

What's for Breakfast?

by ReadWorks

Of course Dad decided to blame *me* when he came downstairs this morning to make coffee and burn toast, and saw the mess in the kitchen and the living room. "DANIEL," I heard him from my post in the bathroom. I stood there on my toes to see what I'd look like if I were taller, brushing my teeth and wondering if I could get out the door with un-brushed hair, and without Miranda, my older and snottier sister, noticing.

"DANIEL!"

I came downstairs still wearing my pajamas and saw a bunch of magazines on the rug by the couch, toppled over from their usual stack on the coffee table. Then I saw the bad mess in the kitchen. The jars with Miranda's baking supplies are usually lined up along the counter, but one of them was on the floor in pieces, and there was flour everywhere. Dad was standing in the middle of it, wearing half of a suit: shiny black shoes and pressed work pants, but no shirt; and his hair still wet from the shower. I laughed. That was a mistake.

"Did you do this, funny man?" The coffeemaker sounded like it was gargling mouthwash. I guess Dad wasn't so mad that he couldn't make his java.

"No, Dad, I didn't." It was the truth, too. When I turned off the TV the night before, the magazines were still stacked. And when I got my nighttime cup of water from the kitchen, there was no flour on the floor.

"Really? Because we've had this problem before, with footballs and jump ropes, and indoor kite-flying." Dad obviously did not believe me.

"Really, Dad, I have no idea how this happened. I got some water in the middle of the night, but everything was clean then."

Dad turned around and got some bread and butter, and honey. The toaster sounded like it hurt when he pushed the lever down. It was old and never made toast right. I only ate toast when I slept over at other people's houses. Dad didn't really care what his toast tasted like, I guess.

"I don't have time to clean this up, Daniel, and I'm mad. Go upstairs and get ready for school." Dad filled a big bowl with water.

"Okay." I was halfway up the stairs when Miranda's cat, Oatmeal, shot up underneath my

legs. "DAD!" I yelled. "I BET IT WAS OATMEAL!"

I don't think Dad heard me, but I got dressed and the more I thought about it, the more I just *knew* it had been Oatmeal. That cat always causes problems. At night he either fights things that can't fight back, like the couch or the cabinets or the laundry baskets downstairs, or he sits in the upstairs hallway and howls, trying to get into our rooms to show off the socks he hunts and kills. He's annoying, which means he's Miranda's perfect pet.

"Hey, Bozo." Miranda came out of her room dressed in high-tops and a red polka-dot dress. She had some bracelets on, which, plus the dress, made her look kind of like a girl, except that her bracelets had skulls on them and her sneakers were black.

She was a weird sister. She was in sixth grade and I was in fourth. I didn't understand why she didn't dress normally. Everything had to have something black or bone-y in it.

"Your stupid cat got me in trouble, Miranda."

"Maybe if you hadn't set precedent so many times, you wouldn't get blamed for wrecking the house."

"I didn't set president!" I didn't even know what that word meant.

"Precedent, dummy. And yes you did, every time you played ball or some other stupid game in the house." She walked past me and petted Oatmeal as he slithered toward her door.

"Hurry up, or I'll eat all the cereal."

I didn't hurry up. I put on my shoes and was silently thankful that she hadn't noticed my messy hair. I walked back downstairs with heavy feet, and let my backpack hit the steps behind me.

Dad was eating his burned toast with honey, and trying to mop up a gloppy mess on the floor. He did not look happy. Miranda was at the table eating a bowl of Kix. She threw one at me. I decided to skip cereal.

"Daniel, this is unacceptable," Dad muttered.

"Dad, it was Oatmeal. He went on a night rampage and did this."

"MIRANDA!" Dad raised his voice.

"Dad, he's just being a cat. He has wild instincts." Miranda didn't even lift her head.

"You need to start keeping your cookie things in the pantry."

"They look good in the jars."

"Fine. They'll just have to look good in the jars in the pantry."

Miranda decided not to argue, I guess, because she shut up. Dad was struggling. The paper towels he was using to wipe up the wet flour weren't doing a good job. He threw two handfuls in the trash, but there were still smears of paste on the ground and some dry flour powdering the corners of the kitchen. Dad looked at the clock on the stove, and he said, "Look at the time! We have to go." Then he rushed to the laundry room to put on a work shirt.

"Get your school stuff together and get in the car," Dad said. He huffed his way out the door. Miranda got up and went back upstairs, leaving me in the kitchen by myself. I sidestepped the sticky streaks of flour on the ground and got a Popsicle from the freezer. Breakfast!

When I got outside, Dad was already waiting in the driveway. I got in the front seat (take that, Miranda!) and noticed some crusty flour on the back of his work jacket. I didn't say anything. He'd probably just get mad. He was already mad anyway and getting angrier, as he impatiently honked the horn for Miranda. She shuffled out the front door, holding her lumpy backpack in front of her with both arms. We pulled out and Dad turned on NPR.

"I hope you two packed lunch."

"I forgot," I said. "Can I have some money?"

"Here, take 10 bucks." Dad tossed his wallet into my lap. I looked back at Miranda. I was kind of disappointed that she hadn't gotten mad about me sitting in the front seat.

"Miranda, do you need money, too?" Dad asked.

"No."

"What did you bring for lunch?"

"Oatmeal."

"That's gross, weirdo." Who eats oatmeal for lunch, I thought.

"If you say so, kiddo." Dad rolled his eyes. "I hope you packed the instant stuff, because if you cooked oatmeal just now, it's going to get really cold and nasty, and I'm going to be really annoyed that you wasted time doing that while we were waiting outside for you."

Miranda just looked out the window. We didn't talk for a few minutes, and the radio droned on about the news.

"Yeah, we waited forever," I said, turning around to glare. When I did, I noticed something weird. Miranda's backpack moved. I opened my mouth to say something but Miranda made a mean face and mouthed, "*Don't say anything.*"

A little white paw poked out from under the flap on her bag. I turned around again. Unbelievable! How is it that I was the one who always got in trouble for what that cat did? Miranda was worse than I was!

Dad pulled up to our school. "Have a good day, guys," he said, and I still didn't tell him about the flour-paste on his coat.

I got out; Miranda didn't. I stood on the sidewalk for a moment wondering why she was just sitting there. And then I saw Oatmeal squeeze his way out of her bag, despite her struggle to keep him contained. I slammed the door shut so he wouldn't escape. I heard her shriek and my dad yell, while I watched the cat tear the leather as he clawed his way under the passenger seat.

"MIRANDA!!!" Dad's scream was muffled with all the doors closed. I could hear them arguing, and then Dad waved at me without looking and drove away.

I probably should have felt a little angry that Miranda got to be late to school, or that my dad just drove away like that. But as I walked into the building, I just could not stop smiling.