

CHAPTER 2

SEPTEMBER 1932 - HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA

The orange juice factory was empty. The only things in sight were immense containers of juice that hung from the ceiling like giant bladders. A crowd of women stood in a knot in the middle of the factory floor. Each wore a short dress with matching tights the color of a tangerine. Over the costume was a sandwich board that read:

**RAYO SUNSHINE
FRESH SQUEEZED ORANGE JUICE
HAVE A GLASS OF SUNSHINE ON US!**

A man wearing a straw hat with a blue-and-white ribbon around it stood before the girls, studying a list. Every time he called a name, his face disappeared underneath the hat brim. “Sandra Sanborn,” he said.

“Here,” Sandra answered from the crowd of girls. She liked how her new name sounded in the man’s mouth. Sandra Sanborn was better than Sandra Guess, which was Billy’s last name, and far better than Emma Jones, the name her mother had given her. Emma Jones sounded like a migrant picker’s stepdaughter. Sandra Sanborn sounded like a movie star.

“Your position is the corner of Romaine and Vine streets,” the man said.

Sandra suppressed a smile. Paramount Pictures was only a few blocks from there. “Yes, sir,” she said.

When the man finished calling out names, he yanked up the factory door to reveal a pickup truck parked by a dumpster. The girls climbed into the back of the truck, clutching the signs and avoiding each other’s eyes as the man handed out stacks of coupons that said, “Good for one free glass of orange juice at Rayo Sunshine’s Hollywood kiosk.”

“As you hand out the coupons, say our slogan, ‘Have a glass of sunshine on us,’” the man said. “During your shift, we ask that you stay put. Don’t leave your stations. We’ll drop you off and pick you up from your post.”

Sandra shot him a look. The whole point of this job was to get close to a movie studio. Wherever the orange juice people stationed her to hand out coupons, she planned to adjust her position so that she was in front of a studio or casting office. That way she was upping her chances of being discovered and getting paid for it at the same time.

Now this man—what was his name? Sandra wanted to say it began with an “H”—was saying she couldn’t do that. But he wouldn’t know what she did as long as she was at her post when he dropped her off and picked her up. And what did he care anyway, as long as the coupons got handed out?

Resolved, Sandra settled back as the truck zoomed through Los Angeles. The broad streets were lined with purple jacarandas and seemed to extend to the ocean. On either side of the road, movie theaters rose like art deco castles between construction projects. It was heartening to see signs of prosperity after the soup lines of San Francisco. She’d been smart to move here. Los Angeles really did seem to be the one place

in the country that was, as the studios kept saying, “Depression proof.”

At Vine Street, Sandra climbed onto the sidewalk. As the truck pulled away, a guy with a mustache came toward her, his eyes trained on her body. She remembered the skimpiness of the dress, which was shorter than some of her slips, and pulled the sign over her head before thrusting a coupon at the man. “Have a glass of sunshine on us,” she said.

He tipped his hat and moved on. Sandra adjusted the sign and took in her surroundings. Although the four-lane road was jammed with traffic, the buildings around her were empty. The only thing to look at was a pharmacy across the street, which had an ad for gum in the window. A woman with gypsy-like hair was hugging a basket of oranges and pineapples. Behind her, miniature fruit trees stretched into a cinematic sunset.

“The taste of California in a gum,” it said.

Sandra made a face and turned her back to the ad. As if that was any kind of advertisement for a California product. The state needed to move beyond such provincial images. She certainly intended to put such things behind her for good.

Now that Sandra was in Hollywood, she would shed her old selves—Emma Jones the migrant picker’s stepdaughter, Sandra Guess the wife of a local bandleader—and become the person she was truly meant to be: a movie star. There was no doubt in Sandra’s mind that she had “It,” that illusive star quality the magazines were always talking about. Success was in her blood. She came from a long line of prosperous people, including her father, Arthur Beard, who headed an agricultural empire selling prunes across the nation.

On top of that, she had a plan to achieve her goals:

1. Get discovered by a director, producer, or other powerful studio man.

2. Get a contract with a studio.
3. Become a movie star through hard work and determination.

That last part was important. It wouldn't be easy to become a star, but if she worked hard, success would follow. Sandra knew it. And right now, it was time to go to the studio. Plastering a smile on her face, she moved backward down the street, handing out coupons to everyone she saw and chirping, "Have a glass of sunshine on us."

She knew from a map she'd memorized that Paramount Pictures was four blocks away, but she'd underestimated how long the blocks were. Each one took at least ten minutes to walk. Once Sandra was off the main road, she gave up handing out coupons and hurried as fast as she could toward the studio with the sign clapping against her legs. To pass the time, she thought about what she would say if Rayo Sunshine discovered she'd left her post. She could always say, "I thought I was allowed to leave for breaks." Or even better, "I had to use the restroom for female troubles." It was unlikely they would refuse to pay her because of female troubles.

By the time Paramount Pictures came in sight, Sandra's forehead was shiny with sweat. She stood near the base of a tree, fanning herself and studying the view.

The studio was a fortress of yellow stucco and red-shingled roofs set back from the road and surrounded by spindly palm trees that looked like upside-down mops. The way in was through a lacy wrought-iron gate. A guard at a window opened and closed a panel for people to pass through. Above it all, water towers teetered on metal tripods, like sentinels watching over the scene.

You can do this, Sandra thought. *It's just handing out a piece of paper.*

As she crossed the street, she saw three women standing by the gate. They were roughly the same size and wore chintz dresses and matching white shoes. Only their hair color differed—one blonde,

one chestnut, and one dark brown. As Sandra approached, they burst out in a chord, their voices vibrating like buzzing bees. Then they launched into a three-part rendition of “I Got Rhythm.”

*I got rhythm, I got music, I got my man
Who could ask for anything more?*

Sandra smiled at them as she passed. Without breaking a note, the singers’ heads snapped around, their eyes as narrow as slots in a penny arcade, shocking Sandra so much she almost jumped. She dropped her gaze and walked down the sidewalk until the singing was muffled by traffic. When she looked up again, a crowd was forming around the group. Despite this, the blonde was still watching Sandra with the same hard expression.

Clearly they didn’t want another woman around the studio attracting attention. They saw her as competition. Well, they were right. She was. Besides, Sandra had more of a right to be here than they did—she had a job to do. Adjusting the sign, she got a coupon at the ready.

“Hello,” she said to the first man who came by. “Have a glass of sunshine on me.”

The man blinked at Sandra and took the coupon. “Thanks.”

As he walked away, he glanced back at Sandra’s legs in the orange tights, which she took as a promising sign. Maybe it was good that the dress was so short. Already, another man was emerging from the gate. She eyed him in what she hoped was a sensual way.

“Would you like a glass of sunshine?” she said. “On me?”

He took the coupon, looked at it, and then at her. “Thank you, miss,” he said, tipping his hat.

This was working! Sandra straightened her shoulders and smiled in a way that would have flashed her dimples, if she had them. She considered herself the Greta Garbo type—sophisticated

and elegant, yet relatable to the average woman—but that wasn't appropriate right then, what with the sandwich board and all, so she would be the gay comedienne instead. She'd be the singing telegram girl who wisecracks with Groucho Marx. She'd be the bright-eyed, all-American dancer waving a flag at the end of the Ziegfeld number.

More people came by, and Sandra handed out coupons, paying extra attention to the men. In between, she waved at the cars, looking for movie stars. Once a Rolls-Royce went through the studio gate, but she couldn't see who was in the backseat. The chauffeur did all the talking to the guard.

As the singers finished a song, there was a smattering of applause from the tourists. They launched into "Dream A Little Dream," their voices drifting underneath the traffic. "But in your dreams, whatever they be, dream a little dream of me."

Whenever Sandra glanced at the group, one of the girls glared at her in that same fierce way. It was making Sandra angry. Since coming to Hollywood, women were always giving her unfriendly looks. Of course they were all in competition for the men's attention, but that didn't mean the other girls had to be such pills all the time. It was exhausting.

A Ford pulled up to the curb and a woman dressed in a delivery outfit climbed from the passenger side. She was wearing a bellhop uniform with a square hat on her head. From the trunk of the car, she pulled out a gigantic flower arrangement and tottered over to the gate.

"Hey," someone said to Sandra.

She turned to see a boy of about eleven years old holding one of the coupons.

"Where is this place that I can get my free glass of orange juice?" he said.

Sandra glanced back at the delivery girl. "Doesn't it say on the coupon?"

"It says Sunset Boulevard. Where on it, though?"

"I don't know. Can't you look it up? The phone book?"

"I don't got a phone book."

Now the delivery girl was arguing with the guard at the gate, her tone sharp as she threw words over the top of the flower arrangement. Sandra strained, trying to grasp what the conflict was about.

"Hey, miss?" the kid said. He stared up with accusing eyes.

She sighed. "It's a building shaped like a giant orange. You can't miss it."

"But Sunset Boulevard is long. Am I supposed to walk the whole thing looking for a big orange?"

The delivery girl was staring at the guard in some kind of standoff. Suddenly she hurled the flowers down and stomped back to the Ford. Throwing open the passenger door, she said, "Let's go." The flower basket rolled on its side, the florist sponge sliding to the sidewalk.

As the Ford jerked around the corner, a man came out of the studio gate, stepped over the flowers, and stopped with his hands in his pockets. His eyes landed on Sandra, and the way he met her gaze made her heart thump in her ears. This wasn't a man going to lunch or taking a stroll. He was looking for Sandra. He didn't even glance at the girl group when they started singing "Happy Days Are Here Again" in his direction.

"Well?" the kid said.

"Go away," she hissed. "Where's your mother?"

"Please, miss? I want to know the address, that's all. I want my orange juice."

"Okay. The address is 10042 Sunset Boulevard."

The kid looked relieved. "Why didn't you say so in the first place?"

"Shoo, shoo," Sandra said, pushing him away before he realized she made the address up.

The man gestured for Sandra to come over to him. She put her hand on her chest, and mouthed, "Me?" He nodded and she headed toward him, clutching the stack of coupons. Now? He was

going to discover her *now*? But she wasn't ready to be discovered. Was she? Did she even want to be an actress? Of course. Of course she did. That was a silly thing to think.

As she approached, she pulled out a coupon. "Hello," she said in her most sultry voice. "Have a glass a sunshine on me."

The man was big, with a beard cupping his chin. He took the coupon. "Thanks. What's your name?"

"Sandra Sanborn."

The singers were watching with their arms crossed. It filled Sandra with cool delight that they should witness this moment.

"Miss Sanborn, I'm sick of Rayo Sunshine sending you girls over here. We've had several talks with them about it, and they keep promising they won't send anymore. And yet, here you are."

Sandra's mouth fell open. So that was why Rayo Sunshine insisted their employees stay at their posts—other girls had done this too. So many had done it, in fact, that Paramount had asked Rayo Sunshine to stop it from happening.

"Oh," she said. "I wouldn't dream of bothering the studio, but—"

"But you are, Miss Sanborn. You're the fourth girl from Rayo Sunshine this month. And I'll tell you what I told each of them: There's no soliciting in front of the studio."

The sound of traffic filled Sandra's ears. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the brunette whispering in the blonde's ear.

"What about them?" she said, pointing at the singers. "Aren't they soliciting?"

He glanced over his shoulder. "They have permission to be here, but you don't. Look, I'm going to call this employer of yours. He can explain to me why you're here."

"What?" Sandra said, and then smiled. "You don't have to do that. I can just leave. It'll be like you never saw me."

He turned the coupon over, ignoring her. Desperately she tried to think how to turn this situation to her favor. She imagined

saying something that would make the man soften to her, and soon they'd be laughing together. He'd say, "I'm sorry I was so rough about your being here. You seem like a nice kid." And she would nod understandingly and say that he was just doing his job and that she would leave now. No need to call anyone.

The man put a stubby finger on the phone number at the bottom of the coupon. "Wait here. I'm calling your boss."

Before she could reply, he headed toward the studio and disappeared behind a door in the guard station. Stunned, she stared through the gate at a yellow building with the words STAGE 4 painted on it. Then she whirled around and hurried down the street, the sign beating against her legs. She had to get away from here before he came back.

At the intersection, she ducked behind a family of overweight tourists until the light changed, then rushed across the street. That was when she heard laughing underneath the traffic. By the gate, the singers were cackling and pointing at her. Sandra held herself erect, like Mabel had always taught her, and walked with as much dignity as she could muster until she turned the corner.

When she was out of sight, she heaved the sign off and stood in full view in the scanty dress, rubbing her shoulders. It felt wonderful, like removing a girdle after a night of dancing. She couldn't go back to the factory and get the dress and hat she'd worn to the job. By now, Rayo Sunshine would know what she'd done. She didn't have the money to throw away perfectly good clothes, but she felt too humiliated to face them. All she wanted to do was go home and hide.

With a sigh, Sandra headed toward the bus stop. Let Rayo Sunshine keep her dress, she decided. The cuffs on the sleeves were fraying anyway.