

## *The Liberation of Gabriel King*, by K.L. Going Original First Chapter and a Deleted Scene

Want to read what chapter 1 was originally going to look like before editing?

The original title for this book was "*The Liberation of Harper McCormack*."

Who?

Harper was originally a friend of Gabe and Frita who didn't make it through subsequent drafts...

Check out the first chapter below to see what the beginning of *Liberation* might have looked like.

Below that is another scene in which Gabe and Frita talk about Harper McCormack.

Can you imagine how different the book would be if I'd kept Harper as a character?

Sometimes during editing, writers make drastic changes. In this case, I removed an entire character. I was sad to see him go, but the story was really about Gabe and Frita.

I hope you enjoy the scenes below.

--KL



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### Original First Chapter

liberate (lib-er-at): to set free; release from control

Frita once told me that before you die your entire life flashes before your eyes. Well, I can tell you for certain this just isn't so. I didn't die, but I sure thought I was gonna, and for me it was just one summer that came rushing back, and that was because I kept wondering how I'd ever gotten in such a serious bad spot. If you'd asked me three months earlier if I thought I might end up sitting in Harper McCormack's boarded-up old trailer waiting for his dead corpse of a grandmamma to take me away, I'd have said you were crazy with a capital C. If you could count on anything it was that I, Gabriel Allen King, didn't do

anything scary. I didn't climb out too far on the branches of the pecan trees or ride my bike on the same dirt road the truckers used. I didn't pick up ugly looking bugs that might have pinchers or walk too close to the cotton fields if anyone even hinted that the cows might be loose. The way I figured it, most things were best left alone, and that included creepy old trailers, especially ones with corpses in them...But that was before Frita made up her mind that Harper McCormack needed liberating, and before she decided I needed to pave the way by overcoming all my fears. That was before I started growing up for real and gained me some perspective. It was before a lot of things, and I guess if I'm going to tell you about them I best start at the beginning.

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The truth is, I never would have thought about Harper McCormack, his old boarded-up trailer, or his dead corpse of a grandmamma if Frita hadn't brought them up. Thinking about Harper McCormack was kind of scary and as I said, I made it a practice to avoid scary things. But Frita didn't, and apparently she'd been thinking about him because she found my hiding place under the picnic table in back of the school on the day of our third grade Moving-Up day. That was the day she decided Harper McCormack needed liberating.

That might seem like a big word (even for a third grade graduate), but that's how Frita talked. Her daddy was a preacher so she picked up all sorts of words and then she sprung 'em on me when I was least expecting it.

Sometimes I could figure them out by how she was talking. Other times I just pretended to know and sooner or later she'd let slip with a couple shorter ones that meant the same thing. Liberate was a word I should've known because she'd said it before. Except I couldn't remember. At least I couldn't figure out what it might have to do with Harper McCormack, so I just nodded and made room for her under the picnic table. She crawled underneath and put a napkin full of sprinkly cookies on the ground between us.

"Yup," she said. "I got to thinking about Harper on account of you missing such a fine ceremony." She said it casual-like, but Frita never said anything casual. What she meant was, *why you hiding out here under the picnic table?* I shrugged. Right then it didn't seem like me and Harper had anything to do with each other.

Frita took a bite of a sprinkly cookie and it crumbled all over her chin. Frita's got dark chocolate skin so only the cookie crumbs stood out. The chocolate sprinkles blended right in. She didn't wipe her face - just went right on talking.

"They called your name," she said. "Twice."

I shrugged again.

“Did they call Harper’s name?”

This time Frita shook her head. “Nope,” she said. “Guess that means he’s not moving up.” She fixed me with a stern look.

“They’re not going to let you stay back,” she told me, shaking her head as if it was kind of sad that I didn’t know the truth. “Once they read your name it’s official, even if you don’t pick up your certificate. Erin Morgan is sick and the principal said they’d be mailing hers to her house. I bet you get yours in the mail on Monday.”

Now why’d she have to go and say that?

“You should’ve planned it out different,” she said. “Failed this year or something. You ought to have had some forethought.”

There was another one of them words. If forethought meant planning it out different, then Frita was right. I should have thought about everything way back at the beginning of the year - then I could’ve flunked some tests or something. But I hadn’t. Back then third grade might have lasted forever, so what was there to worry about?

Frita pulled our class picture out from inside the choir robe the school had given us for the ceremony. The picture was all folded up even though she’d just gotten it. She lay it flat on the ground and tried to smooth out the creases. It said 1976 on top in big gold letters. I loved that it said that because 1976 was the best year ever. It was the 200th birthday of the United States - the bicentennial people called it - and there were going to be big celebrations on July 4th. The Olympics were this summer, and we were going to win lots of gold medals. I just knew it.

And as if all that wasn’t enough, the Governor of Georgia was running for President. That meant come November, we might have a President who grew up not far from Hollowell. A President from Georgia for the bi-cen-ten-ial. Sure was a good year. Except for my having to leave the third grade. This was the only year I’d tolerated out of all my educating, and that was because we were the biggest kids in the East Wing. But next year we moved to the West Wing with the fifth graders, and I sure was scared of fifth graders. Plus, this year I had Ms. Murray and she was super nice, but next year I’d have Ms. Julian and she was the meanest teacher in Hollowell Elementary. Everyone said it, so you knew it was true.

I scowled, thinking how there was no way I’d be attending fourth grade. There were some things a man could not be forced to endure. But Frita didn’t notice all my scowlin’ because she was studying our class picture real hard.

“There’s you,” she said, pointing far below the numbers.

The picture wasn’t very good. I looked like a fourth-grader. I’m the shortest boy in our whole class so they always put me in front, and that day I’d forgotten about picture day and worn my tattered overalls with the broken strap. My hair looked kind of crazy, like a rat’s nest, and if you looked close enough you could tell my hands were dirty.

“Here’s me,” Frita said.

Her finger slid up two rows. She didn’t need to point herself out because she’s the only black person in our class. Plus, she wears her hair in two thick buns that stick out from the top of her head, and half the time she’s got the craziest ribbons this side of Georgia. In the picture she’s got floofy red ones and she’s smiling real huge. Frita does not look like a first-grader. She’s bigger than me and she can whup any boy in the entire elementary school. You don’t want to get on Frita’s bad side. No sir.

I was pretty lucky because Frita picked me as her best friend during the second week of kindergarten. That’s when the Wilson’s first moved to Hollowell, Georgia. Her daddy got assigned to the big ol’ Baptist church in Rockford just one town over, and she might have gone to Rockford Elementary but Mr. Wilson got wind of the fact that there weren’t no black kids in Hollowell schools and he thought Frita ought to do some integrating. I thought integrating meant visiting, but Frita and I looked it up in the dictionary and it really means to make something whole again. Putting the parts back together.

That makes pretty good sense because before Frita came it was like we had a piece missing. We didn’t know it yet, but there was a Frita-sized hole right next to me. And the funny thing? The funny thing is that me and Frita might never have been friends at all except for my last name. I’m called Gabriel Allen King, Gabe for short, and when Frita first heard my last name she latched right on to me and wouldn’t let go no matter how hard I tried to shake her. Turns out she thought I was related to Martin Luther King, Jr. She didn’t tell me that’s what she was thinking, but one day she stood up in front of the whole class and declared me kin to Mr. King. Guess she hadn’t noticed my being white and all. I teased her about it once and she got all put out and said she’d noticed but figured I was a real distant relation. Then she threatened to sock me in the jaw so after that we didn’t talk about it none . . . I guess she was attached to me though, because we kept right on being friends despite the misunderstanding.

I was thinking about that day as we sat there under the picnic table. Sure seemed like a long time ago. I wondered if me and Frita would be friends

forever or if things would change once she moved up. Fourth and fifth grade girls were giggly and only talked to other girls. Yuk. I made another face, but Frita still didn't notice. I wondered what she was thinking about, but I didn't have to wait long. Frita wasn't the type to keep you waiting. She buttoned down her eyebrows, stuck out her bottom lip, and came out with it.

"This picture is nooo good," she said. I suspected I knew what she meant, but I played along anyhow.

"How come?" I asked.

Frita waved the picture in front of my nose.

"Not everyone's in it. It's not a real class picture if everyone isn't in it." I tried hard to look but she was waving it around too much. Seemed to me most people were in it, but I knew she was looking for Harper.

"Yeah," I said, "but how would they get everyone in? Gary Snyder moved away, Leroy Frye was sick, and Harper McCormack . . ."

Well, truth was, we didn't know just where Harper McCormack was. He'd stopped going to school four weeks ago and all the adults said he'd gone to foster care, but we kids suspected different. James Merin said he'd seen people moving around inside Harper's trailer, and Lucy Adams said she'd heard voices. Frankie Carmen, who was in the fourth grade, said there wasn't any foster care in Hollowell, and really all the adults were covering up the fact that Harper was stuck in his trailer with his crazy old grandmamma, too scared to come out. He said they'd be there forever and ever and eventually they'd die and rot.

That gave me the shivers and I didn't believe him at first, but then Frankie showed us the phone book and sure enough there wasn't a single listing for foster care. Frankie also said if you got too close to the trailer, Harper's grandmamma would suck you in when you weren't looking. Then you'd be stuck in there, too, just waiting for your life to flash before your eyes. Well, that sure wasn't going to happen to me.

Except I did feel a bit guilty over it. Me and Frita weren't exactly friends with Harper, but we weren't exactly not friends. I suspect we were all linked together in people's minds. Harper was slow so the fifth graders called him a retard which wasn't very nice but just went to prove how rotten fifth graders were. I was the shortest kid in the whole school except for the kindergarteners so they always called me shrimp, and Frita was black, so sometimes kids called her rotten names too, although not that often because Frita sure could pound a body when she was mad. So we were like a set, the three of us. Sure wasn't

fair, but that's the way it was. And now Harper'd gone and disappeared, so it was just Frita and me, and we hadn't done a thing about it.

"You think he's still alive?" I asked. Frita shrugged.

"I bet," she said. "I bet his grandmamma's dead though. That's for sure."

I thought about Harper's old grandmamma and shuddered. Before Harper stopped going to school she used to come get him every day. She was a bony old woman who smelled like talcum powder, and she only wore knitted stuff even though it's always a hundred degrees in Georgia. Plus, she had a bad leg that dragged behind her. We'd hear her stepping and sliding down the hall every afternoon. Clomp, fffffff, clomp, fffffff.

Harper's grandmamma had to come get him on account of the crying. Just about the time we'd arrive at school Harper would start crying and it'd get louder and louder until the teacher put his desk outside in the hall. She'd shut the door tight and we'd still hear him wailing away out there. Then the teacher across the hall would yell "Hush up!"

The teachers said Harper cried all the time because he'd been born different. Momma said if we lived in a big town Harper might have gone to a special school, but Hollowell is just about as small as you can get - we don't even have a traffic light - so he was stuck with us and I guess he didn't much like it. Can't say I blamed him. I didn't much like it either. In fact, I suspected Harper wasn't as slow as everyone said. Seemed to me he was smarter than the rest of us because he got to sit outside all day while we figured out problems on the blackboard and got pelted in dodge ball. Seemed to me like Harper had it made.

Except, of course, when he disappeared.

I figured we'd seen the last of Harper McCormack, and even though I felt bad about it, I sure wasn't going to go poking around risking my very life to find out where he was. Only Frita had other plans.

"Gabe," she said, "it's time we do some liberating."

I swallowed hard.

"Liberating?"

"Yup," said Frita. "I thought it over during the ceremony and I think we can do it. If Harper McCormack is in that trailer, then me and you had best take care of it." Frita nodded hard. "Yup," she said again. "Time to do some liberatin'."

Now it was official. I was sunk. I could tell Frita'd gone and got this in her head, and when Frita Wilson gets something in her head, you'd better watch out because it is by God going to happen.

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### Deleted Scene

So, that was the last time we talked about Harper.

July turned into August, the Bicentennial was over, Jimmy Carter was slipping in the polls, and school was in the air - I could practically smell it. Every time I thought about it my stomach churned and I couldn't think of anything else. I started feeling pressed about vacation and couldn't let a single day slip by without my trying to make the most of it. I got up early and ate chocolate frosted cereal real quick so I could get outside to play. Then I stayed out as long as I could, even on the days Frita couldn't come over. Momma got annoyed because she had to call me in a hundred times before I'd come home, and then at bed time I'd keep myself awake so the day wouldn't end. But still those days kept slipping by. Started to make me mad, and I guess that's why I got my idea.

It was the last morning before school began and I was sitting at the kitchen table eating toast with cinnamon sugar on it, watching Momma iron. I'd brought Jimmy's tank out to the kitchen and I was watching him crawl up the stalks of grass. Momma was half watching him, too, and every now and then she'd laugh when he fell off, or sprung himself a bit of web out of nowhere. Momma always listened to music when she ironed and this morning she was listening to Daydream Believer. Momma and I both knew all the words and we started singing as soon as it came on the record. We'd sing real loud when it came to the chorus.

"Cheer up sleepy Jean! Oh what can it mean, to a daydream believer and a homecoming queen?"

I didn't know what those words meant, but I knew Momma had been a Homecoming Queen once, and I liked to sing along even if boys weren't supposed to want to do that.

It was right when we started in on the chorus that the idea sunk in. I took a deep breath to sing, "Oh what does it mean" and I knew right that second that I didn't ever want to grow up. I'd suspected it all summer, but now I just knew it was true. Growing up meant no more singing with Momma and no more running through the woods with Frita. It meant dealing with spiders and scary people who didn't behave like they ought. Growing up meant puberty and after that things weren't ever the same. And they might change for good this very year.

That's when I thought about Harper and how he'd never have to grow up. If he was in that trailer, he'd get to live there as long as he wanted and summer vacation might as well never end. Maybe he wouldn't have a class picture, or vote for Jimmy Carter, but he wouldn't have to count down his last hours of freedom, either. He wouldn't have to figure out who looked mean, but was really nice, and who looked nice, but was really mean. He wouldn't have to think about girls who didn't want you to see them without their shirts on even though once they hadn't cared.

That's when I decided for certain. I wasn't going to liberate Harper McCormack, I was going to join him.

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