that means.

No more concealer.

No more long sleeves.

No more alcohol induced seductions.

I hear a car door slam shut somewhere outside and jump with a squeak. Marianne is still talking into the phone, but I cannot hear what she is saying through the buzzing. The front door rattles as someone tries to open it. A cold wave of fear rushes through my blood, turning my limbs to fragile ice.

It can't be him. It can't. Marianne said he was dead, and I believe her. She said she would take care of it and she did. She wouldn't give me false hope. The door rattles again and the knob begins to turn but doesn't get far with the dead bolt secure. Whoever is outside isn't deterred and begins to beat relentlessly against the door. There is yelling and more pounding. It mirrors the thumping in my chest.

"Marianne," I whisper into the phone. But she is no longer on the other end of the line. I drop the receiver and begin to panic in earnest. Screams leave my throat, high and long they echo of the walls. I back myself into a corner and sit hugging my legs as tight to my chest, burying my face into the V formed by my knees. In this position, I feel hidden and removed from whatever is happening outside.

A loud crash and boots stomping over the wooden floor have me trying to hug myself ever tighter. I squeeze my eyes shut so hard the tears that refused to fall earlier leak out the corners and down my temples.

"Lucy!"

Earl roars my name and I know that this is the ends for me. The tears fall harder as I think about how Marianne tried to save me, and I worry what Earl will do to her after he finishes with me. I squeeze my legs and my eyes tighter.

A hand lands on my shoulder, but it's gentle, soothing. Not pain inflicting like Earl's touch. The sensation is so foreign to me that my eyes jerk open to see what new threat is here. Blaring light distorts my vision, but I notice right off that I am not at home. As my eyes adjust, my hearing also comes back the buzzing fading away as the sounds in the room become clear. The beeping of a monitor and the false inhale of a breathing tube. I am in the hospital, again.

Marianne's hand squeezes my shoulder letting me know she is there just like every time before. And just like every time before she tells me, "I'll kill him, Lucy. I swear to God, I will kill that bastard."

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### “We Got Nothing Better To Do”

By Gabriella Sizemore

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Brian died in his bliss. In his ecstasy. In euphoria's splendorous grasp, with a needle sticking out of his arm on my couch. His Sublime shirt was ragged and his hair repulsive. Inbetween my sobs, I wondered what that was like. To be unkempt, but feel mighty enough that you feel like God, on a bigger throne than he could ever have. He couldn't tell me now. I don't think he ever tried.

One of the officers came up to me, his face completely neutral. He had no furrowed eyebrows, nor a comforting voice. He was too used to this.

"Can I get your name?" he asked, pulling out a pen and paper pad. Wow, they really used those. Once I had forced my body to calm down, I replied,

"Amber Atwood."

"Okay, Amber. You found Brian's body?"

Brian's body. His body. Oh, God.

Oh, God, his fucking body.

I nodded furiously.

His body. Brian is gone. Mush and brittle bones were left.

His body. I let him stay here for a week, until he could find a place because his dad kicked him out. Why wouldn't you do that for someone who had been your best friend since you were ten? Of course he could stay.

"Yes," I whispered. Would they suspect me for his death? Am I to blame for his body? I guess the officer didn't think so. I looked into his eyes that put some effort into conveying only false empathy. He spoke,

"I'm sorry for your loss. We'll take him from here. There's nothing else to do."

They took his body. They left my home. I wish I had too.

\*\*\*\*\*

Later that week, I took my lunch break with Kayla. Working at McD's was the highest you could get on the profession food chain here. The gold standard. It meant people were waiting to swoop in and snatch your job as soon as you made a small mistake. It was the same customers, the same orders, so few mistakes were made. Kayla and I had to make it somewhat fun every once in a while. Sometimes we'd give people sweet tea instead of regular tea! How thrilling and despicable!

Kayla was nice. She looked ten years older than she actually was, using corkscrew curls as a failed attempt to cover that up. Other than that, I've never thought too much about her. I heard a voice behind me exclaim,

"What happened to Brian was just a tragedy!"

At the mention of his name, I whipped my head around to see Nathan...Nathan something. I never knew his last name. He was two grades above Brian, Kayla, and I. Nirvana t-shirt, never grew out of the Bieber haircut- his appearance would have been embarrassing hadmost boys in the town not followed that look. He was talking up a storm to some poor old lady inline. He rambled, "Brian and I were super close. We were like brothers."

Lies. It's a small town, but everybody doesn't know everybody. They do like to pretend though. They like to believe in the fable that "small town charm" and "closely knit communities" aren't just terms society made up in the 1950s to keep everyone in line. Alan Ginsberg would vomit all on this town. Fact is, Nathan knew of Brian, but never talked to him.

It's a little repulsive isn't it? When someone dies, people immediately latch onto that death like a mouse with its first cube of perfectly cut French cheese. Everyone becomes the person who was closest to Brian. They'll tell his parents how funny he was (he wasn't, he always stumbled over his words and got embarrassed), how much he'll be missed (not too much, he was a pretty shy guy), and that they're there for them if they need anything.

It sounds nice, that last one. It appears to be filled with goodwill, compassion, and humanity. It's ill-intentioned. They help so they have a story to tell everyone about the good service (which it wasn't) they performed for the grieving family of someone that they lost, whom they were close to (which they weren't). When a death comes around, the words "me, myself, and I" come traipsing behind in a swift manner.

I don't know why people are like that.

"That's the third O.D. this month," Kayla stated, grabbing my attention. I raised my eyebrows, urging her to continue. "First it was Amy, then Mason. Now Brian."

The name still stung a little. I wasn't crying anymore though, which was an improvement. Tears were the body's strange way of coping with something the mind can't handle on its own. She took a bite of her sandwich and I let out a "that's crazy", which allowed her to dribble on about whatever came to her mind. She talked with food in her mouth and I had to keep myself from scolding her like a child. Now that I think about that, I did that to her a lot, actually.

"They're closing down The Stop again." I heard worry in her voice, but it was absent from her face.

Ah, yes. The Stop. The ice cream shop between houses on Maple and the school. It wasn't really a shop though. There were a few wooden tables outside the actual "shop", which was more like one of those places where you buy food and drinks at a football game? I didn't know what those are called. While everyone was at the game, Brian and I would stay home, watching Gilmore Girls, wishing our small town was like theirs.

"I'm sorry," I told Kayla in my best sorrow-filled voice. Give me that Oscar, now. She droned on,

"I already put in my notice here. There's no way they'll give the job back to me. Now I'm gonna be unemployed. Don't know where else I'm gonna find someplace to work. Not in this economy. You sure got lucky with your job."

I clenched my fist that wasn't holding my sandwich, holding back a venomous rampage that would ensue had I opened my mouth. Lucky? How was I lucky to work at the most commercial fast food place in the world- the only place to eat in the town, unless you wanted to drive half an hour to a Wendy's. Was this the rest of my life? Burgers and sleep and dead friends- oh my!

\*\*\*\*\*

After work, I walked down to Julia's house. I passed several boarded up houses across from the CVS. The laundromat was still open for reasons unknown to me because nobody ever went in there. The movie theatre that could only show two movies at a time was vacant. I saw Final Destination 5 there once. I remembered sitting in the eerie room, ceiling fans running furiously but failing to cool me off. I looked up at the sky, into the sun, almost hoping that it would blind me. The damn sun could shine throughout the entire sky and this town would still remain grey.

I approached her pale blue house, dodging the cobweb that placed itself on the column of her porch. Before I could even knock on the door, Julia opened it, with her hair in a bun and her newborn daughter in her arm. She tossed a big grin my way as we exchanged pleasantries and she let me in. Papers were covering the small table in the kitchen and baby clothes had engulfed almost every other piece of furniture.

"How have you been?" she asked in a tone that I knew was referring to Brian. Everyone had been using it when talking to me. I shrugged and looked at the ugly baby in her arms. I didn't think most babies were cute, but this one was gifted an extreme case of hideous. Poor little Ashleigh. She had to live with that face and that extremely unfortunate name.

"I'm alright," I replied solemnly. Julia takes a pack of cigarettes out of her purse and offers me one. I refuse, but light hers for her. She makes sure to blow the smoke in the opposite direction of her baby.

"It's crazy isn't it? What happened with Brian? I mean, seven months ago we were all sitting in class, just waiting to graduate. I thought me getting pregnant would be the craziest thing to happen to us all!" Before I could respond, a voice boomed from behind me,

"It was certainly the best thing that ever happened to us."

Kevin. Julia's husband. I couldn't help but smile at the amount of sarcasm he let drip from the word "best". Julia just shook her head and put her cigarette out. I watched Kevin make his way over to the couch. His shirt had a few holes in it, and his jeans were the same pair he'd been wearing for months. I always got the feeling that he wasn't here with us. He'd listen to you babble on, but he'd allow that distant feeling to flow into you. His way of getting you to shut up. I envied that power.

This obviously wasn't the life he had planned out for himself. Too bad for him and Julia: getting pregnant out of wedlock in this town meant you had to wed. Either that or you could be crucified. They'll pretend they love each other for a few more months, maybe a year. Then they'll divorce. Just like their parents. Just like mine. Just like everyone's.

Julia's phone went ding! She let out an exasperated sigh as she read the message.

"My mom's having another panic attack. I gotta go help her."

"Oh, have fun!" Kevin said, laughing his ass off right after. I gave Julia a sympathetic look (genuine, not my Oscar-worthy one) and she just looked down at her daughter, holding back tears. I wondered how many times she had to grow new skin just for it to be shed all over again. She tightened her grip on the baby, took her purse, and headed out the door. I sighed, making my way over to the couch to sit next to Kevin.

"You're a dick," I stated matter-of-factly. His brown eyes met mine.

"I never denied that. Better to be a dick than pretend like playing house is fulfilling like it is for her." We both let out a chuckle and let our stares linger a bit longer.

To be honest, I didn't know Kevin all that well, but at least he didn't bullshit. This seemed like the perfect scenario: wife leaves the house with the baby, husband who isn't getting any anytime soon from his insecure wife- it seemed as if it was sculpted like a sinful statue. I don't think I really detested the thought.

Instead, he smashed my fantasy by grabbing the tackle box that was sitting on the coffee table. When it opened, I expected there to be hooks and lures, not needles filled with...well, I knew what it was filled with. My breath hitched, thinking of Brian. Amy. Mason. Their bodies.

"W-Why do you have this?" I stuttered. He smirked and grabbed one of the needles, flicking it in a way that surely hurt his nail. He looked at it the way he should have looked at his wife. "Does Julia know you do this?"

He simply nodded and said,

"She understands. Her brother sells. It takes the edge off for dealing with a crying baby who never shuts the hell up."

That baby didn't cry once in all the times I had visited. I steadied my breathing and crossed my arms to make myself feel more comfortable.

"Well can you not use it while I'm here?"

His face fell and he once again looked into my eyes. This time, there was meaning. There was purpose.

"I know Brian is still fresh in your mind. He seemed like a good kid. The thing is, he was stupid with it."

"Don't call him-"

"He did too much. Just a little too much. The thing is, if you do it just right, it can make you so much better. It can break you away from the blues and greys of this goddamn town. It gave me a way of living. It can give you one too."

I felt my entire body start shaking. Why was he doing this to me? Was this a test? What happened if I passed? I knew I wasn't trapped, he was offering me a choice.

"I don't know, Kevin."

He scoffed and grabbed my hand, which I yanked back as harsh as possible. He didn't yell like I expected him to. He just whispered in an angelic voice,

"Aren't you tired, Amber? Aren't you tired of making the same sandwiches every day? Aren't you tired of spending your paycheck every week? Aren't you tired of knowing that you're stuck, just like your parents? Just like I am stuck, just like my parents are, just like my kid will be?"

As the words he spoke started to make more sense to me. They revealed themselves to me, and cried for release. I eyed the needle his hand, taking note of how clean it was, and how gorgeous the substance looked sitting in it. I put my hands on his shoulder.

"You won't give me enough to kill me? To make me like Brian?"

"Absolutely not." He looked me up and down one last time. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

I shrugged and laughed. "What else do I have to do?"

Kevin nodded, feeling secure that his words seeped into me. I rolled up my sleeve and extended my arm out to him. He took the belt off of his waist and wrapped it around my arm. By that point, I couldn't watch. I'd just wait to feel it.

I looked up at the ceiling fan, letting my mind wander. I wondered if it would the way Lou Reed says it does. Or the way that it seems in Trainspotting. I thought about all the dead people, burgers, fries, and the ice cream shop. The conversations with worthless people, whom, like me, thought they were different from everyone else in the cesspool of wannabe derelicts in a town that won't let us go, no matter how hard we punch. Maybe I could drive out of town later to get some Wendy's. It hits my bloodstream. I start flying.

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