

Allica's Chalk Blue Parents
or
Creative Writing Never Saved Anybody's Life, Anyway
by Gabe Wollenburg

Don't have the Main Character commit suicide as the end of your work. That's what they tell you. In every creative writing class across the nation. They tell you: *Don't have the main character commit suicide as the end of you work.* And *Don't use the "poetic image" of teardrops in your poetry.* That's pretty much how it goes around here.

Seven of us sit. On Our Grassy Knoll. That is capitalized on purpose. It's Our Grassy Knoll. That's what everybody calls it. (Truth, it's not THE grassy knoll; it's an island of grass surrounded by an ocean of concrete in the center of the campus mall. It's really more of a planter than a knoll. But that's what we call it. Besides, our group would never, ever call it a Grassy Planter. That's not our style.) Much like young people would Sing, Dance and Play, on our Grassy Knoll we sit Muffin, Beverage, and Cigarette.

Huge chunks of my day have dissolved in the act of Muffin, Beverage, and Cigarette.

I digress. It's a late autumn day. It's perfect weather. The trees are five days shy of blooming into fiery explosions of red, orange and yellow. I think that sometimes the colors of the trees on days like today warm a cold environment to a point that is comfortable, even when in actuality, it is not. It could be fifteen below zero, your breath freezing and falling to the ground a frozen chunk of condensation, and if it was the middle of the foliage climax, you could walk around in shorts and sweater.

That's what I'm wearing: shorts and sweater.

Allica sets down next to me on the cement walls of our grassy planter. They make convenient seats. Ah, the advantages of our modern civilization. It's fun to look at and sit on, too. I am sitting on the pile of wood chips that the grounds-people lay at the base of the three trees growing on Our Grassy Knoll.

Allica is in the act of Beverage. "Hey," she says glancing at me for a second, then she looked up into the chalk blue sky. She hesitated. "Hap had a party at Vivik's last night." Pause. Inhale. "Got totally wasted. Missed Poly-Sci. Had to stay in bed." Some where around the word "Vivik" her voice cracked as if she was forcing herself to speak in a relaxed manner. As she spoke she continued to look up into the chalk blue sky, as if she were speaking to it, and she was waiting for it to answer. Maybe scorn her. Maybe tell her to get her head on straight, and figure out what was important to her. Allica was waiting for God to look down at her, the color of His eyes the same chalk blue as the sky, and lecture her for skipping out of her 8:10 again. It's interesting who people find for surrogate parents the first time that they are really away from home.

"Vivik's, huh? How come nobody called me?" Maybe God would let me off the hook for not lecturing her myself.

"We tried. It was a spur of the moment thing. You weren't home." It was true. I hadn't been home. I spent much of last evening sitting on the floor of the city library reading a book about the great predictions for the year 1990 that was published in 1982. As for Hap's little party... Hap, Happy Adler (don't tease—- that is his real name) has a way of planning spur of the moment stuff weeks in advance.

"You could have left a message on my machine." I really wasn't that upset. I would have turned down the invitation to Vivik's anyway, even if I had been home. Vivik had a way of irritating me when taken in large enough doses. Vivik DeLapados, take in small doses and always on an empty stomach. For the best effect, drink a glass of orange juice about a half hour after consumption. It's the vitamin C, man.

Allica sighed. "Yeah," she said in a irritated tone, "Well, we didn't, so tuff noogies." I guess we didn't think of that, Allica. Those answering machines are scary anyway. They never called. Otherwise she'd have remembered that I have a machine.

"Besides, Sweetie, I know that you wouldn't have had any fun anyway. I thought that you didn't like Hap." It was true. In addition to being irritated by Vivik, Happy Adler was nothing shy of annoying if seen one time too many in a given week. He had a way of getting really excited (really, really excited) about sort-of interesting things, that I guess I don't care about as much as he does. No wonder I didn't go out with my friends very often.

I put a cigarette in my mouth and opened my bag . I dug through the many pockets looking for a lighter. I bought a lighter once.

Allica stopped waiting for God to send her to her room and turned to me. "You never have a lighter, you know that?"

"I should hope that I would." Ask a stupid question, "I bought one once. It cost me \$12."

"Well where is it now?" she reached into her jacket pocket, and she handed me her lighter.

I lit my cigarette with a blue Bic lighter with a Strawberry Shortcake smelly sticker on it.

"I dunno. Somewhere, I guess. I don't like lighters. There is something intrinsically cooler about a match."

Allica, taking back her Strawberry Shortcake Bic, flashed me a half smile. She thought. Allica has a way of letting the world know that she wants to bring something up but is scared too. She cocks her head to the side, opens one eye slightly larger than the other, stares directly at you for a second (giving the appearance of quiet calculated study) and then finally tells you what's on her mind. She did just that and began to ask,

"Can I tell you--"

And was interrupted by Dug. He came lumbering up to us, smiling and dumb, his face always needed shaving, even right after he shaved it, and shouting, "Hey guys!"

As he approached the Knoll he put a cigarette in his mouth. He stopped, looked at us, said ceremonial hellos, and with one smooth, calculated and nearly perfect flick of his wrist, lit a strike anywhere red-tipped match on the edge of his thumbnail.

And as he lit the match, and as he held it to his cigarette and up until he exhaled the cloud of cigarette smoke and started talking again, this 275 pound, jean jacketed, greasy ponytailed, sideburned, clod became James Dean from the cover of Rebel Without a Cause. This big dumb ox with the mere lighting of a match turned from Pee-Wee Herman to Cool Hand Luke and back in about five seconds. He was Hudson Hawk, James Bond, Al Pacino, Patrick Stewart, and Captain Kirk all at once, and all only for five seconds.

"Duggy," I greeted him by saying his name, the same way he always greets other people. Allica stared wide eyed at him. He said her name. She turned to me. She smiled. Her eyes sparkled like the sunshine reflecting off of a freshly minted quarter, as she said:

"Yeah. You're right. There is something... something cooler."

I offered to buy Duggy a muffin. He agreed, as he ground out the cigarette with the toe of his boot. Cool. Very cool.

There are two kinds of Muffin worth having. Both of them have poppyseeds so if you're not a poppyseed person, I guess you are out of luck. The Almond-Poppyseed and the Lemon-Poppyseed. All other muffins are just muffins. The Almond and Lemon Poppyseed Muffins were the Chosen Muffins of the Grassy Knollsters and Myself. Denise, the cashier, and a friend of mine, saw me coming and grabbed one of each. They cost me ninety-nine cents apiece. These were big muffins. They were quite a deal. I gave Duggy the Lemon, because, frankly, the Almonds are better.

I stood with Dug while he waited in line for his Irish Cream Coffee. Duggy had a thing for flavored and imported coffee. He was the only one of the group that did. The rest of us liked our coffee black. Very black.

Not that it had always been that way. We all go through our stages, right? For the longest time it's all that you can do to choke down your first cup of Joe. Coffee, (it isn't fair to call anything that has been that saturated by sugar and cream coffee anymore) isn't the best tasting thing in the world to a 14 year old child, who is more interested in the grown-up feeling the beverage provides. So the child makes it taste more like candy, adding sugar, cream, Sweet and Low, Equall, Nutra-Sweet, Sugar-Twin, honey, syrup, peppermint disks, and milk. And the sugar saturated libation, somehow, tastes good to these preadolescent angst-monsters. They sit in the smoking section and drink there coffee-syrup at the local Denny's, smoking Camel Lights, bitching about how unfair it is that their parents treat them like they are eight, and how there big brothers can do anything they want, just because they've got jobs and pay for their own gas.

Then the next step: Coffee Shops!

Some point between addiction and novelty, coffee shops have long been the home of the pseudo-intellectual, the Beatnik, the jazz musician and the tortured artist. They give folks a place to sit and brood. More importantly, they give folks a place where people can see them sitting and brooding.

At this step of coffee evolution the sugar has been replaced by adding the synthetic flavor of Irish cream and vanilla hazelnut. Cappuccino and espresso fall into favor. "Give me a Double-Vannilla-Decaf-Cap on a coaster, in a glass-- not a mug, and a Vegan Brownie, please." Still not black coffee, but not quite the kiddy sugar drinks that the evolving coffee drinker had previously called coffee.

Something was bugging Duggy. I could tell. Something about the bounce in his step or the way his eyes kept scanning the people in the semi-crowded cafe area, he was looking for something.

"So what's the deal Duggy?" He hadn't even touched his muffin yet. (There were some days when Duggy would have his entire muffin devoured before he ever even got his coffee, poppyseeds and all.)

"Muh." Duggy replied. He had a habit of making guttural sounds instead of using words.

"I see. That bad, huh?"

"Muh. 'sokay. I'm hanging in, ya know?"

"Yeah." How else do you respond to that?

"I dunno. Looking I guess. Haven't seen the Sunshine Girl in a few days." The Sunshine Girl was Duggy's dream girl. People say eventually you will grow out of the dream girl stage, but I don't think so. Sunshine Girl was Suzzie Clemment, a friend of mine in my 10:30 film class. Duggy called her Sunshine Girl because of the inordinate amount of sundresses the girl wore. She wore them with Long-johns underneath, after it got to cold.

Duggy got his coffee, tossed a buck-fifty on the counter and walked out of the cafe area. As we passed the door I decided to bite.

"You could call her, you know."

"Nope. I'd ruin the magic." Duggy lit a cigarette. Cool. Very Cool.

I was heading back to the Knoll to when I saw that Hap and Vivik had joined Allica and Teavan who had been talking. Hap and Vivik, and Teavan seemed to be exchanging Witty Repartee (that's what *they* called it anyway,) as they're want to do. Sometimes I thought it was a out-clever each other contest between all three of them. I saw Allica had turned away and was holding her knees to her chest, as if for warmth.

It was 71° out.

"Wait." Duggy grabbed my shoulder. "Hold on. Lets not go over there just yet."

"Why, who Hap? He's an asshole, but he's Ok."

"No not Happy. Vivik. I'm not to happy about that dickhead right now. He's a fucker. If I go over there, there'll be problems." Dug took a drag from his cigarette. He seemed to suffer pain throughout inhaling it, and then rapture while exhaling. Smoke, chalk blue. *Mental Note: Draw parallel between Duggy's smoke and the sky on this overcast September day...* *There has to be a connection.*

"He was..." Pause. "He's too..." Pause. Duggy never was very good at expressing himself. "He went to far. He's a fucker. He's bad news man."

And that was it. Duggy continued to Cigarette by me until Vivik continued on his way and then we went back over to the Knoll. The wood chips that I sat on stuck to my pants when I stood up later to go to my 2:30 class.

"Last week I bought a CD because I hate all the songs on it."

"Nobody can get through that class the first time."

"Vivik says that I can take it pass-fail."

"It's too late for that. You could have."

"If you'd moved a little faster."

"Do you think that Becky will ever get her license?"

"Can't find my favorite boxers, have you seen them?"

"Did you leave them at Dana's?"

"I never wanted to punch somebody anymore than I did right then."

Allica's eyes flickered with potential fury. "Sometimes I think that this peaceful passivity bullshit isn't where it's at... I mean. I know that I could never feel good later about seriously hurting somebody, but there are times, man, I could just walk up to somebody, all big and bad-assed, Bruce Willis in Last Boy Scout like, punch that bastard in the nose, pushing it up into his brain and listening to that fucker die."

She stopped, embarrassed for letting herself get carried away. I chuckled to myself, thinking of Allica's tiny frame actually in a confrontation of that effect. She'd be lucky to reach somebody's nose, let alone push it into their brain.

"You get angry," I shrugged. "Everybody does."

"You don't."

"I do. I've just had a lot of practice avoiding conflict of that type." It was true. Being beaten up because you are a "weirdo" every day on the school bus until eighth grade gives you many opportunities for that kind of practice. "I think that I'd like to push

a lot of these people's noses at least half way into there brain a lot of the time. The secret is in re-direction."

"Yeah. I know. Redirect-The-Emotion-Into-A-Constructive-Effort. I've been to Creative Writing. It's not the same though. I mean. When he pushed himself on me..." Her face leaked the expression of genuine horror. "What was I supposed to do?"

I could see tears welling in her eyes. Somewhere in the last two minutes, things had gotten very real.

"I couldn't let him have his way with me. But I can't just give up seventeen years of pacifism. He's such a fucker. " She buried her face in her knees, which she pulled tighter to her chest with her arms as she sat and rocked.

"Thursday night. 11:30. The night the world turned to shit."

"Are you sure you're ready to talk about this?"

"I can't talk about this."

"You need to."

I was in Vivik's apartment. His room was decorated in a style that he called "a collage of all things, cool and not." A picture of Michael Douglas (Probably clipped from some oversize magazine) caught my attention. Next to a first print Star Wars movie poster, and a bunch of record store P.O.P. posters for bands like 311 and Rage against the Machine.

"I have to. I know. That's such a bunch of shit. I know I have to talk about it. I know. Everybody needs to talk about it. Fuck you man. I don't need to talk about it."

"I'm your friend. You can talk about it to me, Vivik. I wont judge you. I'm past that." I smiled. "I already think you're an asshole." There was a little too much truth to that.

"Fuck you man. Everybody looses control sometimes. It happens. I was drunk--"

"Being drunk isn't a viable excuse."

"No shit, But fuck. I mean. It's an excuse. I mean, I'm not like that. I can't believe that. I'd like to take that night back. I made a mistake. I feel awful. Is that enough sharing? She wont talk to me about it. Fuck her. I feel awful. I violated her. I stepped over the bounds, but God dammit, If she wont let me be sorry, fuck her. I need to be forgiven."

"Why should she forgive you?"

"Because I'm sorry. I am so sorry. I tried. I'm not a creep. I'm not a sexual predator. I haven't got it in me."

Or do you? I thought. I have always believed that alcohol gives people an excuse to behave like they want to. To do the things that he or she would like to do, but can't because of societal restrictions or whatnot. Jack Daniel's himself has broken up many good lives. Screwed a lot of people out of what they would deserve, if they could have controlled themselves instead. I drink too. I like it. I think that drinking is a good thing, but maybe in an unstable world, that little bit of stability that drinking takes away from us, is enough to push things over the edge.

Maybe AA has a point. Move over Betty Ford. here comes Vivik DeLapados and he's pissed.

Upset by my silence, Vivik shouted at me: "Look man, don't just sit there." Vivik was getting defensive. "You came over here. You thought we needed to talk, and now you're just sitting there, fucking say something! "

"Easy Viv... I'm just thinking. I'm not judging. You already know what I think about what you did. I'm past judging. I just want to deal with it. I'm-- We are dealing with a very scared little girl. She's very angry and she's afraid of not only you, but herself. Viv, you're a smart guy. You can understand what she's going through. "

"What about what I'm going through."

"That's part of the problem too. She doesn't understand what you feel. She sees you as the evil one here. She sees you as the predator. She doesn't see you as having made a mistake. Maybe she doesn't want to. She sees you as a cold, calculating would-be rapist. I'm here to get your feelings so that I can help her, before she loses it."

Vivik's face twisted from the angry-hell bent for leather- fuck the universe- snot-nosed punk I knew him as, to that of a scared, tearful sorry eight year old.

He never looked like he was going to cry. But the fear in his face was nothing short of pathetic.

"Why can't she see I'm sorry," he asked no one in particular. "Why can't she see that?"

Were in Brewed Black. It's a little shop. Small, clean. Industrial, as opposed to homey. It was comfortable, but not inviting. I work there. I locked the door 15 minutes early. Nobody ever comes in after 11:30 on a Tuesday night, anyway.

She smoked.

I brought her a double. "I talked to Viv."

"What excuses did he fucking offer you? " she mocked, 'I was drunk, I was drunk.'."

"Yeah, he did say that. but he didn't mean it. He's scared Al. He's scared out of his skull."

"Well he fucking ought to be." She pulled from her cigarette. She took a swallow of her cappuccino.

"He wants to forget it all. He wants to put it behind you guys."

"Fuck that. He humiliated me. I carry on like nothing happened. I pretend that I wasn't violated, but really, I was. He put me there. I am screaming on the inside because of him, and I have to pretend that he's an Ok guy? He did this to me, He had to be the big man, and use his strength and power over me. He's the one who fucked himself, He's -- huh?"

A couple, in search of late night coffee banged on the door, interrupting Allica's ranting. "Let us in." the male shouted.

"Hey we're closed, sorry," I said standing up and heading to the door. If I was gong to have an argument with this guy, there was no reason for both of us to have to shout.

"I got fifteen minutes.--"

"Get the fuck out of here you stupid piece of shit!" shouted Allica, throwing her double vanilla cappuccino at the door. Coffee (Splash) everywhere. Brown puddles of double vanilla cappuccino stained the white tiles. The china hit the door just above the handle. I thanked God for letting it miss the glass part of the door as it exploded. Powder blue. *What's the connection... there has to be something..*

Allica had stood up. She looked shocked. She looked frightened. She looked scared. "I... I..." she stuttered. tears welled in her eyes. "I... I..." she gave me a pained look, finally taking her eyes off of the puddles of coffee on the floor and the chalk blue mark on the brown door that the china had left, she choked and ran off, "Sorry." She ran. She left through the back door. I knew I should have locked it. Fuck.

The couple who wanted coffee must have sensed the psychosis inside our humble establishment, because after I got back with the mop and bucket from he kitchen. They were know where to be found.

I worked competently. Completely. Efficiently. I closed the shop down faster and better and more completely than I ever had before. I didn't know what else to do.

As I mopped one thing kept running through my head. *Chalk blue. What's the connection. Where's the symbolism. What's the parallel. Chalk Blue... Chalk blue...*

This is the part in the story where I bear my soul and I tell the reader all about my problems and how awful my life is. It is supposed to give me depth as a character and it is supposed to make you identify with me. I will share with you the experiences of my life

and you will draw parallels to your life experiences, and as a result you will identify with me and see my experiences in the story as your own. You're supposed to learn something.

I don't think that is going to happen.

It's not an attitude problem, I'd love to spill out pages and pages of useless angst about how I'm more fucked up than the next guy. But the truth is, I'm not anymore fucked up than anybody else. Everybody's got problems.

Dealing with them. That's the real thing. That's tough. That's where people fuck up. Everybody deals with their problems in their own ways. I deal with mine better than other people, I guess. I don't kill people. I can't figure that one out.

Why would offing some Wicked Witch of the West make the world a better place to live? I think that murder is merely stooping to a antagonistic level.

Anyway, what Allica did is inexcusable. I don't understand it. I can't believe it. I'm not going to try.

Two weeks went by and I never saw her. Not since that night in the coffee shop. She didn't return my phone calls, and I didn't see her about. Nobody saw her. (I take that back. Denise saw her. She has English with her and she has been attending class regularly. Almost religiously compared with her track record.)

Not until the day I saw her on the Knoll. There she sat, staring up at the sky like she always did. Like I had known her to and like she had never disappeared. So I bit. I approached her.

"Allica," I helloed her as I pulled up a spot of grass next to hers.

"Did you ever just miss looking up at the sky?" she asked me.

"No. I try to look at it often enough to not have to miss it. The sky is a wonderful thing. It never ends, and it's chalk blue reaches can soothe the soul like cool jazz on a soft summer's evening. "

She wrinkled her nose at the cliché. She sighed a sigh that relaxed the heavens and told little boys afraid of the monsters under the bed that everything was going to be all right.

I looked at the clouds and at the trees. It was well past peak foliage. The skeleton bones of the trees that used to warm those happy fall days only made it colder now.

She sat up, and leaned over to me. She looked me in the eye.

"I suppose you want to ask me how I'm doing?"

I shrugged. "The thought had crossed my mind."

"Well don't because I'm fine. I feel good. I feel better about everything. I like everything, and I like everybody, and I like you not to ask me about it Ok? I'm working things out. I'm dealing with it."

She flashed a disturbing smile, crossed somewhere between girlish glee and sluttish ecstasy. The effect was creepy.

"Don't worry about it."

I looked into her eyes, they were a beautiful shade of green, the perfect compliment to a days worth of anger, and greed. Soothing without being condescending at the same time. You could look into these eyes and feel better about the world with out feeling retarded, or like a child, or both. Like the big dumb man I am,

I fell for it.

Allica shot Vivik dead on October 29. Two days before Halloween. At Vivik and Happy Adler's Halloween party. They had been serving, they joked, a bloodbath of alcohol. They had goofy gag prosthetic gore and silly plastic chopped fingers, but they all seemed pretty damn stupid compared to the image of Vivik in his stupid Lost-Boys-esque vampire outfit, lying on his back with blood pouring out of a wound in his chest. This image filled my eyes after I heard the gunshot and kicked open Vivik's door. Blood spattered all over Vivik's clean white linen. Real blood. Real spattered.

Allica was standing over him, holding a revolver, blue smoke coming in wisps out of the barrel. (*Chalk Blue Smoke*) She was shaking and she wouldn't put the gun down. She turned it on me when I approached her.

She looked lost. She looked scared. She was a confused child suddenly realizing that Santa, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy were all just really Mom and Dad. She was a lost little girl in the department store looking for help, but not trusting anybody enough to ask. Mommy had gone to buy some new pantyhose and her little girl was about to kill the clerk who was going to take her to the Information desk.

Allica looked at me, her eyes were no longer the deceptive sparking green ones that had been shining on me days before, they were the same scary, bloodshot, just past psychotic ones that I had only ever seen once before. The night she threw the mug at the coffee shop.

She grasped for something to say. She mouthed something, No sound ever coming out of her wide open mouth.

"I didn't-- She--- He could have---" she turned the gun on herself. Placing the barrel on her right temple. "I didn't..." She continued to try to speak in full sentences, failing miserably.

My mind raced. Do I run over and jump her, wrestle the gun away from her? Do I let her do what she has to? Do I try to reason with her, explain the evils of suicide? She'd just killed a friend, sure he was an asshole, but he was a friend nevertheless...

"Allica..." I said. "Never have your main character commit suicide at the end of the story."

She looked at me, her bloodshot eyes, pleading.

I repeated, my voice wavered, "Never have your main character commit suicide at the end of the story. Never use the poetic image of a teardrop, and write about what you know."

There was an intense moment of awkward silence.

Allica's mouth shut and it slowly twisted from the angry clamp it had, to a scared grimace and finally, as she tossed the gun on the floor, into a laugh. Not a sinister laugh, or a psychotic laugh, but a genuine Allica Stoletnburg laugh of relief, as she ran to me and hugged me.

She kept half laughing, half crying to herself as we embraced. Her face buried in my chest, and my chin resting on her shoulder. And as she laughed, I held her, and a single, dewy teardrop rolled out of my eye, poured down my face, dropped off my chin, and splashed on the floor.

Splash.

[END]

Released under a Creative Commons license:
Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 United States

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 United States License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

For additional usage rights, please contact gwollenburg@writelarge.com