

# Chapter 1

## Sunny Skies

Rylie was in her room, headphones in, reading her umpteenth Leonard novel when her phone buzzed. She looked at the caller ID—‘unknown’ with a weird area code—and picked it up anyway, still reading her book.

‘Hello?’

‘Hello there, I’m looking for Rylie Cates,’ the voice said.

‘This is she,’ Rylie said, still engaged in her book.

‘Good evening, Ms. Cates, my name is Sharon Howard. I’m calling about your submission to the Jones Filmmakers and Screenwriters Festival.’

‘Oh!’ Rylie sat up and her book fell shut without its bookmark. ‘Yes? What about it?’ she said. It had to be good news if they were calling instead of mailing her a rejection letter.

‘Your screenplay, *Gansevoort*, has been selected for our program this fall. We would like to film a ten to fifteen minute short with your script to show at the event, and we’d like you to come out to LA to help produce it. The screenplay

won't be judged based on the short, of course—it has its own category—but its purpose is to give the audience an idea of the type of work you've created.'

'When will all this happen?' Rylie said.

'We'd like to get started right away. I'm sure you're aware, the festival is six months from now in November.'

Rylie tried to sort through a million things in her head before she had to speak again, but it wasn't nearly enough time. 'How do we arrange this?' she said. 'Do I have to stay in LA for six months? Financially, that might be a little... impossible.'

'That's up to you. We'll cover your expenses for plane fare, round trip, and because of your financial situation, we can set you set up in a hotel for the duration of the filming process. That'll be one to two weeks. If you want to stay, you might be able to find a temporary position here. We'd be happy to offer references,' Sharon said. 'But if you're not able to stay, we can fly you back out for the weekend of the festival.'

Rylie was on her feet now, waiting for the moment she could jump up and down and scream. 'When do I leave?' she said.

'Tomorrow afternoon. There's a two o'clock

flight from Portland to LAX, and we can arrange to put you on it, if that works for you.'

'It's perfect. Thank you so much!' Rylie said.

'Of course. We'll see you soon. We'll have someone pick you up at the airport.'

'Wow. Thank you again.'

Despite Sharon's flawless professionalism throughout their conversation, Rylie could have sworn she heard a small, bemused giggle on the other end of the line. 'You're welcome. Have a good night, Ms. Cates.'

'You, too. Goodbye.'

Rylie hung up and did a little jig on her bedroom floor. Her grin felt frozen. She let out a shriek of delight, and went to bang on her roommate's door.

'What the hell is the matter with you?'

Hannah said.

'That script I wrote? It's been accepted to the Jones Film Festival out in LA! I'm leaving tomorrow!'

'Oh, my God!' Hannah said, finally opening the door. She came out in a bathrobe and hugged Rylie. 'Congratulations, Rylie. That's so great! I *knew* you could do it. That script was too good not to make it.'

'I appreciate you lying, it means a lot,' Rylie

said.

‘You’re welcome. They’re flying you out?’

Hannah said.

‘Yeah, I’ll be gone for a week or two, I guess. But if I can find work and a place to stay, I might move there. I’d have to anyway, right?’

‘If you’re really gonna be in the big time, you gotta do it. You’ll stay in touch, won’t you? After you’re hobnobbing with movie stars.’

‘I will,’ Rylie said. ‘God, I can’t believe I’m going to be in California in less than twenty-four hours!’ Her mind still hadn’t stopped racing—she couldn’t keep track of it all. ‘I have to find a new job. I have to call Cheryl and tell her I won’t be able to come in to work for a while.’

‘You know, you may not even need the job at Cheryl’s for that long. If someone buys your script, you can make your living off that,’ Hannah said. They migrated to the kitchen, where Hannah started dumping tequila, ice, and lime juice into the blender for celebratory margaritas.

‘Don’t tempt me. I don’t want to get my hopes up this early. The festival’s not even until November.’

‘I think this is it,’ Hannah said. ‘I think you’re gonna make it this time.’

Rylie smiled. ‘Thanks.’

‘God—I’m gonna *miss* you. Who’d have thought?’

‘I’m sure you’ll get over that. No more rock music blaring when you get home from work. And no more borrowing your clothes when I find someone dumb enough to ask me out,’ Rylie said, rubbing the glasses’ edges in salt.

‘Yeah, well, I’ll miss some of the other things.’

Hannah’s boyfriend Jake came out of the bedroom, fully dressed again, with a sour look on his face.

‘Did you hear the good news, baby?’ Hannah asked him over the blender running.

‘I heard,’ he grunted.

‘Isn’t that great?’

‘Yes, it is. Good for you, Rylie.’

‘Thanks. I know *you* won’t miss me,’ Rylie said.

‘I’ll miss having whiskey in the house. That’s about it, I think,’ Jake said.

‘Sorry for barging in tonight. But, it may be the last time you ever see me, so maybe you can forgive me.’

‘Sure.’

Hannah poured the margaritas into the glasses and handed them to Rylie and Jake. ‘Here

is to Rylie Cates,' she said. 'May your pens never run out of ink, your computer never run out of power, and your brain never run out of brilliant ideas.'

'Thanks,' Rylie said, unable to avoid blushing. They clinked the cheap plastic glasses together and drank to her success. Rylie wondered if it *was* real this time. If this time, she'd really get there and do something great. Be appreciated in her own time.

Her mind overwhelmed her with other thoughts: I can buy a new Firebird now; I wonder if I'll meet Colin Farrell; I'm so getting a place with a view; I can get that big TV and have room for all my books; it'll be weird having Christmas without snow; maybe I can meet a director and we'll work together all the time. But Rylie tried to focus on the more immediate concerns. She had to pack. She had to prepare herself for Hollywood. She needed to put together a better portfolio and a résumé. Figure out what weather to pack for.

She checked the web for the forecast in LA: sunny skies, seventy-five degrees.

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When Rylie landed in LA, she was in awe of

the sheer size of the city. It was bigger than she'd ever imagined. A man in a suit with a sign that said 'CATES' drove her to a nice hotel with a balcony and a kitchenette. After she finished checking out the room service menu, she got a call from Sharon Howard to meet her at the studio in the morning where she'd make introductions and go into more detail about everything. She gave her the address and told her the car that had picked her up at the airport would be waiting for her in the morning.

For dinner, Rylie found a place nearby where she didn't need a reservation, and which was within her budget. She was getting ready to go to bed that night when she realized she'd forgotten to call Hannah.

'Jesus Christ, it's 2:00 a.m.!' Hannah said.

'Sorry. I forgot about the time difference. I promised I'd call you and tell you how it went today, so this is me calling.'

'So, how is it?' Hannah said, yawning and straightening up in her bed at home.

'It's pretty great. This city is amazing.'

'I bet you outgrow it.'

'Maybe, but this is still great. There's a pool indoors *and* outdoors. And I can see the Hollywood sign from here.'

‘That’s good, hon. But next time, don’t call me this late.’

‘Check.’

‘Okay, take some pictures and send them to me. I’ll talk to you later,’ Hannah said.

‘Sorry for waking you.’

‘It’s okay. Good night.’

‘Night.’

Rylie went to bed, imagining what tomorrow would be like—her first day on a real movie set. Even if they weren’t making a whole movie, it was *her* movie.

## Chapter 2

### Relationships

In the morning, after twenty minutes of debating what to wear—trying to decide what looked most ‘writerly’—a car picked her up and took her to the studio.

‘Rylie Cates?’ a woman called, coming to greet her. ‘I’m Sharon Howard. We spoke on the phone.’

‘Yes, it’s nice to meet you.’

‘You, too. I’m glad you made it here all right.’

‘Yes, fine. Thank you so much for bringing me out here.’

‘We’re happy to have you. If you’re ready, I can introduce you to a few of the people you’ll be working with the next couple weeks.’

‘Yeah, absolutely.’

Sharon walked over to a group of people congregated around a breakfast buffet. ‘Rylie, this is Dean Jameson, he’ll be directing your piece. Cameron Alden, the producer. And we cast Frances Carlyle here as Mira.’

‘Great,’ Rylie said, shaking hands with everyone. ‘It’s very nice to meet you all.’

‘We’re glad you could make it. I really love

your script, Rylie. It's a great story,' Jameson said.

'Thank you, so much. That means a lot, coming from you, Mr. Jameson,' Rylie said.

'You're welcome,' he said. 'As to the short, we've decided to shoot the scene where Mira storms out of the restaurant and has her monologue in the rain. What do you think about the selection? Does that work for you?'

'I think it's great. It's a good scene, and I'm sure you'll find the right way to bring it out.'

'Well, we've got our casting all done. We're going to start reading lines and doing some lighting tests later today if you'd like to stop by.'

'I'd love to, thank you.'

'Great. Well, I know Sharon has some more to talk to you about, and we're ready to get started on things here, so we'll see you later, huh?' Jameson said.

'You bet. Thanks again.'

Rylie re-shook some hands as everyone but Sharon left the room.

'What can I offer you? Coffee? Scone? Some orange juice?' Sharon said.

'Orange juice is fine. Thank you.'

'Good. Now, I wanted to discuss a few things with you. You don't have an agent, do you?'