



## 59 | I See You

**Thank you @ejnfg for the gorgeous poster!**

A good friend would bail you out of jail, but your best friend will be sitting next to you saying "Damn that was fun" – Anon

**Chapter 59: I See You**

"Pick Luke."

"No way. He is the ultimate player. He'll be done with her like she's flavor of the week at an ice cream shop."

I was sitting at LUCKY's table for lunch, feeling not so lucky about it. Cearra had convinced me to join, but I was already regretting it.

"Maybe Luke can be loyal," Yoona said optimistically, eating lime jello. "He hasn't hooked up with anyone this semester."

"Yeah he has. He's hooked up with Jamie Gri ith and Bianca Rodriguez; the two hottest girls in school. And he was dating a model over the summer," Khloe cast me a knowing look.

She had been a camp counselor this summer. The first girl I met when I arrived at Camp Beaver Hill.

I sat there, watching the girls debate my life around me. I didn't have the heart to tell them that I've already moved on from this subject. I was going to give Luke a chance. Despite the whole world and his entire reputation suggesting I do otherwise.

"Excuse me," I said, and took my tray to the cleaning station.

Away from all the opinions. So many people have so many opinions about lives that aren't their own.

I set my tray among the others and paused. I was nervous to be honest. Nervous for my date with Luke tomorrow and nervous for my night out with Bianca and her friends tonight. This was new territory for me. How do I know if I'm ready?

**\*Later that day\***

"Frier night and I was listening to the queen.

Whitney Houston on loudspeaker.

We were going out tonight.

Party

Sleep

Repeat

That's not my motto, but it was hanging on Bianca's wall.

She and Oma were getting dressed in her bathroom, while I played around with the music. Other girls joined us. They were all friends of Bianca, though she called them her minions.

The smell of hair straightener and perfume mixed in the air. Clothes draped over the bed as they changed and squeezed into tight outfits. There were a lot of mirrors and fairie lights, as if the room was made for Instagram.

My sister would fit in here so much better than I ever could. It was certainly awkward the Kelly Mathers was here. Amy, one of Bianca's friends, had invited her.

Austin was downstairs, watching TV with Bianca's dad while we got dressed. He was joining us.

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"Where are we?" I asked Oma, as we arrived in a neighborhood near Alpine High.

"We're meeting some boys from another school," Oma answered, "Bianca's been flirting with one of them."

Oma waved me over to join the rest of the girls plus Austin. Heels clacking against cement was the main sound as we walked towards the place. I looked up at the name: Laughing Heads Bar. I didn't bring ID.

It didn't seem to matter. Bianca had a good relationship at the door and we all entered free of cover charge. I don't come to bars o en, so I was feeling out of my element. I looked around.

The countertop was made of red marble and bartenders served drinks in test tubes. Yellow lamplights were set on every table, but the room still had many dark areas. A boy waved us over from one of the bigger booths.

They must be who were meeting. Boys from Alpine High. The reason I knew that, was because Christopher Hayes was amongst them.

Oh shiiiiii

Bianca waved back at him and then clicked her fingers at a girl, "Amy. Spot me."

Amy checked Bianca's make-up, making sure her bronzer was blended and mascara hadn't smudged under her eyes.

"Yo, I can't join that table," Austin said, flat-out refusing to go any closer.

"Why not?" Bianca pouted, "You planning to hook up with random girls? I can tell you already that we're the hottest."

"You tell me a lot of things B, but somehow you didn't tell me who we were meeting tonight."

"So what, Austin? They're some cool guys from Alpine."

"He's our arch rival in basketball," Austin glared at the back of Chris' head, "Luke and Chris have mad issues."

Bianca exclaimed, "Why does everything always lead back to Luke? It's like he brainwashed all of us to fall at his feet. He doesn't own me if he doesn't want to hook up with me, I'm free to be with whoever I want."

"OK," Austin said, "and I'll be at the bar."

Bianca wanted him to stay, but Austin had already moved on. He was ordering six test tubes by the bar before anyone could do another hair flick.

"We should get drinks though," Amy said, as she stared longingly at er Austin. "I'm thirsty."

Austin was oblivious to the admirers he had. I looked at him now, already cracking jokes with one of the bartenders. The girl next to him was listening in and laughing. And that's when I realized who she was. I knew that ponytail and scrunchie. I knew what laugh.

It was Julia.

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There was a stage in this bar. Faded green lights shone in the background, creating a misty glow over the wooden stage. One lone microphone stood in center stage, waiting for a performing to take the attention.

I walked up to the bar and squeezed myself in between Julia and Austin.

She was taken aback by the interruption, having cozed up to Austin very quickly in the last 30 seconds. Austin gave me a friendly, one arm hug.

"Can I have one shot of worst friend ever and a side of betrayal?" I asked.

Austin's arm went sti around my shoulders.

I was staring at Julia. She suddenly realized that it was me under all this anger and makeup. She took a step back and laughed.

"What are we, in a teen movie? You need new lines."

"I need new friends," I said.

Oh, come at me, girl. I am so ready for you.

The bartender placed a row of test tubes in front of us, filled with a pale green drink. Austin put his card on an open tab, but his eyes didn't leave me.

He slid a test tube near my hand to give me liquid courage. I didn't notice. My attention was fully focused on Julia.

It felt like another life when we were in my room, talking about summer camp, Netflix and the player next door.

"You came into my home, you pretended to be my friend," I started, "But you were poison in my life."

The emotions went flying up inside of me and I tried to control them so I wouldn't explode... any more than I already was.

"Oh, she knows her?" Bianca said, sliding onto a bar stool to Austin's le. "How nice."

Bianca drank one of Austin's test tubes and was about to leave when she heard me say:

"You slept with him."

Bianca slowly put the empty test tube on the counter and whispered, "Oh, this is getting good."

"What are you talking about? You sound completely crazy," Julia answered, nervously glancing back at the crew behind me.

Bianca Rodriguez, Chioma Dozie, Austin Taylor, Kelly Mathers, Amy... and the Alpine boys who started coming over to see what was taking us so long.

"Don't test me, Julia," I accused her, "You slept with my boyfriend."

Oma wanted to separate us and cool the situation before it got any hotter, but Bianca pulled her back. "Plain Jane Millie Ripley finally has some courage. Let her go o."

"Like I said," Julia took her purse and got ready to leave, "You're crazy. Now that you have some friends, try and keep them. They'll soon realize what a compulsive liar you are."

"I am crazy and trusting you all this time," I answered, "You were my best friend and you slept with my boyfriend."

"Oh!" Austin exclaimed.

Amy gasped.

Bianca reveled in the drama, "Boyfriend... with the best friend... It's always the best friend, isn't it?"

Oma narrowed her eyes and Bianca hastily retracted her statement, "Except you, Oma. You're an OG."

"Excuse me," a bartender said, leaning over the bar so that we would pay attention, "Can you all take your seats? The show is about to start."

"This is a show right here," Bianca answered, "I'll have another test tube, please."

Everyone went back to watching the showdown between me and Julia. The Alpine boys were confused why none of the girls were paying them any attention. Kelly Mathers had moved to get closer to the front. This was her current boyfriend we were talking about, a er all.

Julia pointed at me, "Bartender, maybe you can escort her out? She's had too much to drink."

"I stopped drinking your kool-aid a while ago," I said.

"You're throwing accusation at me with no proof, girl," Julia answered, "Get a life."

"I did. You've been telling me how busy you are with the LUCKY girls, but they barely see you. Then I bump into you coming out of a math classroom, where you tell me how you're being tutored. But mathletes only tutor on Wednesdays, I said and then glanced at the crowd behind me, "It wasn't a Wednesday."

"It wasn't a Wednesday," Amy repeated to others behind her.

The crowd murmured.

"You need to take your seats," the bartender called out, louder. He was getting pissed o , and one complaint away from calling security.

I didn't care about that.

"Then came the nail in the co in," I added with extra drama in my voice. "It was really getting into this now" "When I found a Mrs Field's wrapper in the mathlete room. There's only one person I know who pops those cookies like vitamins."

"She found Mrs Field's wrapper?" Austin asked, "Millie's talking about a used condom?"

"No, a cookie," Oma explained.

"Like a vagin-"

"Austin!"

"There's not a single person here who can possibly believe you. Your proof is a cookie in a math classroom? How lame is that. It's no proof at all," Julia pointed out.

I would've said it's a woman's intuition but I don't have a good track record of that. Julia had a point. I didn't have any actual evidence linking them together. Just circumstantial events... a cookie wrapper sounds pretty random if you don't know Julia like I do.

"Are you sure you didn't drink anything at my place," Bianca asked me.

People around us laughed. Julia's laugh was the loudest of all. No one was siding with me.

"This is like a lame Nany Drew novel," Amy said.

There was more laughter. Julia gave me the harshest look I had ever received: part evil, part glee at winning.

"She's always been a lame Nany Drew," Julia answered, "This was my best friend and look how she's treating me. Her jealousy makes her nothing more than an ugly leech with a momentary boost in popularity."

I wasn't going to let it go. Even if the whole world turned against me, I was going to say my truth. I'll say my truth until I can't say it anymore.

"I believe you."

The words never came out of my mouth. Someone else beat me to it.

I looked back. It was Kelly Mathers. She had tears streaming down her face. She'd been watching my accusations, realizing how her boyfriend was a serial cheater.

Not cereal, serial

I wanted to clean the wax out of my ears. The girl who my ex-boyfriend cheated on me with - is now the one girl coming to my defense. How crazy is this world we live in?

I'll try to avoid judging people from one action, if possible. If there's one thing today taught me, is that people make orts to redeem or hurt friendships... we are all complex.

"I saw him making out with someone in the fun house during Chad's party," Kelly said, wiping the tears o her face, "He was cheating on me too."

"Who's she?" one of the Alpine boy asked, joining in late.

"Current girlfriend of the cheating ex," Amy answered.

"This guy gets around."

Kelly was standing next to me, silently allowing the pain to flow in a stream of tears down her cheeks. I remembered how I felt when I heard Kaden was cheating on me.

Julia laughed at Kelly, "Both of you are girls scorned by the man you love and blaming it on someone put-together like me. It's jealousy. You're losing it. You didn't see anyone at that fun house. And you definitely didn't see me."

A er all we had said, Julia still managed to throw it back in our face. I couldn't believe it.

"Liars," Julia waved us away.

But, then, a deep voice called out from the back. "They may not have seen you... but I did."

No one gasped anymore. So many gasps had been gasped that people were all out of gasps by now. We all turned to see who had said those words.

I said I couldn't believe it before, but I definitely couldn't believe it now.

Christopher Hayes.

"Chris?"

"I don't usually get involved in drama," Chris admitted, "But I also won't watch two girls get humiliated like this."

"What are you saying, Chris?" one of his friends asked.

I looked back at Julia and she was pale as a sheet.

"I was at Chad's party for the charity basketball game," Chris started, "Some rich guy wanted me on his team. Anyway, I was hanging out by the fun house before the game when I saw you."

I had a flashback to that a ernoon. I remembered how I had bumped into Kelly Mathers and how Luke had led me away from her. We walked by the fun house, Luke o ered me some 'adult fun' and I remembered seeing Chris Hayes. I'd even waved at him.

"They may not have seen your face, but I did," Chris said, and pointed at Julia, "I see you. And I don't know anything about you, but you need to find your own man instead of chasing others."

Chris Hayes, of all people, was the evidence in the case against my best friend. Who knew that Luke's arch enemy would be a better friend than my own?

Who knew that it would ever come to this?

"Julia," I said, in the silence that dominated our group, "Why do you accept being the side chick?"

Julia screamed. She was about to yell at me, when we heard a gigantic slap.

Kelly Mathers had slapped Julia right across the face.

She screamed, clenching her pink cheek. Burning from the hit. Julia went to slap Kelly back and the bartender immediately called security.

Austin tried to protect me from the fight that was moments away from engulfing me in it. He led me away and I followed, still too stunned to process these events. I heard more screaming and fighting. I couldn't recognize who was saying what anymore. Then a guard stopped us.

"You were a part of this," He grabbed hold of me and Austin tried to intervene, "You're not leaving here before the cops come."

"Don't make any mistakes, boy," the security guard told Austin, "I've already called the cops."

Austin overlooked the threat and tried to pull me back, but another guard grabbed him and shoved him into handcuffs. I yelled at them to let him go, but they squeezed my arms behind my back to cu me as well.

They pushed us forward to towards the back o ice. Julia was still screaming and Kelly was trying to break free. I tried to wrestle my way out of this painful lock, but the security guard just wrenched my arms tighter until I felt a searing pain.

"Stop!"

The fighting stopped. Even the security guards paid attention.

"No one is touching my comedic muse."

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**A/N: THE BIGGEST AND LAST CHAPTER WILL BE OUT NEXT FRIDAY, 27th SEPTEMBER. I won't post this Friday because I need to write this final chapter and I need to make sure it's epic.**

**And it's likely I'll be writing a sequel... thanks to your encouragement, and how there's so much unresolved Luke-Millie story le .**

**You can see comments and other PND conversations & reactions on my Instagram @NatalieInACorner! I hang out in the comments section of my posts quite a lot**

**See you next Friday <3**