



**WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU O.J.
EXCERPT**

CHAPTER 1

The whole mess started with a note:

KID,

SEE ME IMMEDIATELY WHEN YOU GET THIS. DO NOT SPEAK OF THIS TO ANYONE, NOT EVEN YOUR PARENTS OR YOUR BROTHER.

ACE

P.S. I HOPE YOU ARE READY FOR THIS.

I found the note on my nightstand, attached to a jug that definitely hadn't been there the night before. I had to put on my glasses to read it. On closer inspection, I could see that the jug was a plastic one, like the kind that milk comes in. The note was attached to the neck of the jug with a green rubber band.

Even without his name on it, I would've known this was Ace's work. The rubber band was a dead giveaway. Ace is the proud owner of the world's largest rubber band collection. He doesn't trust Scotch tape.

Ready for what? I thought. I sat up in bed, staring at the jug. If Ace was behind this, I was definitely not ready for it.

Ace is my grandpa. His real name is Abraham Diamond, but he likes everyone to call him Ace. My name is Zelda Fried, but I like everyone to call me Zelly. Ace doesn't call me Zelly, or even Zelda. He calls me "kid," so I call him Grandpa to get him back.

I studied the note, then turned my attention to the jug. It was a big white plastic orange juice jug. Before Ace moved in with us, my mom always made pitchers of orange juice from small cans of frozen concentrate. Now she buys it premade in plastic jugs like this one because Ace

drinks a lot of orange juice. He mixes scoops of powder into it, which he says keeps him “regular,” whatever that means. Ace is about as far from a regular person as anyone could possibly be, and I can’t imagine how any powder is going to change that.

I read the note again. I HOPE YOU ARE READY FOR THIS. I picked up the jug, which turned out to be empty, and unscrewed the bright orange cap. The faint scent of oranges wafted out.

Okay, fine, I thought, getting out of bed. Let’s go find out what this is all about.

I left the jug where it was and went to the bathroom. The same owl eyes and freckle-strewn nose, framed by an especially frizzy halo of morning hair, stared back at me. I showed my teeth to make sure they were still, thankfully, pretty straight. When you already have crazy hair and glasses, the last thing you need is braces.

It seemed like everyone in the house was still asleep. Except maybe my little brother, Sam, who sometimes gets up super-early to build things in his room with his LEGOs or his blocks. He always forgets that when you wake up, you need to go pee, so after he’s been building for about thirty minutes, he’ll shoot down the hall to the bathroom.

I went back to my room and got the jug and the note. I carried them downstairs to Ace’s room, which is also our TV room. Having the TV there makes my mom super-happy because Sam and I watch a lot less TV than we did a few months ago, when we lived in Brooklyn and the TV was in our living room. We practically never want to watch TV bad enough to hang out in Ace’s room. True, Ace likes some of the same shows we do. For example, old Star Trek reruns. But he always ends up yelling at the TV so much that it isn’t worth it.

I knocked quietly on Ace’s door. No reply. The sign hanging on his door says Gone Fishing, but it’s just for decoration. I don’t think Ace has gone fishing once since we moved to Vermont and Ace moved in with us. Gone to Henry’s Diner or Gone to Ben & Jerry’s or Gone to Battery Park to a band-shell concert wearing my lucky fishing hat? Yes, yes, and yes. But Gone Fishing, not so much.

I looked at the jug. It didn’t make any sense. Maybe Ace had finally completely flipped out. It seemed pretty likely. It occurred to me that maybe I should go upstairs and tell my parents. That thought made me feel all worried and nervous, though. *What if Ace had gone crazy, and he got really mad at me for getting him in trouble? What if they dragged him off to the loony bin and he started yelling, THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT, KID!*

Which it kind of would be.

I took a deep breath and knocked again, harder this time. “Grandpa?” I called in a loudish whisper.

“WHA?” boomed Ace through the door.

“Grandpa,” I whispered again. “It’s me, Zelly.”

“STOP WHISPERING ALREADY. I’M AWAKE. COME IN.”

I entered the room and immediately tripped on something and fell flat on my face. I had a feeling it had been one of Ace's many pairs of golf shoes. That's another thing about Ace. He stopped playing golf years ago, but he loved the shoes so much that he started wearing them all the time. He probably has about twenty pairs. If anyone asks about his shoes, he launches into this lecture about how they "give excellent arch support."

"WHO'S THERE?" yelled Ace. I was on all fours, feeling my way over to the wall, where I knew there was a light switch. I had dropped the jug when I fell. Before I could make it very far, Ace switched his bedside lamp on.

"WHAT IN THE NAME OF--?" said Ace.

"Sorry," I said. "I just tripped, and, I mean, I got your note."

"NOTE? WHAT NOTE?"

Okay, he's definitely gone crazy, I thought to myself. Just back up and out and go see Mom and Dad. But there's something about the way Ace talks. His voice practically requires an answer.

"The note you, uh, put on the orange juice jug?" I spotted the jug lying on its side on the floor, but I left it where it was. Instead, I walked over to Ace and handed him the note.

"OH," said Ace, putting on his glasses and swinging his legs out of bed. He looked it over carefully, as if seeing it for the first time. "THAT NOTE."

"Uh-huh," I said, getting ready to make my exit.

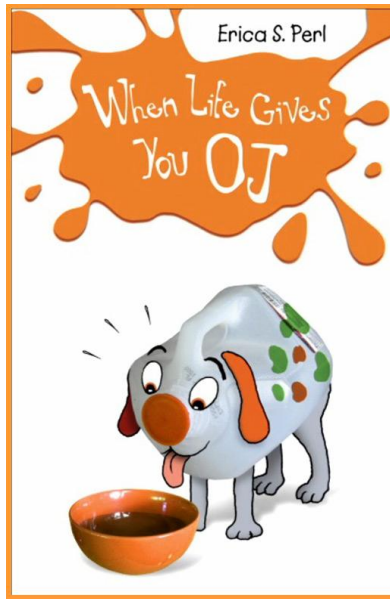
"SO, ARE YOU?"

"Am I what?"

"ARE YOU READY?"

"Ready for what?"

Ace looked exasperated with me. "DO YOU WASH YOUR EARS WITH CHOPPED LIVER? READY TO GET A DOG, FOR CRYING OUT LOUD!"



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