

How to Make Orange Juice

by Pia Donovan

I open my eyes and peer into the darkness, I am confused. I hear soft noises outside my bedroom. I can hear Mom and Dad talking anxiously in hushed tones. I slowly get up; I want to leave my room, but I'm not sure I want to know what is happening. It all seems strange and unfamiliar, the darkness, the tense talking. I have to know, so I take tiny steps towards the door of my room. Slowly I twist the knob, I don't want to make any sound. I need to see what is happening before I am seen. I am afraid of what it might be, and I want to be sure that I can make a quick getaway if I need to.

I am good at the getaway; I often have to run to avoid Mom. Sometimes she is scary, and I know that running is the best way to stay safe. If I can be unseen, get out of the way, and avoid eye contact, I will be OK. I learned this from Dad, who stays in the back bedroom doing paperwork a lot; he taught me the word *getaway*; he said it means to run. Dad likes alone time; I do too. People think there is something wrong with me because I like to be alone. All the grown-ups say things like "you look like you're carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders." I don't think my shoulders are that strong, and I don't know what they mean. Sometimes they laugh after they say these kinds of weird things to me. I think they are making fun of me.

I am taking very, very slow and careful steps down the hallway. It is so dark and so long. I am still just outside my bedroom door, but I can see the cut-out part of the wall that you have to walk into to get to my parents' bedroom. It seems very far away. Slowly I get there, the door is open, I stop to listen for the voices. They aren't coming from the bedroom. I wish

they were; I can hide really well just outside the doorway. I have to keep going though I am getting more nervous. If I get caught or scare my mom she will be so mad. Not the yelling kind, probably more the kind where she doesn't like me. That is the worst kind. I know what *annoyed* means. It means go away; sometimes she even says it to me.

This is why I like to be alone in my room with my things. It's my own place, and I feel safe there. I am very nervous about losing my room. I know it won't be just my room really soon. My parents told me they are having a baby. I will get a brother or sister, and the baby will be put in my room. I don't think I like that. I feel like maybe Mom got annoyed with me so much it made her get "fed up." I really don't know what *fed up* is, but I think you say it about people you don't like. I guess Mom decided to have another baby because I wasn't a good one. Maybe it's because I don't do what she wants. It's true, I don't. I want to make her happy, I want her to like me, but I don't know what to do. So I usually just play by myself and try not to make too much trouble.

I am between the bathroom door and the door to the linen closet now. I think an hour has passed; this is the longest hallway ever even though our house is small. We only have two bedrooms, so that's why I have to share. I'm mad about this, but I don't tell Mom, because she would say that I am "ungrateful" or "spoiled." Those aren't good things; I have to make sure to not be those things otherwise I get the annoyed face.

I cross in front of the linen closet door. I love the linen closet. On the third shelf up, there is a small bin that Mom keeps fancy makeup in. Not the kind she uses every day but special stuff she never uses. There is this silver box that has letters on it. Not written on it but cut into the top. I love the round *C* and the little *q* the most. When I am alone I get the little kitchen stool and bring it to the closet so I can look into the bin; I always take the silver box out first. Then I trace the letters on it. At first I didn't know it was a box; I thought it was a silver rectangle. One time it was a little bit open on one side, and I could slide the top in one direction and see what was inside. It was so beautiful. It was a white-and-silver color that shimmered, and when you touched it with your finger some of it stayed on your fingertip. It was dusty and soft and reminded me of the paint on the eyes of the angel we put on the Christmas tree every year.

Now when I go into the bin I open the box right up, put some of the dust on my finger, close my eyes, and rub some on my eyelids so I can look like the Christmas tree angel.

I am tucked into the tight little space between the linen closet and the grandfather clock now. I really hope it doesn't bong while I stand here. It is so loud, and I always jump. I can hear the voices better here though. I guess Mom and Dad are in the kitchen. There is light peeking through from the kitchen, but the door, that is really not a door, is half-way closed. I like the door; it looks like a giant piece of paper that was folded into zigzags. When you push it to one side all the zigzags close together, and the door gets small. If you pull the door, all the zigzags unfold, and there is a little magnet on the other side that sticks it open.

I can see more now; it's not as dark, because the kitchen light is on, and some of the light is coming into the living room. I look deep into the darkness and try to crane my neck towards the half-open door of the kitchen. I need to find out where my parents are. Something moves on the couch, I get scared, and a little squeak comes out of my mouth. I can now see a giant, long, and lumpy thing on the couch. It's making strange noises. I think maybe it's Grandma, who lives upstairs, and something happened to her. Then I remember that Mom is having that baby soon. I feel so nervous. What if it's her on the couch? What if she isn't feeling good? I have to find Dad and tell him. Maybe they were talking and then she got sick.

The noises on the couch get louder. I forget I am hiding and burst into the kitchen; Dad is there. His hair is messy; he has daytime pants on and a pajama shirt. He's doing something on the counter with the plaid Thermos, a spoon, and a can of frozen orange juice. He looks mad and scared at the same time. Then he throws his hands up and calls to my mom, "Elaine, how the hell am I supposed to get this orange juice in a Thermos for her! It's frozen!" My mom yells, "You make it and put it in, it's easy! You have to hurry up this baby is coming!" She sounds mad and scared too.

I run into the living room and try to sit as gently as possible next to my mother. "Are you OK, Mommy? I'm scared, what is happening? You and Daddy are angry." Mom is breathing funny; it seems like it's hard for her to get the air in and out. She seems extra big in the dark; her belly

looks like a mountain sitting on her. She probably can't breathe because of the baby mountain. Then I realize what she said to my dad, and I panic. My mom is in pain; what if something happens to her? Why isn't Dad in here? What if the baby comes out and hurts my mom or something happens to it? What if Mom can't tell Dad how to get the baby out? She has to tell him a lot of things; he can't do things without help just like me.

"Mommy?" I say again. "Yes, Honey, it's OK; the baby is coming. But don't worry, we are very close to the hospital. Daddy is just making you some juice so you don't get thirsty, and then we will go." "It's OK," I say. "I don't need juice; we can go before you get more pain. I will go and check on Dad." Sometimes I try to help Mom by bringing instructions to help Dad or checking on him for her. She likes when I do this, and she is being so nice to me, so I want to be nice back.

I run into the kitchen and ask my dad if he needs help. He is holding the frozen orange juice container over the thermos hole while he digs the frozen orange juice out with the skinny part of the wooden spoon. I remember Grandma; I guess she is still asleep upstairs. I ask Dad if I should go get her so she can help, but he says it's OK, she should sleep. I run back and check on Mom. She pats my hand and tells me it will be OK, so I run back and check on Dad. I think Mom is doing better than Dad. The frozen orange juice is running down his hand to his elbow, and it's all over the counter and down the Thermos. "Daddy, I really don't want orange juice; let's get Mommy in the car." He tries to clean himself up and throws a bunch of stuff into the sink. He gets out the spray bottle and sprays the counter, grabs a paper towel, and starts wiping the counter down, making big circles with his hand. Suddenly Mom shouts, "Now, Ralph, right now!"

We both run into the living room. I realize there is a big bag on the floor next to the couch. I try to carry it towards the basement door, but I have to drag it. We have to go down all the steps and go through the basement to the garage to get in the car. Mom is giant; I don't think she can fit in the car. This is going to be hard, I remember how scared I am feeling, and now I feel worse. Dad is trying to get Mom off the couch; it is hard for him. Mom is much bigger than him because of the baby mountain. I think she is taller too. Maybe the baby makes her taller; maybe after the baby comes out she won't be as tall.

Everything seems very slow. We are all walking so slow, but I think we should run because Mom said “right now.” That usually means go fast. I tell my dad to hurry, but he doesn’t say anything.

I look at them walking slowly together; I love them so much. I can tell how much they love me, because even though the baby is coming, they wanted me to have orange juice. I want to make everything stop so I can just sit on the couch in between them and feel safe and tell them I love them over and over. When the baby comes they won’t have time for me, because the baby will need a lot of help, so I have to make every minute as slow as I can, like I did in the hallway. That way I will have more time with them before they say goodbye.