

*Twelve-year-old Nikki Davis has been lying most of her life, pretending to fit into her friends' world of designer clothes and country club parties. When her mother loses her job and they move into a rundown apartment, Nikki tries to cover things up with increasingly desperate lies.*

Rebecca Weiss has her own problems. Her bat mitzvah is just months away, and she's totally unprepared. She doesn't have time for a new person in her life—especially someone who might be deceiving her.

**When Nikki and Rebecca's worlds collide, an unlikely friendship forms.**

But can a friendship built on secrets and lies survive? And when the truth finally comes out, will Nikki have the courage to make things right? Can Rebecca ever forgive her?

Funny, fast-paced, and heartfelt, *Rules for Liars* is about making mistakes, asking for second chances, and discovering the truth is worth telling.

# Rules for Liars

Debra Green and April Patten

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## Chapter 1

# Acres of Lemon Groves

### REBECCA

*Hi, God. Rebecca Weiss here again. Obviously.*

*Question: You know the future, right?*

*How will I survive my bat mitzvah? Will I survive my bat mitzvah?*

*Also, God, are Hailey and I still friends in the future? I'm pretty sure Hailey's trying to back out of being my best friend. Please tell me this is just a phase. Can you send me some kind of sign? I'm not sure what that would be, though, or if I'd notice it. If I saw a burning bush like Moses did, I'd probably just run away and call 911.*

*Am I a terrible person for asking You about my future, but not asking about the future of global warming or world peace?*

*One more personal thing, though. How is my mother? I miss her so much. Remember how she always said, "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade?" Don't tell my mom this, but I kind of wish she'd been more specific.*

*Especially because there are so many lemons in my life now that I'm trying to figure out—the biggest ones being Hailey and my bat mitzvah that I'm probably going to bomb at.*

*Question: If you make lemonade out of rotten lemons, won't the lemonade be rotten too?*

*And please, God, don't let me stay flat-chested forever!*

## Chapter 2

# Friends Forever

### NIKKI

“Nikki, why do you have to move away from us?” my best friend Saylor Chang asked me. We were standing with our other best friend, Willow Hughes, in front of the heart-shaped bonsai trees on Saylor’s front lawn.

“Tell your mother you refuuuse to go,” Willow said, her ruthless words contradicted by the sing-songy voice she’d copied from her favorite Instagram influencer.

“Honestly, I tried.” I glanced at my mom in the U-Haul parked at the curb. “And I’ll keep trying to move back.”

“You better!” Saylor pointed to the U-Haul. “How does that little truck fit all your furniture from your big house?”

“It doesn’t,” Willow said. “The professional movers

take the furniture. The U-Haul is for the valuables you just don't trust with strangers."

My friends didn't know that the furniture wasn't ours to take. (Or that we'd never owned the house we'd lived in. Or that the only movers were Mom and me. Or that all our possessions fit into the little U-Haul.) I didn't correct them.

***A Rule for Liars: Let other people assume what you want them to think about you.***

"My clothes are in the U-Haul," I said truthfully.

"You have the best clothes," Saylor said.

I smiled at her. "Thanks." To tell the truth—not that I ever would—all the expensive ones were secondhand.

"And you're our fashion stylist," Willow said.

That was true. I'd helped Saylor and Willow pick out the straw hats, bikinis, and matching gold mesh cover-ups they wore. (I had the same cover-up, now folded neatly in a box.) We all wore flip-flops I'd decorated for everyone with beads and pearls. Sometimes we styled our hair the same way too. Though today, Saylor's midnight-black hair and Willow's thick auburn hair were wet from Saylor's pool and slicked back, while my blond hair was still in the long braid I'd worn to Landon's party the night before.

Willow raised her lower lip into a dainty pout. "Who's going to help us with fashion now?"

"I'll still be in Portland," I said. "It's supposed to be only twenty minutes away without traffic."

"There's alllllways traffic in Portland," Willow said.

Saylor's lips went into a pout too. "My mom complains about driving me places ten minutes away."

"Let's hang out next weekend. I'll come back here and put together some cute summer outfits for you."

"Yay!" Saylor fist-bumped me.

"How can Saylor and I rule the school with only us two?" Willow said.

I shook my head. "We don't actually rule the school. Principal Ashton does."

"But we were like the social rulers of seventh grade," Saylor said. "We throw the best parties and we get invited to the best parties."

Willow grinned and flipped her wet hair. "Aaaand we look the best doing it."

Saylor laughed and flipped her wet hair.

I laughed and flipped my long braid.

My mom honked the horn of the U-Haul.

"I'd better go." I frowned. "I'll miss you so much. If I weren't wearing an Escada silk top and if you weren't wet, I'd hug you two like crazy now."

“Friendship over fashion.” Willow put her long, thin arms around me.

Saylor quickly joined the hug.

“Friends forever,” I said. It was such a great moment.

Except I couldn’t help thinking that if my top got ruined, I couldn’t afford to replace it.

## Chapter 3

# Unbearable

## REBECCA

I checked my phone again. It was on silent mode and on my lap under the kitchen table so Dad wouldn’t know. Still no response from Hailey.

Question: How hard is it to answer your best friend’s text? Last night I’d texted Hailey: **Movie tomorrow? A/C there!** She only had to type one word back: “Yes” or “no.” Hopefully “yes.” But even “no” was better than nothing at all.

I returned to the menacing evil in front of me, also known as the first page of my bat mitzvah speech. It was as blank as my phone.

I petted my dog under the table. I didn’t have far to reach because Meatball is big. By “big,” I mean seventy-five chubby pounds. With his thick black fur like a permanent winter coat, he must’ve been miserable in our hot apartment.

“How’s your speech going, Rebecca?” Dad asked from across the table.

“Great.” Lying was wrong. But on a scale of one to ten, with complimenting someone’s bad haircut being a one and cruel lies being a ten, exaggerating the state of my bat mitzvah speech was only a three. I could even look at it as a hopeful prediction and not a lie at all.

“I haven’t seen you write anything,” Dad said.

“I’m trying, but this heat is unbearable.”

Dad sighed. “It’s eighty-one degrees in the apartment. That’s bearable. What’s unbearable is the cost of air conditioning.”

I nodded. “I know.”

“Beccala, your bat mitzvah is less than three months away.”

“I know that too,” I said through clenched teeth. In eighty-seven days, I was supposed to stand on the temple bimah and lead an entire two-hour service, reciting fourteen Hebrew prayers, reading a super long Hebrew passage from the Torah, and making a speech about “What My Torah Reading Means to Me.” And I had to do it in front of all my family and friends and the temple congregation. And God, of course.

I wrote, *My Torah reading means a lot to me*. I stared

at my bat mitzvah binder before adding, *The Torah is very meaningful. Reading is very meaningful. Therefore, reading from the Torah is very meaningful. Therefore, it means a lot to me.*

I read over my words. They stunk. I crossed them all out and drew a frowny face.

“Your first appointment with the cantor is coming up,” Dad pressed.

“I know that also,” I said, my teeth now clenched so tight I sounded like a bad ventriloquist. I’d heard that Cantor McGrumpy—aka Cantor Segal—was super harsh. Supposedly she screamed at kids who weren’t prepared. Like me.

My brother barged into the kitchen, wearing soccer gear and smelling like old sweat. Even he didn’t stink as much as my bat mitzvah speech. Noah said, “Dad, did you tell Rebecca about the new girl?”

“What new girl?” I asked.

“I didn’t want to distract you from your bat mitzvah studies,” Dad said. “But a girl your age is moving into 5B today. Noah and I talked to her mother this morning in the parking lot.”

That sounded promising. Hailey and I had been best friends for years, but it would be nice to have a friend right across the hall.



I checked my phone again, gripping it hard. No response from Hailey. It would be nice to have a friend who answered my texts.

Noah grabbed a chocolate chip oatmeal cinnamon cookie I'd baked yesterday. "These are the best!"

"Yeah," I said, which wasn't that conceited, because they were the best when my mom made them too.

Noah walked over and stood behind me. "How's the bat mitzvah prep going?"

It was bad enough to have Dad on my back. I didn't need my brother there too—literally. He had read the Torah so flawlessly at his bar mitzvah, he'd made Cantor McGrumpy smile during the entire service. Plus, Noah had made Great-Grandpa Serge shout, "*Vat a scholar!*" and Great-Aunt Ruth sob. At my bat mitzvah, Great-Aunt Ruth would sob about what a letdown I was. Noah couldn't understand what I was going through. I closed my binder and said, "I can't concentrate in this heat. It might be bearable, but it's not study-able."

"Study-able is not a word." Noah put his hand on my shoulder. "And if I can practice soccer in this heat, you can study Hebrew in it."

Just because my brother, Mr. McPerfect, could do something didn't mean I could. He was an all-county

soccer player with a beautiful girlfriend and perfect GPA. I could never live up to him. No one could live up to Noah, not even the Biblical Noah. Sure, Biblical Noah had made a nice ark and got the animal pairs on it. But if my brother Noah ever built an ark, he'd probably make it twice as big and board four animals of each type, just in case something happened to the first two. And I'd have to spend the next forty days on the ark listening to Dad brag about Noah saving mankind and animalkind. I'd dive off the ark and take my chances in the flood.

Dad beamed at him. "I never had to remind you to study once."

"Are you even human, Noah?" I turned toward him. "I bet you're secretly a robot with artificial intellect."

"You mean artificial intelligence," Noah said.

"Only a robot would know that. Do you need help replacing your batteries?"

Noah laughed.

"Rebecca, show me what you've written so far," Dad said.

Dad would not want to see my dumb, crossed-out sentences and my frowny face. And I didn't want to show them to him. So I tore out the notebook

page, stuffed it into my shorts pocket, and said, “My speech still needs a little polishing.”

“Rebecca!” Dad snapped.

“And Meatball needs a walk,” I added. And I wanted to see my new neighbor.

My dog stood as soon as he heard the word “walk.” He knocked my bat mitzvah binder off the table and ran in a circle.

Dad called out, “Calm down, Meatball!”

He—meaning my dog, not my dad—was really too big for our dinky apartment, but there had been no other choice. After I’d found him three years ago whimpering in front of Mattress! Mattress! Mattress! and taken him to the shelter, the lady there said he didn’t have much chance to be adopted because he was so big and frisky and, well, not the most beautiful dog in the world. He had fur that got matted about five minutes after I brushed him, an overbite that emphasized his yellow fangs, and an unfortunate drooling problem. He was beautiful to me. On the inside. I wasn’t blind.

Sometimes I thought God gave me Meatball to help make up for what He’d taken from me. Though even the biggest dog in the world couldn’t make up for that loss.

Hailey had gotten me through the hard stuff too. We’d been friends before anything went wrong, and she’d stuck with me through everything. Everything until now.

I checked my phone again. No new texts.

I put Meatball’s leash on him, led him out of the apartment, and shut the front door.