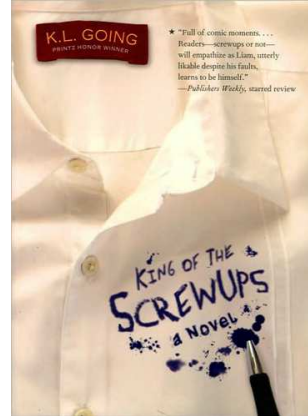


King of the Screwups, by K.L. Going Deleted Scenes

Deleted Scene 1

Here's a small portion of a scene that showed Liam and Pete interacting. This one was cut simply because of some plot changes that made the timing of it awkward:

When I arrive home Aunt Pete is lying on the couch watching a movie that, as near as I can tell, is all about explosions. I stand in the doorway trying to figure out how exactly I'll break the news about my permanent detention.



“You’re late again,” Aunt Pete says when the screen door bangs shut.

“Yup,” I say. A building explodes on screen and Aunt Pete pauses to make a fist before looking up.

“Well?”

“Well what?”

“Why are you late?”

I walk over to the refrigerator and search for some fruit.

“Did you eat the kiwis I bought?”

Aunt Pete looks blank. “Do you think I ate your kiwis? What’s a kiwi?”

I find one and stuck it in a bowl. I slice it in half and start eating it with a spoon.

“You haven’t answered my question,” Aunt Pete says.

I pretend to concentrate.

“About the kiwis?”

A car explodes and immediately afterwards two more burst into flames. Aunt Pete is momentarily distracted, then he turns back to me.

“No. Not about the kiwis. I asked why you were late.”

I nod.

“Ooohhh. That question.”

Silence.

“Well, you know I joined the AV club.”

“Yeah.”

“So, we meet after school to do AV-type stuff.”

Aunt Pete frowns.

“AV-type stuff?”

“Yup. We talk about the announcements and practice giving the announcements.”

An entire town explodes on screen and Aunt Pete turns back to the television, shaking his head.

“Alright,” he says at last. “I just wish you’d told me ahead of time about this AV thing, but it sounds productive. Let me know if you guys want to come down to the radio station some time. I could show you the equipment.”

I scratch my head. Aunt Pete would take me to work? As in publicly acknowledge me in front of his co-workers? I swallow hard. Now I feel like crap for lying about detention. I study my Sketchers.

“Thanks. Okay. Guess I’ll go lie on the picnic table now. Wait for Darlene to get home.” I linger near the door, but this time Aunt Pete only grunts. The entire planet is exploding, so it’s hard to compete.

Deleted Scene 2

Originally I had Liam do two modeling stints for Eddie. The party scene and the bathing suit display came earlier in the novel, and this second display came later on when Darlene was finally beginning to thaw towards Liam. I still like this chapter a lot, but in the end we decided that two modeling scenes were too many, and since I moved the party later in the book I needed the bathing suit display to act as a catalyst. Thus, I bid adios to this chapter!

Notice the spelling of Darleen's name changed (as it did many times!) and Eddie is Freddie here. I actually wrote the first draft of this book before I wrote Saint Iggy, and I'd used the name Freddie. To avoid repetition I changed this Freddie to Eddie when I started working on the book again.

I stare at my cell phone. How hard is it to dial a phone? I should just pick up the phone and dial. Not hard.

I stare at my cell phone.

The display is completely set up; now all I need are some people. Randy and Simon like people. Darlene like people.

Freddie slides up behind me and grabs the phone out of my hand.

"I'm calling Darlene," he says. "I'll see if she can bring that telescope she's got in the attic." He punches in the numbers.

"Hello, Darlene? ... Yeah, it's Fred. Listen, I've got a favor to ask you. Liam just set up a truly amazing display here at the shop...yeah, it's really beautiful. Actually, I think he said you inspired it."

All the color drains from my face.

"It's a Physics display," Freddie says. "We're selling the new fall pajamas...uh huh. So, listen. I wanted to invite you to come down here and I was hoping you'd bring that telescope you've got up in the attic...mmm hmm. Really? Okay, that's great."

Freddie turns off the phone and grins at me. "That's one down," he says, handing back the phone. I glare at him, but Freddie doesn't seem to notice. He's busy scattering silver glitter around the shop.

I punch in Randy's number and it rings twice before someone picks it up. "Hi. Is Randy there? This is his friend Liam. From school." I drum my fingers on the counter while the person on the other end yells for Randy. There's a long pause, then a confused voice.

"Hello?"

"Rambo? I'm glad you're home. What're you doing today? This morning I mean?"

There's another long pause.

“Randy?” I adjust the antenna on my cell phone but it seems to be picking up fine.

“Sorry. I thought I lost you there. Listen, if you don’t have any plans I was hoping you and Simon might stop by the shop. Darlene’s coming, and I’m doing a Physics display. We’ve got some new stuff in stock that you guys might really like. Maybe we could grab lunch when I get a break.”

There’s no response and for a moment I wonder if Randy hung up.

“Who is this, really?”

I pause. What does he mean who is this? I just told him who it was. “It’s me. Liam.”

There’s a muffled sound on the other end. “Liam? Why are you calling me? I don’t think I can go anywhere . . .”

I have to think fast. “I also thought you’d want to cover the shop display for the news while you’re here. A lot of kids have come by and no one has caught the story yet.”

“That’s true . . .”

“I’d hate to see it slip by us, and I can’t exactly cover it.”

There’s a breathless noise on the other end. “Yeah. I guess you’re right. You said Darlene’s coming? I could call Simon and ask him to bring his camera. I doubt we could get the video stuff down there, but we could get some still shots. Something for the school paper. Maybe some color photos . . .”

“Randy?”

“Yeah?”

“Aren’t you the president of the math club, too?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you could make it a math club event and include that in the story. There’s got to be a few, uh, math loving people who are free on a Saturday morning, don’t you think? Excellent publicity.”

I can tell Randy is nodding on the other end.

“Yeeesss. Very sharp. People think we don’t have any fun, but they’ll just see how wrong they are.”

“This will be really fun,” I say reassuringly. “Lots of excessive fun.”

“Alright,” Randy agrees. “I’ll see if I can round up the team.”

I grin.

Excellent.

###

Three hours later the store is crawling with pocket protectors. Simon brought his camera and Randy attempts to interview me while the others linger around the store. There are imminent plans for the whole group to get pizza, but they have to wait until Randy is done with the interview.

“So, what made you choose Physics as the theme for this week’s display?” Randy asks.

I take my time considering my answer.

“Physics,” I say at last, “is very important.”

Randy nods.

“And?”

There isn’t anything else, so I say, “math is important, too. I take both Physics and math, and specifically Physics that involves math very seriously.”

I smile, pleased with my answer. Then I notice Darlene has finally arrived. She certainly took her time.

Darlene stands in the doorway staring at the shop, and I hop out of the window. “You made it,” I say.

She nods distractedly. “It’s beautiful,” she breathes. She clears her throat and hands me the telescope. “Freddie said you needed this.” I take it and walk over to the window to set it up. To my surprise, she follows. “It really is beautiful,” she says. “I mean, not that I didn’t think it would be. It’s just I wondered what kind of a . . . I mean . . .”

I want to say something. Something charming and profound, but my attention is distracted by a fashion emergency. “Hold that thought,” I say, darting across

the room. A tall string bean kid with acne and braces is checking out the price tag on a pair of plain white underwear. There's nothing worse than choosing the wrong underwear. I speak slowly and quietly.

"For the love of God, put those down."

The string bean drops the briefs, eyes wide, and I scoop them up. "I could let you buy these," I say, "but it would be a mistake." I take a slow step back. "If you just move away from the display, I can find you something much more suitable."

The kid takes two steps to the right and I nod. "Good," I say. "Very good." I eye the wall display and choose a pair of red Armani boxers with a gold trim. "These are much more your style. You want something that's going to play down your height, see, and these are kind of long without being too long. The color and material is good for you, and well, you should buy them." I hand them to the kid then dart back to Darlene.

"Sorry," I say. "Anyway, you were saying . . ." Then I stop, horrified. "Simon, what are you doing? You can't buy those. Those aren't even men's shorts. They're androgynous women's wear. Think Hilfigger. Seriously. Check out the one with the insignia on the back pocket."

I wipe my brow. "Sorry," I say. "Where was I?"

I try to focus on what I want to say to Darlene, but at that precise moment I notice that Principal Mallek is in the shop browsing through the flannels. Please, please God, don't let him buy a thong or anything involving animal prints. Randy is standing at my elbow impatiently waiting to finish the interview, and a girl I don't know is tugging at my sleeve.

"Did you know your math is wrong?" the girl asks.

I frown.

"Excuse me?"

"Your math in the window is wrong. You're supposed to be solving for X but mid way through you start solving for Y."

I stare at the window, appalled. I was certain I'd gotten that one right. "How can that be?" I've never properly understood how I can be solving for a letter. My vision narrows and a hundred voices are coming at me from every direction. "Liam could I ask you a few more questions . . ."

"Do these flannel things come in large?"

“I thought we were going for pizza.”

“Simon wants to get a picture for the school paper, so you better correct that equation.”

I start to panic.

“Wait here,” I tell Darlene. I step back in the window and wash off the soap. Then I pull out the Physics book I brought and look at the equation again. If a mass traveling at thirty-five kilometers per hour hits a second equal mass traveling in the opposite direction at eighty miles per hour, what will be the resulting velocity of each mass?

Oh God. How should I know? How will I ever figure it out? There are two masses and they smash into each other, so why wouldn't they both just stop right there?

I write something else in the window, but this time I'm overly conscious of Principal Mallek wandering around behind me. There's also a small crowd lingering outside Freddie's shop.

Crap. I'm going to screw up.

Randy and Simon are standing outside the shop and Simon is snapping pictures, but I'm not even posing yet. I'm not ready. The lighting is all wrong, and I'm starting to sweat. There are three women from the hair salon talking to two men in overalls from the feed shop and a drunk from the liquor store and they're all pointing at the half erased math problem.

I close my eyes. I can't remember where any of the numbers are supposed to go. Something is supposed to be X. But what? X is never mentioned in the question. I'm positive.

I look over my shoulder at Freddie, but he's working the register.

“Crap,” I mutter. “Crapcrapcrapcrap.” I bite my lip. I'm about to erase the whole thing when someone else steps into the window. A hand reaches over mine and takes the soap.

“If you're going to pass Physics, you better learn this stuff.” Darlene says.

“Look. The unknown quantity is always X. That's why it's called X, or Y, or V or whatever we decide to call it. We give it a letter because we don't know what it is yet. The other numbers fall into one of a few standard equations. There's

a list of them in the back of your Physics book. You want to figure out which equation to use, not invent your own.”

She turns to the back page and sure enough, there’s a whole list. I almost kiss her.

“Which one should I pick?” I ask. Darlene shrugs.

“Think about it,” she says. “What information do you already have?”

None, I think. I got no information from that question.

“It’s all there,” Darlene says. “You just have to make an effort to see it.”

I read the question again. Then I read it a third time. This time I compare it to the equations in the back of the book. Maybe there is something.

“I know that the masses were equal and I know how fast they were traveling before they smashed.”

“So there’s your equation,” Darlene says. “The question asks you to find velocity, so that’s X.” She writes the problem in the window. Simon snaps a photo and the entire crowd outside the shop window applauds. Behind me, Principal Mallek clears his throat.

“Nice work,” he says and I almost grin, but then I notice Principal Mallek’s prospective purchases.

Three pairs of boxers. Leopard print.

Deleted Scene 3

For those of you who don’t mind reading a longer excerpt, I thought it would be interesting to post some of my earliest work on this novel. I’d originally written the whole thing in third person, but it was difficult for readers to get into Liam’s head, and since he is a character whose behavior can be downright awful sometimes, it was important that readers know his motivations. A few other things you’ll notice... Liam had an older sister, Meg, who ended up getting cut. I also toned down the sex stuff in the final drafts to make it more palatable for libraries and school. As my editor pointed out, other than the opening chapter, the entire book is/was so innocent it seemed a shame to risk banning over something that didn’t actually represent the novel.

1.

Liam knew it was wrong to sleep with a girl who didn't even like him. It was wrong because A) the girl would never like him (after all, they never did) B) they were in his older sister's bedroom which was technically off limits while she was away at Julliard and C) he'd meant to be impressing his father with his remarkable studying skills, but instead he'd snuck out to a party and had a few drinks. Then he'd had the brilliant idea of sneaking back in, only he'd brought the girl with him and well, one thing led to another.

Crap.

The bedroom door slammed shut and Liam rolled onto his back. The girl in question, Delia, was already sitting up, frantically pulling the blanket to her chin while attempting to find her bra. He watched her, thinking she looked different now that it was over. Before she'd looked interested. Interested in him. Now she just looked desperate.

And she was desperate. Desperate to be rid of him. She flung herself off the bed without a glance, and that was fine. There was nothing to be said in a look that wasn't already being said in the pleading tones of her voice.

"Mr. Geller? Please wait, I can explain."

It was too familiar; an overpowering sense of déjà vu. Liam listened distractedly, thinking he could predict everything that was about to happen. The girl would get dressed. Hurriedly. She'd pull her shirt on backwards while trying to smooth her hair with her fingers then end up hopping towards the door with one shoe on and one shoe off, a stray hair clip held temporarily between her teeth.

The girl got dressed. Hurriedly. She pulled her shirt on backwards then stopped to straighten her hair, clenching her hair clip between her teeth. She forced one shoe on the wrong foot then hopped toward the door.

"Mr. Geller? Please don't call my parents . . ."

Liam waited for the door to slam shut then reached across the bed to grab his cigarettes. He'd dropped them on the way in when nothing was more important than getting undressed as quickly as possible. Now nothing was more important than a smoke. He lit the cigarette and smoked it flat on his back. It was horrible to smoke in Meg's room. He knew that, but it was far too late to be good now. What was the point when he'd already screwed up? In just moments everyone in the universe would hate him, so he might as well enjoy a good smoke.

He closed his eyes and exhaled. The army slogan his father had been drilling into his head for months danced in his brain. Be all that you can be. It was a good slogan, but Liam suspected he didn't get much better than this. He took a last drag on the cigarette, put it out in his sister's silver piggy bank, rolled over, and went to sleep.

2.

It was the alcohol that allowed him to sleep when any sane person would stay awake to apologize. It was the alcohol and the fact that he'd been up for thirty six hours straight and now at ten PM his system was shutting down whether he wanted it to or not. Ten o'clock . . .

No. Make that eleven o'clock.

Liam's eyes were working hard to focus on the huge red numbers on Meggie's digital clock. 11:00. 111111 111111 000000 000000. For a long time the symbols meant nothing. They were a mystery. Was he awake? Dreaming in binary code? Were they part of a giant price tag - red for reduced? The proof on a bottle of alcohol? Who knew? Except, apparently they held some connection to what his father was screaming at him.

“. . . lazy, shameful, pitiful excuse . . . couldn't even wait until the house was empty . . . and there we are in the other room for Christ's sake . . . your mother and I . . . and in your sister's room . . . goddamn you, get up. Get up.” It was all very confusing. Liam needed to sleep, anyone could see that, but his father was insistent. The primary message seemed to be that he was to Get Up. Get Up. Get Up. Get Up.

Liam sat up and the head rush that ensued was worse than the lingering drunkenness. Everything came back in the whoooooooooosh of upward motion. Everything. It was eleven o'clock and he was naked, lying in his sister's bed after having slept with a girl who didn't even like him after having drunk far too much at an end-of-the-summer party which he was not supposed to have attended seeing as he was still grounded from the last time he'd slept with a girl who didn't even like him after attending a beginning-of-the-summer party and . . . Oh. The list could go on.

Not Good.

Not only did his long-term prospects not look promising, at the moment his short-term prospects were queasy. Along with the overwhelming realization of his state of affairs, up came everything he'd had to eat or drink in the last thirty-six hours and he could now predict with absolute certainty that he would, in fact, vomit very soon. Despite the persistence of his father's command (getupgetupgetupgetup) he sat up very slowly. One would have thought this

would be perceived as a gesture of goodwill, an indication of his intention to get up. But no.

Strong fingers circled his bare arm, pulling him out of the bed.

“If you wanted to wait just one minute . . .” Liam offered, but the grip did not wait. It tightened. The room spun. Pink comforters blended with red digital numbers and bare flesh melded with white carpet. Somebody’s underwear (his?) spun into somebody’s shoes and all of it was careening into posters, lamps, piggy banks, dark trousers, brushes, mirrors, dressers, closets, clothes, doors, cigarettes. He was a whirling dervish flying through space and everything was blending, narrowing, spiraling into one centrifugal force. Then he was throwing up all over his father’s bare legs. All over his sister’s white carpet and the pink bedspread that was half wrapped around his waist. The world came to a jolting stop and he felt momentarily better. Momentarily.

Then he felt worse. Decidedly.

Liam clutched his stomach and considered the many things one might say under the circumstances.

I can explain. (Not true.)

This has all been a huge mistake. (An understatement.)

It appears I’ve had a tad too much to drink. (Obvious.)

Wrong. All of them. There was only one thing to say under such circumstances. Only one possible utterance that could adequately express his current state. Crap.

3.

During the next hour and a half, Liam’s parents melded into one identical unit.

The Fathermother.

Plastic, both of them.

They sat together on a narrow couch. Pliable action figures arranged on a blue sofa in a rectangular living room of a huge square house in the suburbs of New York. He, the Liam action figure, was molded into a perfect curved slouch, his dirty blond hair, usually impeccably mussed, was now in perfect disarray and his plastic face, usually stunning, was now contorted in misery.

The Dad action figure, a George Bush lookalike with gray hair and a knee length flannel bathrobe, swiveled its head from side to side and the stiff half-bent

arm moved so its molded fingers pointed straight at the spot where Liam slouched.

“This was the last straw,” his father said. “Do you understand that? I’m sick of you.”

The voice was far away and hazy. What was he saying? Sick of . . . sick . . . of . . . Now that he mentioned it, Liam did feel sick.

“Why are you such a pathetic human being?” It was a rhetorical question, but his father waited for a reply. “Why can’t you do anything right? You’ve had every advantage - money, international education, a strong family unit, and still you blow it. It’s a disgrace. Disgrace, disgrace, disgrace . . .”

Either the words were echoing or his father was repeating them. Liam tried hard to focus, but the room was spinning in slow, elliptical rotations. He tried to focus on his mother, but she was silent, waiting for a giant hand to scoop her up and tell her what to say.

“Did you even think about our feelings? Did you even once consider how completely inappropriate and disrespectful . . .”

The lecture went on and on. Liam tried to listen because his father was absolutely right, and he was lucky to have someone as brilliantly responsible as his dad to set him straight, but he kept getting distracted by his mom. She wouldn’t look up, which made the knot in his stomach tighten even though he wasn’t entirely certain about his father’s accusations. It was possible he had, somewhere along the line, failed to consider their feelings, but he’d never wanted to hurt them. Had he?

For a moment the world of action figures threatened to dissolve, and he wanted to say something. Apologize maybe.

“Mom,” Liam said, but she didn’t respond. No one responded, and Liam wondered if he’d really said anything.

“I’ve come to a decision,” said his dad.

The words interrupted Liam’s milky thoughts and he nodded miserably. Of course there was a decision. Every time Liam screwed up it demanded a decision on the part of his father. He felt bad about that. Liam hated decisions, especially important or difficult ones, so he could sympathize. But it had to be done.

He waited for the pronouncement, wondering what it would be. What kind of decision had his father made? As near as he could tell all the significant ones

had been exhausted. Grounded, scolded, privileges revoked, license lost, friends banished . . . And this was a repeat offense. A multiple offense. A multiple, repeat offense.

“I want you out of my house.”

The words echoed in the hollow room.

“What?” Liam looked up. He couldn’t have heard right. His father had said something else. Something that sounded like “I want you out of my house,” but was really something entirely different. (“I think you are a louse?”) Liam stared at his mother as the knot in his stomach twisted tighter.

“Mom?”

She stared out the window, her plastic eyes fixed on some unknown point. “You’re a disgrace to this family,” the Dad action figure said. “You’re not anything I ever wanted from a son. You’re a sham, Liam. Do you know what that means? It means you’re a shallow, empty mess. You’re a senior - a senior - and what do you have to say for yourself, Mr. Popularity?”

Liam closed his eyes.

“Dad, I . . .”

“Why can’t you be more like Meg? She didn’t waste her time going to ridiculous parties and running around with a flock of worthless admirers. Do you know how disciplined she had to be to get into Julliard?”

This time his father didn’t wait for an answer. “I’m sure you don’t. You don’t know the meaning of the word. You’ve never gotten an A in your life, let alone excelled at something, and now you think I’m going to let you continue this behavior? You think I’m going to pay when that little tramp turns up pregnant? You think I’m going to bail you out when you end up in jail?” His father paced back and forth. “As CEO, I’m the public face of Save the Children, Liam. Meg understood that, but you . . . I can’t have my own son running around like some delinquent. I won’t stand for it. You can take the GED, join the army, and get out.”

Get. Out.

Liam thought he might be sick again. His head was beginning to ache and the words were melding into an indecipherable language. He could already feel his body melting into the chair as if some kid were holding the Liam action figure over a candle. There was a horrible ringing in his ears and every other word began to fade. Then every two words.

“ . . . surprised . . . no one . . . because . . . so . . . failure . . . sense . . . word . . . ”

The drone was getting louder, filling his head with the sound of the blood coursing through his veins. He intended to stay awake and plead with his father. He wanted to. If he could do just one thing right and convince his dad that he could be as smart and well adjusted as Meg there was a chance the situation could be redeemed. A slim but faint chance.

But as it turned out, he passed out instead.

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