

CHAPTER ONE

Vitamin Orange



“Not that one!”

Here we go.

“Not the red one!”

This is a good place to start.

“No! That’s squished! Not the squished one!”

We go through this every morning.

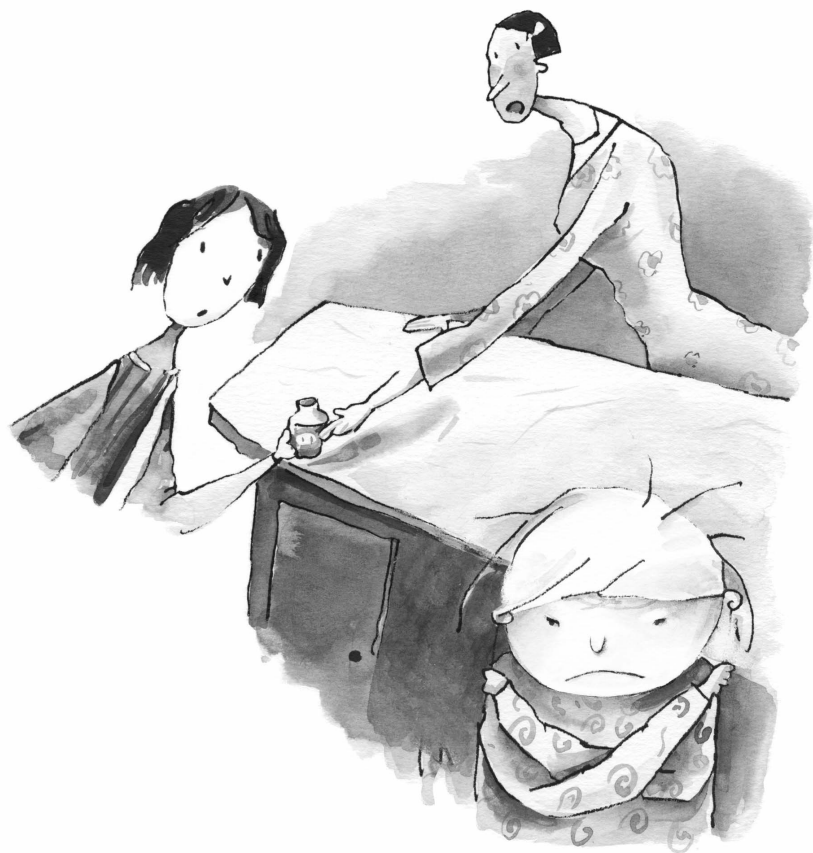
“That’s red! I don’t like red ones! No red “tuff!
I wan’ onge!”

That’s my sister. Lily June Power. Except nobody calls her that. At least nobody in my family does. What do we call her? Just wait, it takes some explaining. We’d better get through the vitamin thing first or we’ll be on this page all day.

My mum is fishing around in a bottle of gummy bear vitamins, trying to find an orange one. She’s starting to look a little desperate. I already got mine. I think it was green, but even if it was red, I wouldn’t freak -out about it. I’m nine. Nine-year-olds have bigger things going on.

For starters, today's bigger thing will be whether or not I have to get a late slip at school, because my three-year-old sister is having a spaz. I already have six late slips this year because of Lily June. Now when I go to the office, Mrs. Peale, the secretary, just says, "Spaz again?" and hands me a slip. I think she makes them up early just for me. I'll bet she has one ready for today.

"Mimi, can you see an orange one in there?" Mum asks. She looks worried.



I peer into the bottle, shake it around a bit. "I don't think so, Mum. I think we got the last one yesterday."

"I wan' ONGE! ONGE!"

"How about this pretty little yellow one?" mMy mum coaxes.

"No LALLO! Onge!"

"Green?" squeaks Mum. "Green is nice!"

"No geen! ONGE!"

"Listen, Waby," says my mum, taking in a deep breath and trying to sound patient. "There aren't any orange. There just aren't any. Can't you pick a different colour?"

That's right. We call her Waby. It's a long story. I'll tell you later. Right now, back to the hollering. It starts like a far away fire engine siren, and gets louder until you want to plug your ears and run from the room.

Mum starts grumbling about how, when she was a kid, there were no gummy bear vitamins and the only vitamins she got tasted like chalk. She shakes the bottle and spills all the gummies onto the counter. Then she quickly sorts through them and gasps with relief.

"Look! I found one! Look, Waby! Here you go!"

Waby unscrunches her face and studies the

gummy bear. For a second I think we' are okay. Maybe I'll make it to school on time after all. Waby reaches out and takes the vitamin. We're almost home free. She even has her mouth open, and she's not screaming. That's when she spots it.

And it's *not* okay.

"Not THAT one. THAT'S A SQUISHED ONE! NO SQUISHED ONE!"

One of the ears is mashed down. Plus, its head is a bit crooked. It is not perfect. Which means it is not good enough for my little sister. She's fussier than Grandma, who has plastic on all her furniture so it doesn't get dirty. "In case of accidents," Grandma says.

Sometimes I think Waby's crazy. The way she gets mad about stupid stuff. Like vitamins and wearing socks and if my dad doesn't put the newspaper in with the recycling. My mum says, "Sshe's not crazy, she's three." Like that makes it all right.

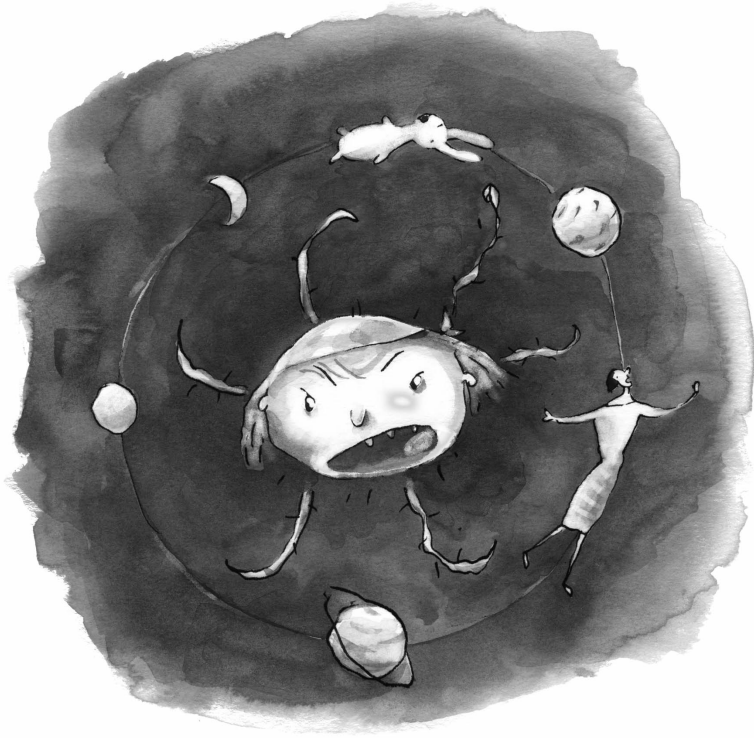
Mum gulps. It is weird watching your parents when they don't seem to know what to do. But then she gets an idea. She starts picking at the gummy bear's ear with her fingernail. When that doesn't work, she rummages in a drawer for a fork to poke it with. Now I think mum is crazy. And *she's* not three.



I try shaking her arm. "Earth to Mum! Earth to Mum! I have to get to school!"

"What?"

"I have *have* to get to school! I have *art* first thing, and I can't be late for *art*!" My mum knows all about Art and me. Our whole school's getting ready for Gallery Night and it's a very big deal. Huge. And I'm working on a very big idea for my piece. I just haven't figured out what it is yet. Big ideas take their own sweet time.



Mum knows all this, but she's in the alternate universe now, orbiting around Waby. She can't hear me because Waby is now on the floor like an upturned bug that can't flip itself over. A boiling-mad red bug. Her legs are kicking, and she is howling so loudly I think Mrs. Peale can probably hear her all they way up at the school office. No wonder she always has my slip ready.

I shake Mum's arm again. "What? Oh! Mimi! Sorry! Yes, school! Go get your jacket! We're good! We're all set!" Actually, I don't think we *are*

all set. Waby is crying like one of those little kids you see at the mall at Christmastime who is totally terrified of Santa.

I go get my jacket.

"I give this one five minutes," says Mum, checking her watch. "Okay, maybe ten."

Waby belts out one more really loud,: "No red 'tuff!"

She's vey smart, my little sister. She is even cute sometimes when she' is not terrorizing us. Too bad, that.

Anyway, there you have it. It's not even nine o'clock and already we've had the first spaz of the day.

Like I said. It's a good place to start.

