

NO-FAULT

Keith's father died three days ago of a heart attack. He had taken his son, Keith, out driving so the boy could get in enough practice hours to get his license. Keith's father was always a bit nervous about being a passenger. On every turn, his father would give Keith advice as he gripped the arm rest tightly. A few nights ago though, Keith's father was unusually quiet as Keith drove. When asked what was wrong, his father told Keith that he had some pains in his chest. Once he heard this, Keith suggested they go to the emergency room right away, but Keith's father brushed it off, saying he was fine. Keith really did want to keep driving. He wanted to practice parallel parking in the lot behind the church. It wasn't until they were on the way home that the pains got worse. Soon Keith's father slumped over. In an absolute panic, Keith stopped the car and flagged down help. By the time the EMS arrived, Keith was sobbing. Though they tried repeatedly to revive his father, he was pronounced dead that night. Since then, Keith has barely spoken. His mother and sister were devastated and shocked. It is now the first day of the viewing at the funeral home. Keith stands outside of the doors afraid to look at his father's body in the open casket. He sits in silence when Jude, his 18-year-old sister, approaches him.

JUDE: (Long pause.) So . . . How ya doin'?

KEITH: (Quietly.) All right.

JUDE: Liar. I don't know why I'm asking you that. People have been asking me that all day, and all I feel like screaming back is, "How the hell do you *think* I'm doing?!" (Sighs.) This dress is ugly. I look like a saggy immigrant, don't I?

KEITH: You look fine.

JUDE: Come on, all I need is the babushka on my head and the rotting teeth. There weren't a lot of choices. Black dresses come in four styles: tacky-sleazy, gothic sleazy, snotty-sleazy, and saggy-immigrant. So that's why I'm Gretal Vanschnop tonight. It looks terrible, doesn't it?

KEITH: It's okay.

JUDE: Gee, thanks.

KEITH: What?

JUDE: Nothing.

KEITH: I didn't mean anything—

JUDE: I know. I just know what he would say.

KEITH: Oh.

JUDE: (*Beat.*) He'd tell me I looked great even if I looked horrible. Remember the prom last year? A beauty school girl got all pluck-happy on my eyebrows. I looked awful. My face was frozen in a state of constant surprise. (*She does the eyebrow look.*) My dress sucked. Dad just beamed when he saw me. I always thought he was lying when he said I looked great, but I'm not sure he ever was. I think he *really* believed Mom and I always looked great. You know, you might want to remember that kind of thing when you start dating girls. Girls love that crap. You're real cute. Girls are gonna go for you if you don't act like a dweeb. So you interested in any yet?

KEITH: (*Annoyed.*) I don't know.

JUDE: I'm just trying to give you a word of advice, Keith. Start early. Don't want my bro turning into some loser computer freak.

KEITH: I'm not a computer freak. I just happen to like them. And I don't feel like talking about this stupid stuff right now.

JUDE: What's your problem? I just don't want you to turn into one of those freaks, who hides in his basement, hacking away, crashing e-mail systems, building bombs, avoiding deodorant—that kind of thing. You know what I mean?

KEITH: Why are you talking about this? It's like you have to

joke about everything. Who cares what you look like? You looked awful going to the prom—so what! Who cares? Dad died three days ago. Our dad. We have to come to this stupid funeral home and look at him and talk to people. I mean, at this very moment what sane person gives a care whether I am interested in girls yet or not?

JUDE: What are you trying to say there, Keith? That I'm insane? I'm just trying to make conversation. Can't we talk? It's better than not talking at all.

KEITH: Is it? (*Beat.*) And why do *you* care about my dating anyway?

JUDE: I don't really. I guess it's the only thing we could potentially have in common.

KEITH: Yeah? Well, you bring it up all the time. Why do you have to make me out to be some weirdo? I like programming—so what?! I'm only fifteen years old. Dad says he didn't start dating till he was like—old. He was like . . . eighteen. (*Beat.*) I mean . . . said . . . he *said* he didn't start dating till then.

JUDE: Yeah. I guess. Boys start later with everything I guess. I wasn't trying to insult you, Keith. It's cool that you're into programming. I was just talking to talk to you, okay?

KEITH: Okay. (*Beat.*) I'm sorry if I don't happen to say the right things, like Dad. You're right, he always made me feel better too. You look great, okay? Real nice.

JUDE: Thanks.

KEITH: What did the funeral director say?

JUDE: Mr. Creepyola? I don't know. We're early. They're still arranging the flowers in the room. Probably still arranging Dad as well.

KEITH: (*Disgusted.*) Jude.

JUDE: Well. Am I wrong? Aunt Alice peaked in at him. She says he looks good—like himself. Course she's a moron. I'm sure he doesn't look like himself. I mean, I'm glad he doesn't look like anyone else. But when you're dead, you rarely look like yourself. It's insulting to even say. You look like a heavily

made-up wax version of yourself. Remember Grandpa?
(*Keith nods.*) We'll be able to go in in a few minutes.
KEITH: Is that dress one you picked out today with Mom?
JUDE: Yeah.
KEITH: How is she doin'?
JUDE: I don't know. About the same as us I guess. Less than perky.
KEITH: Did she say anything?
JUDE: About what?
KEITH: About everything.
JUDE: Not really. Why don't you talk to her yourself?
KEITH: No. I just wondered if she happened to mention things.
JUDE: She's sad, Keith. She feels lost. She's concerned about us. She doesn't know what to say to you because you seem to be avoiding her. She's giving you time.
KEITH: That's all she said.
JUDE: Basically.
KEITH: Is she mad?
JUDE: Mad? No. Wait. Now, what are you talking about?
KEITH: I don't know. Nothing really. It's just . . . people get angry. I remember that from psychology class.
JUDE: Yeah. Sure. (*Beat.*) Do you think she's angry with you?
KEITH: This seems to be taking a long time. I could use some water. You want some?
JUDE: No! Wait a minute. Look, Mr. Dweeb, I hope you don't have some retarded delusion that you're responsible for this, because—news flash—Dad died of a heart attack.
KEITH: I know, but he happened to be with me.
JUDE: The paramedics and the doctors both said there was nothing you could have done.
KEITH: Well . . . besides getting him to the hospital.
JUDE: He didn't want to go. He barely complained.
KEITH: He complained some.
JUDE: Okay, so what could you have done?
KEITH: Taken him to the emergency room as soon as he brought up his chest.

JUDE: Didn't you insist on him going?
KEITH: I didn't insist. I suggested it.
JUDE: And he said no.
KEITH: I should have known something was wrong, Jude. You know Dad. He always reminds you to watch for oncoming traffic and stupid morons coming out of nowhere every time you make a lefthand turn. He's always gripping the door handle too. He was silent at Nine-mile Road when I turned. Totally silent. And his hand was in his lap. He even yawned. I should have known something was wrong.
JUDE: (*Sarcastically.*) Oh yeah, he yawned—that really makes you guilty. What did he say when you asked him if you should take him to St. John's ER?
KEITH: He said, "I'm fine. Keep driving." Then he was talking about when we'd go to get my license and he told me to head over to the school to practice parallel parking.
JUDE: See? There's nothing you could have done. He refused to go. He didn't want to.
KEITH: I didn't either.
(*Jude looks strangely at him.*)
KEITH: I wanted to practice parking and then get home to hang out with Jeff and Sam and look at used CDs.
JUDE: So?
KEITH: So maybe he could tell I didn't feel like it. That I didn't feel like waiting around all night.
JUDE: Maybe he could. So what? (*Beat.*) You didn't know. He had no history of heart problems.
KEITH: That's not all.
JUDE: What do you mean?
KEITH: I mean, I left out things when I've told some people. I told Mom everything when she first got to the hospital, but afterwards, to others, I left out parts.
JUDE: Like . . . for instance?
KEITH: Like after, when we were practicing parking, he brought up that he felt tired and kinda weak . . . like maybe

he was getting a chest cold. He thought that's why his chest hurt. So I asked him what he wanted to do.

JUDE: You told us that. I remember that part. He wanted to go home.

KEITH: No, that's the thing. I didn't tell you exactly what he said. That's not exactly how he said it. He said, "I'm not feeling so good, Keith. I think we ought to even head home now or . . ."

JUDE: Or what?

KEITH: He didn't finish the sentence.

JUDE: Okay, so he said he wanted to go home.

KEITH: He wanted *me* to finish it . . . to say . . . "Do you want to go to the hospital?" But I didn't finish it. I just told him I'd take him home right away.

JUDE: Umm. Well then, that's conclusive. You are guilty.

KEITH: Yeah, I am. I am guilty. I know that.

JUDE: I was kidding. Exaggerating to make a point.

KEITH: No. I should have known he was playing it cool. That's what Dad does.

JUDE: I don't feel like talking about this anymore.

KEITH: Why not? Because you know I'm right? Because you know you would have realized it and done things differently?

JUDE: No.

KEITH: What would you have done? (*Pause.*) Come on, what would you have done? I'm curious.

JUDE: I don't want to talk about it. You did all you could. Now, let's drop it.

KEITH: What does Mom think?

JUDE: She doesn't blame you in the least. (*Beat.*) I don't know why people always have to wear black for funerals. Why not white? It's pure. It's serene. It's more heaven-like. Dad even had the forethought to die at the right time of year to wear it. Or red is good. Red was his favorite. Why couldn't we just wear red?

KEITH: I think she does blame me.

JUDE: If she does, she doesn't want to and won't in time.

Instead of sympathy cards, people should send you lottery tickets or tickets to good comedy shows, and plane tickets to exotic islands and money. All the "sorries" of the world won't make up for anything.

KEITH: And money and tickets will?

JUDE: Hell no, but they couldn't hurt. And baskets full of chocolate, not flowers or fruit. The last thing you need is an apple or pear. God, I hate pears. They're the most boring fruit in the entire world. Don't you think?

KEITH: I'm not only afraid to lose him, Jude. I'm afraid because I don't know how to live and always be responsible for this.

JUDE: You aren't responsible.

KEITH: You don't understand then. Even if it's a complete accident, and it was, I'm still always responsible for what happened.

JUDE: Remember Grandpa? Aunt Frieda could not stop going on and on about the holy water that was blessed by virgin saint somebody and how she should have christened Grandpa and he probably wouldn't have—

KEITH: Anointed.

JUDE: Huh?

KEITH: Anointed Grandpa.

JUDE: Yeah. Whatever. It was so ridiculous. Like she could have changed anything. Like any of us have control? I was scared to go in the room then too.

KEITH: Me too.

JUDE: I was glad you were with me. I was glad I had you.

KEITH: But I didn't do anything.

JUDE: Yes, you did. You remembered all the important moments you had with him. We remembered them together.

KEITH: (*Closes his eyes.*) I just wish we weren't here. I wish to God we weren't back here again, Jude. I'd do anything to take back these past three days.

JUDE: When I die, cremate me, Keith. I just don't want to be

remembered as a waxy figure with formaldehyde freezing my veins. I'd rather swallow glass or be hung by my eyelids or swallow glass while being hung by my eyelids and forced to listen to Christian rock music.

KEITH: Wow.

JUDE: Promise me.

KEITH: I promise. *(Beat.)* So why didn't you want to answer my question, Jude? What would you have done?

JUDE: *(Sighs.)* What do you want to hear?

KEITH: The truth. I just want to hear the truth.

JUDE: Fine. I probably would have taken him to the hospital.

KEITH: I knew it.

JUDE: Wait. I would have taken him because I had a class in health this year at Columbia, and I would have remembered how tight chest pains could be the only sign of a heart attack. But I don't know for sure that I would have taken him if he said he wanted to go home instead. And more importantly, I don't know if taking him there would have made a bit of difference in things. It's as if you want to feel responsible for it, but you can't. Things happen, Keith. Things happen that we can't control. If your theory of responsibility was true, Dad might have killed Mom three years ago when he put off taking her to the emergency room when her stomach ached.

KEITH: Her appendix?

JUDE: He gave her a heating pad. The worse thing you could possibly do for an inflamed appendix. And it burst. The doctors couldn't find anything when she arrived. Was it their fault? You didn't know this, but she would have died if the surgeon on duty didn't insist on opening her up immediately. So she didn't. But Dad waited. He kept telling her it wasn't serious enough. Do you think he was to blame? If she died, would he be to blame? Would he?

KEITH: *(Shakes his head.)* No.

JUDE: Don't look now, but Mr. Creepyola is opening the door.

It's time for us to go in. You'll talk to Mom tonight when we get home, right? About all this?

KEITH: Yeah. I guess. Sure.

JUDE: She'll set you straight. *(Beat.)* Dad loved you so much, Keith. He was very proud of you. He always wanted someone around as dweeby as him. And he got it. The last thing in the world he would want is for you to think you're responsible. You know if he were here he'd be cracking jokes about the funeral director's nightlife and telling us not to chew gum and showing us the photo albums of the deceased.

KEITH: Yeah. Proudly showing us the picture of him as the president of the debate team in college and the first time he went skiing. He looked so nerdy. Those checkered pants.

JUDE: He was a ladies man, right? Those pants were frightening. *(They laugh.)* You'll hold my hand when we go in? Stop me if I start telling inappropriate jokes.

(Keith nods. He takes her hand.)

JUDE: We'll remember the most important moments, right? The funny and the sad?

KEITH: All of them. *(They begin to walk.)* Apples.

JUDE: Huh?

KEITH: I think apples are more boring than pears.

JUDE: *(Smiles.)* Probably. You're probably right. You sure I look all right?

(He steps back and takes her in.)

KEITH: You look great. You look really great, Jude. Let's go.