

## "How I'm Going to Die"

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My mother thinks that I am going to die of radiation poisoning because when I was four and five and six (but not seven) I used to press my nose up against the microwave so that I could watch the popcorn pop or the casserole warm or the hot dog cook or whatever. I liked the sights and the sounds and the smells and one time my brother put a chip bag in there and it shrunk up real small but he didn't let me touch it, and another time he put a CD in there and it started shooting out blue sparks but my mom came in and turned all red and my brother pointed at me and said she did it. I had to agree with him because I'm little and that's what little kids do - they say that they did stuff like put a CD in the microwave even when it was actually their brother.

So now my mother thinks I'm going to get radiation poisoning and die and she spends whole days moping on the couch about her poor life and why does she have to have children who go and get themselves radiation poisoning and leave her no one to take care of her in her old-ness. I tell her that I can take care of her in her old-ness because my brother surely won't and plus I don't even feel a tiny bit sick and I don't have any fever so probably I'm not poisoned and probably I won't die.

When I say things like that, though, it doesn't make my mother feel better. Most times it just makes her more sad and she digs herself down into the couch like a dog trying to bury its bone except we don't have a dog just a mom who hides herself in the couch cushions with an ugly little blanket covering her. My brother says that she is melodramatic and also she had some other kids who died so she's prone to worrying but I don't know what prone means and I never had any other brothers and sisters so I think probably that he is lying to me.

Even though he lies to me and even though sometimes he makes me say I put CDs in the microwave when I did no such thing, I sort of like my brother sometimes because he makes me a lunch on the mornings when my mother is busy getting swallowed by our couch, and he reminds me when the bus leaves so that I don't have to get a late note. If you get too many late notes, your teacher makes a little mark in her little book and you have to go and talk to the

principal who says things like why are you so late or why do you miss your bus or why does your mother never come to the Parent-Teacher Conference. The principal has big watery eyes and sometimes it looks like he's about to start crying in the middle of talking to you like missing your bus and not going to Parent-Teacher Conferences is the saddest thing in the whole entire world.

I know for a fact that there are sadder things in the world than missing your bus, and even though I don't know what a Parent-Teacher Conference is, I bet there are sadder things than not going to one of those, like a flower that gets squished by big mean boys on the playground or a puppy with only three legs or when my brother pulls my hair and calls me a stupid little bug-eyed runt. Sometimes I think that I should tell these things to my principal because my brother told me that what principals need is a little per-specs-tive and I think that puppies are the best kind of per-specs-tive, but then I think that probably my principal would not like to hear about puppies or maybe he would just be so sad that he would finally start to cry.

When I go back to class after talking to my cry-ie eyed principal, all of the students make the uh-muh-muh-muh-muh sound which means you got in trouble in first grade speak and then I just have to go sit quietly in my desk because the teacher knows that I got in trouble too and she'll be watching me like a hawk and I think that hawks are probably something scary although we haven't learned about them in our textbooks yet. Sometimes, when I'm sitting in my desk and trying not to make trouble and be quiet so my teacher-hawk won't see me, I like to think. Sometimes, I think about imaginary things like what the clouds in the sky look like or what I would do if one day I become a princess which is what I want to be when I grow up. Sometimes I also think about real life things like whether my brother packed me PB&J because he knows that that's my favorite or whether he ran out of time and had to give me ham and cheese which he knows I hate because the ham gets all warm and the cheese taste like the glue that we used last year to make art collages.

Every day, when I get home, I have to make sure that I go and kiss my mother on the forehead because my grandma told me before she died that I should always be nice to my mother and also so that I can make sure and tell her that I haven't died yet. Once I forgot to go in and kiss her and

she got up off the couch and wrapped the ugly blanket around her and started wandering around the house, calling my name. She sounded really scared but I was tired and I was already sitting down so I waited until she came into the kitchen and found me there drinking a glass of milk and peeling an orange with my short fingernails because I bit them off even though she told me not to.

When she found me, she slapped me really hard across the face and started crying really hard and then she sat down on the floor and wrapped herself in the blanket and I spilled my milk and my face burned red in the shape of a hand and I wanted to cry too, but I thought she was doing too much crying for the both of us. Instead, I just sat there with milk in my lap and my mother's hand across my cheek and tear tucked back in my eyes and my mother on the floor until my brother got home and found us there and fixed everything. He cleaned up the milk and told me to go to my room and change and then he pulled my mother to her feet and led her to the couch and the whole time I could hear her sobbing and she kept saying I thought she died I thought she died.