

Stealing Kevin's Heart

A Young Adult Novel
(a chapter excerpt)

By M. Scott Carter

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Chapter 1

LIFE SUCKS. The whole world, everything, bites. I don't care if I ever wake up. I don't give a rip about school—I haven't been in days.

I could care less about my little sister, Jenny, or her piano recital.

Then there's Bill—he's planned some lame family trip for months now—well, screw him. I'm not going.

Life sucks—in stereo.

It didn't used to. It most definitely does now.

Take today. I'm trapped in the car with my stupid sister and Bill and Clarise (my parents, in case you're wondering). We're driving home on this stupid, rainy day past the stupid, big church where we spent two, stupid hours listening to a stupid, fat bald guy in a rumpled dark suit with a

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beanie-thing on his head go on and on about all this stupid religious mumbo jumbo I really don't give a damn about.

I told them both yesterday I wasn't going. I spelled it out clearly: I did not want to go. Did they listen? Not hardly. They made me go. My life is bad television.

"Yes, ladies and gentlemen, it's the 'Alex Anderson Show.' The show about the world's most screwed up sixteen-year-old, brought to you by . . . those wonderful folks, Bill and Clarise. Tonight, you'll see Alex fall apart, on your local TV station . . . stay tuned."

"Honey." Clarise gave me her big-eyed, sad-puppy look. "You need to be there. It's important you go. You need closure. And you owe it to Kevin and his family."

I don't owe anybody anything. Not now. Not ever. Besides, who cares if I'm there? I don't. I was ready to tell her off when Bill jumped in.

"Now, Alex," said Bill, in his formal, I'm-the-father voice, because he wanted to make a point. "Don't argue. Your mother knows what's best. Besides, if you go, you'll feel better."

Good ol' Bill. He really thinks he can solve every problem if he talks like a sports announcer and sticks out his chest. He and Clarise think they're the "cool" parents. Clarise is always reading the same books as Jenny, and Bill

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thinks that since he's memorized two songs by Green Day he's in touch with the younger generation.

They don't know squat.

For all her books, age-inappropriate clothes, and "insight" into teenagers, Clarise is about useless. She's always giving me this "get in touch with your feelings" crap, and trying to tell me about how she "found herself" when she traveled with some rock band.

Whatever.

I wish they would just leave me alone.

Right now, I don't care. Right now my life is over. It's dark and cold, and no hovering adult is going to tell me what to do. I don't want to hear how sorry they are, and how concerned they are, and how things will get better . . . blah, blah, blah, blah.

Right now, being dead sounds ideal.

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Did you ever want to go back in time? I do. If I could, I know exactly how far back and just where I would go: two weeks ago today, here in Stillwater, America.

Why?

'Cause that's when my best friend in the whole world died—some drunken lowlife driving a rusty pickup

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slammed into him and sprayed him all over the road.

That's why I'd go back.

I'd stop time for that one moment.

I'd stop time so Kevin wouldn't die.

Chapter 2

OKAY, SO THAT's the story—Kev's dead. I'll tell you something else, too.

I was there.

Not that I want to talk about watching my best friend get his guts slammed all over the pavement, but my counselor, Therapy Chick, makes me write all this stuff down. We have this deal: I write about all the stuff that's bugging me, and she promises to keep Bill and Clarise from sending me away.

So I've kept my end of the bargain—you're reading it—but you can bet I'll end up getting screwed. Therapy Chick and Bill and Clarise will make sure of that. But maybe, just maybe, if I keep writing . . .

Since you already know Kevin is dead, you need to understand that it messed me up but good—and for a long time. See me and Kev grew up together. Most everybody

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assumes we've always been friends. Heck, some people think we were brothers.

Truth is, we were best friends.

Kev was the skinny, goofy-looking geek with the computer brain, and I was the jock who protected him, who kept him from getting beat up at school.

Our friendship started when I was three. Bill moved us to Stillwater (Bill's a professor of ancient music at Oklahoma State), and we settled into a big house on Country-side Drive.

We hadn't lived there very long when another family moved to the neighborhood—the Rubensteins. They had two kids: a girl and a boy. The girl, Erin, was about seven. She always wore dresses, rode a pink bicycle, and her teeth were covered with braces.

She was a raging snot.

At first, I couldn't stand Erin, but her little brother was great. He was my age with bright red hair. He drove a silver tricycle, and he ate all the time. Didn't matter when or where, Kevin was always munching on something.

He also liked to play, and he had the coolest stuff on the planet to play with. That is, as long as you didn't try to make off with his favorite blanket or his stuffed cat.

His name was Kevin Gabriel Rubenstein, and we got

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to be friends real fast. ‘Course he was the only boy my age on the block—I sure wasn’t going to play trucks with his snot-rag sister.

It wasn’t long before Kev (that’s what I always called him) and I started hanging out together. Kev always made me laugh. Clarise said we were “attached at the hip,” but she was always smiling when she said it. She meant it in a good way. Even if she didn’t understand the attraction. By the time we hit kindergarten we were a team.

I’m not sure what glue held us together, but I guess, well, we must have needed each other.

Kev was not the most athletic guy in the world. He was skinny, couldn’t throw a baseball worth a damn, and yeah, he was the last guy picked for the team—no matter the sport. Being Jewish didn’t help him, either. The rednecks around here always called him names and made stupid jokes.

It didn’t help that he looked like a doofus.

I mean a serious, USDA-Grade A doofus—a piece of string with feet. Bill liked to say Kev was just skinny, that he’d fill out later.

“Kevin’s fluid,” he said. “He’s built like a jet, aerodynamic.”

“Naww,” I countered. “He’s a pipe cleaner, or a

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stick, plain and simple.”

Didn't matter, though, 'cause Kev was my friend. And what he lacked in muscle, he made up for in turbo-powered, rocket-scientist-quality brains.

“. . . our special guest star tonight, making an all-too-brief appearance is Kevin Rubenstein. Kevin will play the part of Alex's best friend . . .”

And me? Well, I played football, ran some track, and got in enough fights with the rest of the jocks that most of them left me alone. I guess that's why Kev and me hit it off so well. We each had our area in the friendship. I did the physical stuff, and Kev . . . well, Kev handled anything involving a book, a pencil, a computer, or serious thinking.

Kev was also a sharer.

He gave me chicken pox in first grade, mumps in the second, and last year he loaned me some gross, stomach-thing that parked me in the bathroom for days. I remember that last one well. I spent most of my time puking.

The first time it happened, I was sleeping over at his house when my stomach blew up.

“Sorry about infecting you with puker-ritus,” Kev laughed, as I raced for the bathroom.

After paying homage to the toilet, I stumbled downstairs, with my gut aching. “It's okay. I just hurled on your

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bed,” I told him.

The look on Kev's face was priceless—especially as he raced past me—and discovered I wasn't kidding.

So, yeah, you could say that, at times, our friendship bordered on weird. But it didn't take long before we became a two-headed, four-armed thing that didn't take guff from anyone, could outsmart the A-listers at school, and was known to be able to clean out a refrigerator in five seconds flat.

‘Course we did a lot more stuff than just eat. We caused all sorts of trouble and had a great time in the process. See there was more to Kev than just the skinny geek the world saw. Like art. Kev was about the best artist in the world. He drew stuff all the time. In fact, that's what he wanted to do when he went to college.

“One of these days, you're gonna be watching my cartoons on television,” he told me one afternoon. “I got tons of ideas.”

I believed him, too. He always carried a pencil and a sketch pad. He'd done it since third grade. Third grade was Mrs. Talkington's class. She was this big lady who thought kids should sing, play, or draw. She never got mad, and she always smiled. She also talked cool.

Kev thought she was the greatest teacher in the world,

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because she let him draw during his spare time. When he finished something she'd put it up on the bulletin board for everyone to see.

“Master Kevin, you’re going to be quite the artist some day.” Mrs. Talkington came from England and spoke in a formal, British accent. “I *so* look forward to attending your first showing.”

“Thanks, mum,” Kev said, with a smile.

Kev wasn't too concerned about conquering the art world; he just liked to draw. He was all about the pictures. I guess Mrs. Talkington must have figured that out, 'cause by the time we made it out of third grade, he had covered most of her walls with them.

I still have one—a sketch of Kev and me standing in front of the Rubenstein Cartoon Studio.

I took it from his locker after he died.

It may sound lame for a guy my age to be holding on to a drawing like it was a lifeline.

But it's all I got.

Chapter 3

IT'S STRANGE. BUT it's getting harder to remember all the fun things we once did. Seems like all I think about lately is weird, death-stuff.

Somewhere in the back of my head all the fun faded like a picture left in the sun way too long. Now, all I remember is the day he died.

I don't want to think about Kev. But, it's like everything I do, or everywhere I go, something happens to remind me my best friend is dead.

I'm sick of it.

The dreams won't go away either. I don't want to open my eyes for fear of what I'll see. I keep re-living that day, that moment over and over. I guess . . . I mean . . . now listen, I can't believe I'm writing this down (and no, I

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haven't told my folks) . . . maybe I can't get all of this out of my head because I'm . . . I'm the reason Kev died.

There, I said it.

I wrote it down.

Now you know.

I'm the reason Kevin is dead. I have never told anybody what happened, I mean what *really* happened.

Until now.

About the Author

M. Scott Carter is an award-winning investigative reporter. He lives and writes in Oklahoma City, with his wife, Karen, and their four children.

Stealing Kevin's Heart is Carter's debut young adult novel.

