

Fear of Dying

by Linda Lee Horvath

Dear Frances,

I think your suggestion about making a list of the things I worry about is a good one. You are really a dear friend to offer to read it. If I just wrote it for myself it wouldn't do any good because I've been over these worries so much in my head already and just can't seem to get rid of them. I hope you don't begin to feel worried after you read this.

First of all I am worried about my son who is 22 and lives in Philadelphia. He has never had a party of his own before; he is serving liquor and inviting 102 people. I'm afraid there will be a riot at his party and he will be drowned in the bathtub.

Whenever I go out to eat I worry that I will have a terrible allergic reaction to that chemical they put on salads. Someone will think I'm choking and try Heimlich maneuvers on me while I die of anaphylactic shock.

I'm worried that there will be a brown recluse spider in my bed, it will bite me, I will turn all brown and black and die.

Some night there will be a fire but the smoke alarms won't go off in time and when I try to escape out the window I will fall on my head in the sticker bush and break my neck.

If I buy a dress with a tight collar my throat might swell up suddenly and I would strangle.

If I look like other people there could be a case of mistaken identity wherein someone accuses me of murder and I am sentenced to death even though I am innocent. This could happen even if I wear a bag over my head.

Every month right before my period I eat too much chocolate which makes me hyper and nervous. I might put my head through the storm door when the mailman comes.

I am very allergic to dust and sleep with a mask over my face so I won't get sick, but I am afraid I will die of suffocation.

Sometimes my right eye hurts and I think that after I go blind or have to get a glass eye, they will find I am dying of a brain tumor.

Frances, you know how sometimes when you've put off doing your laundry all you have left is some old stained underwear that you almost threw away? I'm afraid I will be in an accident with that underwear and the doctor will leave me bleeding to death in the emergency room.

Sometimes I try to relax in a hot bath but I always think I might get too relaxed, slip down into the water and drown.

If I don't cut my toenails straight across, they will get ingrown and hurt all the time. I will be so distracted by pain that I will step in front of a UPS truck at Christmas time.

If I go out at night wearing black shoes with thin high heels and pointy toes I will get caught in the trolley track while crossing the street and my feet will swell up from fear so that I won't be able to get the shoe off and since I am wearing black, the trolley driver won't see me and I will be run over.

Frances, this is all I can bear to write just now. This sweater feels awfully tight around my neck, the mailman is at the door and I'm absolutely exhausted from writing so I'm going to lie down for a while.

Take care. Thanks.

Love,
Madge

Dear Madie,

Thanks for your letter. I do hope it helped you feel better. If it's useful just keep on cranking out those lists.

I've been having the best time out here in Colorado. My daughter and I have been skiing like madwomen every afternoon, partying all night in the lodge and sleeping it off in the AM. We've met a darling man and his son, so it's a happy foursome, for now. In fact Barry and I are leaving the kids here and taking off for Mexico in a couple of days. Love that hot Mexican food. You could try that. Nobody is ever allergic to Mexican food.

As for the fires, you could sleep on the first floor or cut down that sticker bush. I wouldn't worry about wearing black if I had your blonde hair. Just take taxis when you go out at night. And Madie, you've got the boobs for low necklines so throw out those high necked things if you don't like them. About bugs—always remember you're a lot bigger than they are.

Here's Barry. Must go. You do sound blue. Write again soon. Maybe we can get you over those worries and back to life in the fast lane. Remember those gay times way back when. . .

Love ya,
Frannie

Dear Francis,

I felt just a little cheerful when your letter came and I do thank you for it. You are the only friend I have. Perhaps you wouldn't mind if I were to tell you a few more of my concerns since I did get some help from writing before. I am doing my job, keeping the house in order, paying my bills on time, doing my mending, visiting my mother in the nursing home once a week but I keep worrying that I will go crazy.

Sometimes I think I have Alzheimers disease. Yesterday morning I put the milk into the oven and the broiler pan into the refrigerator. Then I went off to work without my medicine and left the checks I was supposed to mail lying on the table. Things are falling apart. I can't remember anything. If my mind goes I'll just commit suicide.

Also I keep having the craziest dream. I go into a concert hall which has a huge red column in the center. The column then turns into a tree in a grassy park. I dive down a deep hole into a pool and suddenly I am swimming in a nice safe enclosed tank, but it has windows and people outside are banging on the walls and windows with clubs. I hold tight to my oxygen tube and stay in the middle of my tank but they break the glass. In a rush of water I am forced out through the window and lie on the grass floundering, gasping, dying. I am terrified. I look up into the sun and scream.

I am never going to any more concerts or parks.

Soon it will be spring. The termites under the porch will begin to eat the house. Water will get into the basement when it rains. The grass will grow and the lawn mower will break. I will have to shop for new clothes. The robins will build a nest in the rain gutter which will make the water back up under the eaves and damage the plaster. I planted a few daffodils and tulips in the fall but the squirrels have surely eaten them.

I do hope you had a good time in Mexico. Mother's room is empty and with just a little trouble I could put you up for a while if you can come for a visit. It would certainly be nice to see you again after all these years.

Love,
Madge

Darling Madie,

Barry followed me back to New York so we're having a fabulous time of it. He's one lovely hunk! Joy!

Your letter sounded a little down in the dumps. Hope you're feeling better now that spring is here. It's just the sexiest time of year? Don't you just love it! Maybe you should get an apartment. The manager would take care of the termites. Pick one with a single, cute manager and be sure it needs a lot of repairs. My friend Julie in the Bronx did that and she's **very** happy.

Have you heard of primal scream therapy? It's miserable. They take you back to the womb and your birth, you scream a lot. One of my friends did it and she's still the same, so don't try that. But maybe one of the other therapies would help. There are lots of them.

We used to have a lot of laughs at our old bridge group. You were such a sweetie. Keep writing. Must rush.

luv ya,
Frannie

Dear Frances,

Thank you for your last letter. I have not replied for some time now because Stanley has come into my life. Stanley came to exterminate the termites. He was just as worried about them as I was. Now we get together several evenings a week to play Monopoly or watch TV. We don't watch TV a lot because Stanley says it is bad for our eyes. He says I worry too much because of my unhealthy diet, so we are now eating brown rice, beans and tofu. A healthy body makes a healthy mind, Stanley always says. We take vitamins every day. We eat eggs sometimes but no meat because meat is full of artificial hormones and fat. It arouses violent and primitive instincts, causing people to behave like animals.

Stanley says that I must get an air conditioner since the night air is very unhealthy. He thinks I will feel better if I stay indoors in the evenings.

He helped me roll up all the rugs and remove the wallpaper. He says that bugs can get behind the wallpaper and into the rugs.

Last week he cut down all the shrubbery around the house to keep bugs and birds from getting too close. Did you know that birds carry 74 diseases which are communicable to humans?

Now I can see why you are so happy with Barry. It is nice to have a man around the house. I am not dreaming about swimming in the tank anymore. But I still will not go to any concerts or parks.

Be careful. Write soon.

With much love,
Madge

Pick a number

1 2 3 4

Poets always choose 3.

by Jim Rattan