

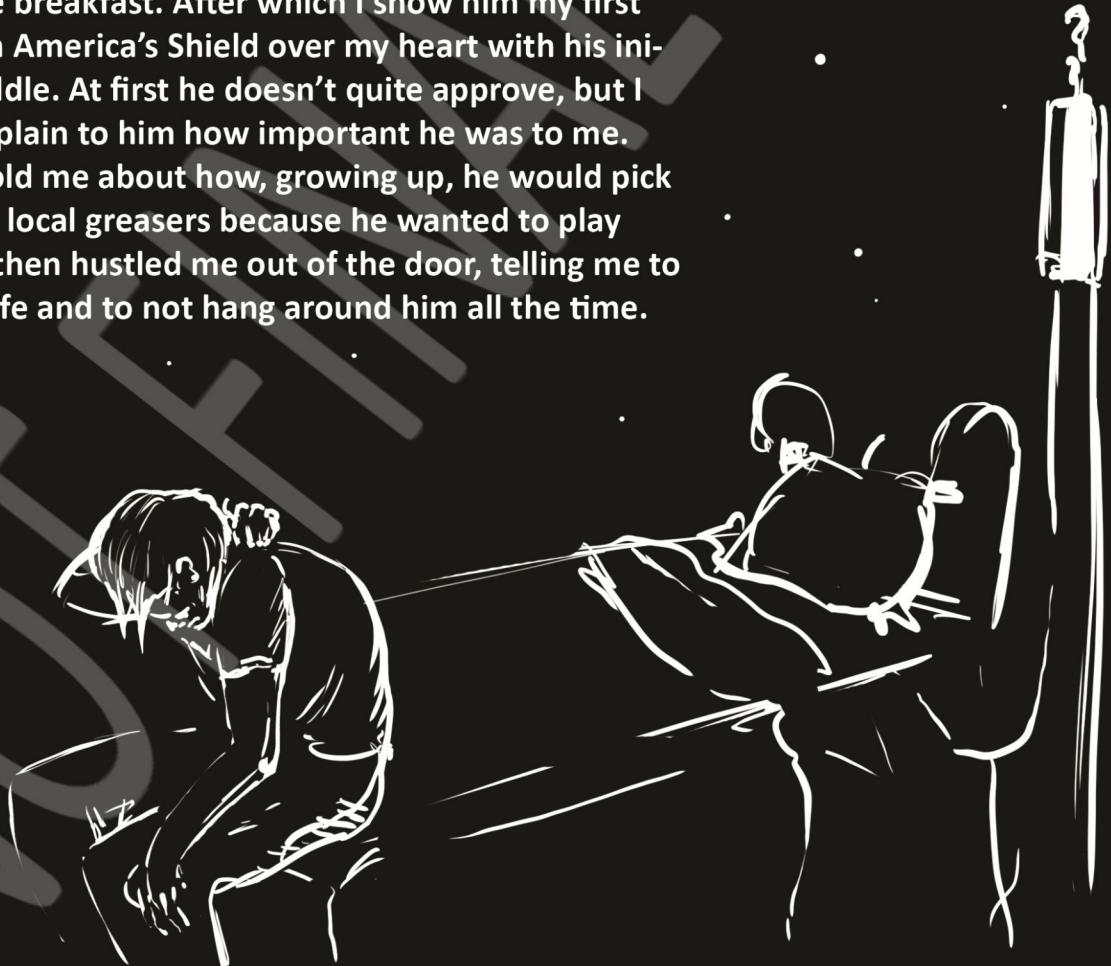
# Terror: An Idiot's Lament

By: Alex Fucking Smith



For the second time in my life, I'm terrified. So terrified, in fact, that it keeps me up at night. It's a heart-wrenching feeling that I can't seem to shake. Always accompanied by a sense of helplessness.

The first time it happened was when I was 20. My grandfather was admitted to the hospital after his pacemaker knocked him out trying to restart his heart while he was working in his garden. My mom came up to my work and told me. And I felt my heart sink to the floor. This man, who I idolized was in rough shape, and there was nothing I could do. After about a week, he was out of the hospital, and I spent every possible moment hanging out with him. The fear of losing him had always been there, for as long as I could remember. I knew every day I got to spend with him was precious, but he was so fucking tough that after coming out of that heart attack I felt like he would be around forever. A week after he's released from his heart attack we have breakfast. After which I show him my first tattoo, Captain America's Shield over my heart with his initials in the middle. At first he doesn't quite approve, but I was able to explain to him how important he was to me. And then he told me about how, growing up, he would pick fights with the local greasers because he wanted to play volleyball. He then hustled me out of the door, telling me to go and enjoy life and to not hang around him all the time.



That was the last conversation I had with him. He suffered a stroke the next day and spent the next month (including his 85th birthday) in the hospital. He didn't want me to see him in the hospital. Not like that. But when I was there, and in front of my brother and cousins, he did remind me that despite his current predicament, he could still kick my ass. A cherished moment that exemplifies a man I love, my hero. But it wasn't before long that I was sitting next to his bed and he was begging me to take him away from there. To break him out of the hospital. He promised me ice cream. At that point in my life, I had never felt more terrified of anything. I couldn't stand to see him like that. I couldn't stand to not be able to do anything about it. I leaned in and told him to hold on one more day. One more day and I will take him home.

He died the next morning.



I cherish the fact that I was able to have that man in my life for as long as I did. I do my best to live to his standard, to make him proud in my actions. "What would grandpa do?" Is the common question for figuring out life's choices. And life has been good. His inevitable passing was a moment I dreaded from the time I was first introduced to death. It was a moment I wasn't sure I would ever be able to get through, but I did. The fear was a driving force for me. One that allowed me to cherish the time I spent with that man, both good and bad. My fear prepared me to deal with life after he passed. But there was a part of that experience that was completely unexpected.

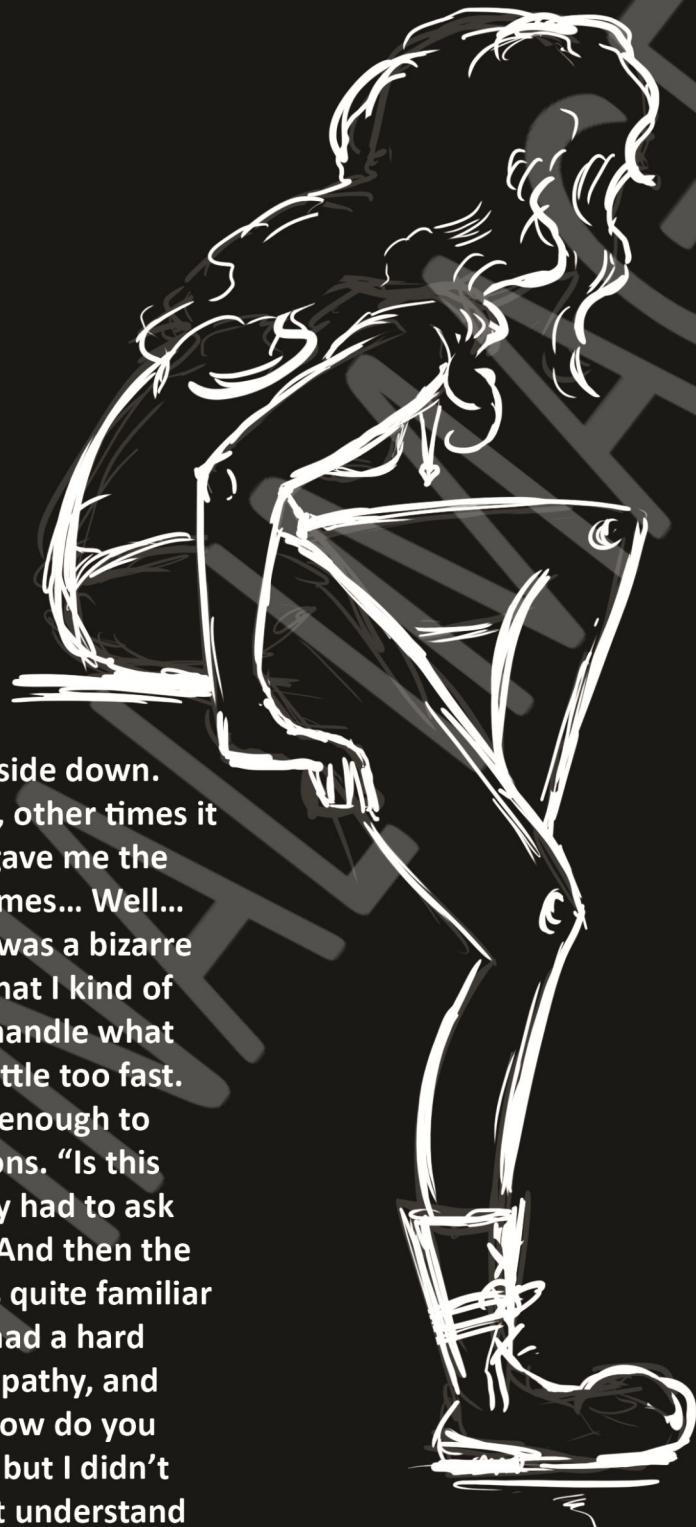
The terror. The terror of seeing the pinnacle of toughness, my icon, wither away in a meager month. I was forced to stand by and do nothing. Nothing but wait, and make the best of the time I had. There's no preparing for that feeling, and sometimes I wish it all would have happened sooner. Or quicker. Like peeling away a band aide on your hairy leg, slowly. At some point you get to the gauze-y part and everything seems ok. But then, here comes more adhesive! That what that month was like for me. A rollercoaster of heart destroying emotion. It was something I never planned on experiencing again. At least not any time soon.

The plan was simple; aside from family and a few (healthy) close friends, don't get close to anyone. Relationships are for the birds, and in my early 20's I was much more inclined to be a loner. For the most part the plan has worked. I'm not friends with any terminally ill people, I've since left my hometown to move to Chicago, thus making new friends. And for a good long while the only romantic relationship I had was the kind that only existed on Tinder. As far as I was concerned, the only lady I will ever love is my Mama. Love was a concept I refused to grasp. Reflectively, that refusal stemmed from the possibility that I would experience negative emotions. I spent a lot of time burying my emotions. Emotions are too volatile, and caused irrational behavior. "What is love? Baby don't hurt me. No more." I didn't want to know the answer. I didn't want to feel. I was a coward, running away from the very thing that makes us human. But I didn't want to be human.



Then that all changed.

I met a girl who turned my life upside down. Sometimes that was a good thing, other times it was a bad thing. Sometimes she gave me the best feeling in the world. Other times... Well... Other times were pretty shitty. It was a bizarre rollercoaster for me. Something that I kind of fell into and didn't know how to handle what was going on. We moved fast. A little too fast. And I wasn't emotionally mature enough to rodeo all these new found emotions. "Is this love?" Was a question I constantly had to ask myself. One day I decided it was. And then the next day I decided it wasn't. I was quite familiar with anger and frustration, but I had a hard time deciphering compassion, empathy, and passion. I knew how to be cute (how do you think I got her in the first place?), but I didn't know how to be romantic. I didn't understand the importance of self-sacrifice. "Why should I change my way of doing things? Why can't she change hers?" (Stupid questions asked by a stupid person.)





I was constantly getting frustrated and most of the time I didn't know what at. There was a lot of outside stressors, but that's not an excuse to be a dickhead to the person who cares about you. The new influx of feelings lead to an internal battle: "Who am I? This isn't the person we wanted to be. Everything will end badly and you brought this on yourself." —My brain. This internal frustration put me on edge, and I allowed it to boil over. Constantly. This lead to pointless arguments, mostly caused by me doing or saying something in a manner that I can't see as being disrespectful/dickish/mean but actually is. And then I'd be too stubborn to admit that I ever did anything wrong. I was never at fault. Not in my eyes. Because she did X to upset my Y. When in all actuality I didn't give a shit about Y. My negative thoughts were winning, and that just compounded my frustration.

Why did I have to fight so hard to just "Be Happy?"

I still don't know the answer to that question. I can only suppose that I was so dead-set on being alone (in order to avoid any super-sadness) that I would sabotage any possibility of being super happy. To quote The Menzingers, "I will fuck this up. I fucking know it." This became my motif. I sabotaged the possibility of super-happiness for fear of being super sad.

Idiotic.

Idiotic because that's fighting what it means to be human.

Idiotic because I was punishing myself for feeling.

Idiotic because I never realized how happy I actually was

Idiotic because I managed to fuck up a girl who wanted nothing but the chance to love me. Idiotic because it took me way too long to realize it.

Idiotic because this is not what grandpa would have done.

I fucked it all up. And I lost who I was in the process. I betrayed the spirit of the only person I've ever known that I've truly idolized. If he were alive today, he would kick my ass.

Twice.

And now I'm terrified.

It's been 3 months since we split and I've finally worked through why I was such a shitty person. And this whole time I figured we could just pick up and move on. But life's not that simple.

The world doesn't revolve around me.

She has to decide whether or not I'm worth coming back to. And it's killing me. I struggle every day with it. There's a part of me who is saying, "Fuck it. Cut your losses. You fucked this up too much, time to move on. It's not worth the pain. It's not worth the terror of not knowing."

That's the old me trying to get through. And today I let that part out and I could physically feel her moving away from me. And it's a familiar frustration that I bring on myself. I need to do better. It's hard. But I got to keep trying. WWGD?

So now I can't sleep. I'm terrified of losing this girl. I'm helpless. And it's nobody's fault but my own.

I want so badly just to do some grand romantic gesture. One that'll show her I'm serious. But it's childish to think that I'd be able to wipe away the pain I caused just like that.

You know for a while I thought to myself, "If I can get over all the shitty things she did to me, why can't she get over the things I did?" And before today that answer eluded me.

I'm able to look past them because deep down, I know I caused the issues. So yeah, I can forgive her for something I did. Easy. Forgiving myself? That's a whole different can of worms that I don't want to open right now.

She says she loves me, which is a good thing to hear.

But can she forgive me? I don't know. And that's terrifying. I can't speculate. I don't want to.

All I can do, is what grandpa would have done:

Acknowledge my mistake.

Apologize.

Do better.



There was a time I told this girl that I didn't actually love her.

Why?

Self-destruction I suppose. Self-hatred. Perhaps I was simply confused on what love meant. Because, if I'm being honest, outside of family I was not sure I have ever felt love for another human.

But if I'm equating known feelings with the unknown. I know this feeling of terror. I know this feeling of helplessness. This feeling that I would do whatever I could to make things better. This is the same feeling I had when I was 20. When I watched the one person I loved more than anything slip away from me.

I may not understand the concept of love. Or the worth it brings into someone's life. I might have done everything in my power to stop myself from falling in love. But, reflectively, I think I underestimated my opponent.

"You don't know what you have 'til it's gone." As I feel what little I have left with this girl slip away, the terror intensifies. A terror that I have only ever felt for one other human. A person who I idolized, a person who I have to thank for everything I have in this world, a person who I love. If he was still here he would slap me upside the head.





**It's obvious.**

**I'm terrified of my apologies falling on deaf ears.**

**I'm terrified of my inability to handle my emotional immaturity.**

**I'm terrified of facing a world where she's not mine.**

**I'm terrified of knowing that I broke the heart of the girl who *loves* me.**

**I'm terrified of losing this girl because I love her.**

**I just have to wait and see if it's enough.**