

## It Happened One Summer Novel – Chapter 2

Jail was a cold, dark place.

Piper stood in the very center of the cell shivering and hugging her elbows so she wouldn't accidentally touch anything that might require a tetanus shot. Until this moment, the word "torture" had only been a vague description of something she'd never understand. But trying to *not pee* in the moldy toilet after roughly six mixed drinks was a torment no woman should ever know. The late-night Coachella bathroom situation had nothing on this grimy metal throne that mocked her from the corner of the cell.

"Excuse me?" Piper called, wobbling to the bars in her heels. There were no guards in sight, but she could hear the distinctive sounds of *Candy Crush* coming from nearby. "Hi, it's me, Piper. Is there another bathroom I could use?"

"No, princess," a woman's voice called back, sounding very bored. "There isn't."

She bounced side to side, her bladder demanding to be evacuated. "Where do *you* go to the bathroom?"

A snort. "Where the *other* non-criminals go."

Piper whined in her throat, although the lady guard went up a notch in her book for delivering such a savage response without hesitation. "I'm not a criminal," Piper tried again. "This is all a misunderstanding."

A trill of laughter echoed down the drab hallway of the police station. How many times had she passed the station on North Wilcox? Now she was an inmate.

But seriously, it had been one hell of a party.

The guard slowly appeared in front of Piper's cell, fingers tucked into her

beige uniform pants. *Beige*. Whoever was at the helm of law enforcement fashion should be sentenced for cruel and unusual punishment. "You call two hundred people breaking into a hotel pool after hours a misunderstanding?"

Piper crossed her legs and sucked in a breath through her nose. If she peed herself in Valentino, she would voluntarily remain in jail. "Would you believe the pool hours weren't prominently posted?"

"Is that the argument your expensive lawyer is going to use?" The guard shook her head, visibly amused. "Someone had to shatter the glass door to get inside and let all the other rich kids in. Who did that? The invisible man?"

"I don't know, but I'm going to find out," Piper vowed solemnly.

The guard sighed through a smile. "It's too late for that, sweetheart. Your friend with the purple tips already named you as the ringleader."

Kirby. Had to be.

No one else at the party had purple tips. At least, Piper didn't think so. Somewhere between the chicken fights in the pool and the illegal firecrackers being set off, she'd kind of lost track of the incoming guests. She should have known better than to trust Kirby, though. She and Piper were friends, but not good enough for her to lie to the police. The foundation of their relationship was commenting on each other's social media posts and enabling each other to make ridiculous purchases, like a four-thousand-dollar purse shaped like a tube of lipstick. Most times, those kinds of surface-level friendships were valuable, but not tonight.

That's why her one phone call had gone to Hannah.

Speaking of whom, where was her little sister? She'd made that call an hour ago.

Piper hopped side to side, dangerously close to using her hands to keep the urine contained. "Who is forcing you to wear beige pants?" she gasped. "Why aren't they in here with me?"

"Fine." The guard flashed a palm. "On this we can agree."

"Literally any other color would be better. *No pants would be better.*" Trying to distract herself from the Chernobyl happening in her lower body, she rambled, as she was wont to do in uncomfortable situations. "You have a really cute figure, Officer, but it's, like, a commandment that no one shall pull off nude khaki."

The other woman's eyebrow arched. "You could." "You're right," Piper sobbed. "I totally could."

The guard's laugh faded into a sigh. "What were you thinking, inciting that chaos tonight?"

Piper slumped a little. "My boyfriend dumped me. And he . . . didn't even look me in the eye the whole time. I guess I just wanted to be seen. Acknowledged. Celebrated instead of . . . disregarded. You know?"

"Scorned and acting like a fool. Can't say I haven't been there." "Really?" Piper asked hopefully.

"Sure. Who hasn't put all their boyfriend's clothes in the bathtub and poured bleach on top?"

Piper thought of the Tom Ford suit turning splotchy, and shivered. “That’s cold,” she whispered. “Maybe I should have just slashed his tires. At least that’s legal.”

“That’s . . . not legal.”

“Oh.” Piper sent the guard an exaggerated wink. “*Riiiiight.*”

The woman shook her head, glancing up and down the hallway. “All right, look. It’s a quiet night. If you don’t give me any trouble, I’ll let you use the slightly less shitty bathroom.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you.”

With her keys poised over the keyhole, the guard hit her with serious eyes. “I have a Taser.”

Piper followed her savior down the hall to the bathroom, where she meticulously gathered the skirt of her Valentino and eased the unholy pressure in her bladder, moaning until the final drop fell. As she washed her hands in the small sink, her attention caught on the reflection in the mirror. Raccoon eyes looked back at her. Smearred lipstick, limp hair. Definitely a long way from where she’d begun the evening, but she couldn’t help but feel like a soldier returning from battle. She’d set out to divert attention from her breakup, hadn’t she?

An LAPD helicopter circling overhead while she led a conga line had definitely reaffirmed her status as the reigning party queen of Los Angeles. Probably. They’d confiscated her phone during the whole mug shot/fingerprint thing, so she didn’t know what was happening on the internet. Her fingers were itching to tap some apps, and that’s exactly what she would do as soon as Hannah arrived to bail her out.

She looked at her reflection, surprised to find the prospect of breaking the internet didn’t set her heart into a thrilling pitter-patter the way it did before. Was she broken?

Piper snorted and pushed away from the sink, using an elbow to pull down the door handle upon leaving. Obviously the night had taken its toll—after all, it was nearly five o’clock in the morning. As soon as she got some sleep, she’d spend the day reveling in congratulatory texts and an inundation of new followers. All would be well.

The guard cuffed Piper again and started to walk her back to the cell, just as another guard called down to them from the opposite end. “Yo, Lina. Bellinger made bail. Bring her down to processing.”

Her arms flew up in victory. “*Yes!*”

Lina laughed. “Come on, beauty queen.”

Vigor restored, Piper skipped alongside the other woman. “Lina, huh? I owe you big-time.” She clutched her hands beneath her chin and gave her a winning pout. “Thank you for being so nice to me.”

“Don’t read too much into it,” drawled the guard, though her expression was pleased. “I just wasn’t in the mood to clean up piss.”

Piper laughed, allowing Lina to unlock the door at the end of the gray hallway. And there was Hannah in the processing area, wearing pajamas and a ball cap, filling out paperwork with her eyes half closed.

Warmth wiggled into Piper’s chest at the sight of her younger sister. They were nothing alike, had even less in common, but there was no one else Piper would call in a pinch. Of the two sisters, Hannah was the dependable one, even though she had a lazy hippie side.

Where Piper was taller, Hannah had been called a shrimp growing up and never quite hit the middle school growth spurt. At the moment, she kept her petite figure buried under a UCLA sweatshirt, her sandy-blond hair poking out around the blank red hat.

“She clear?” Lina asked a thin-lipped man hunched behind the desk. He waved a hand without looking up. “Money solves everything.”

Lina unlocked her cuffs once again, and she shot forward. “*Hannnnns*,” Piper whimpered, throwing her arms around her sister. “I’ll pay you back for this. I’ll do your chores for a week.”

“We don’t have chores, you radish.” Hannah yawned, grinding a fist into her eye. “Why do you smell like incense?”

“Oh.” Piper sniffed her shoulder. “I think the fortune-teller lit some.” Straightening, she squinted her eyes. “Not sure how she found out about the party.”

Hannah gaped, seeming to awaken at least marginally, her hazel eyes a

total contrast to Piper’s baby blues. “Did she happen to tell you there’s an angry stepfather in your future?”

Piper winced. “Oof. I had a feeling I couldn’t avoid the wrath of Daniel Q. Bellinger.” She craned her neck to see if there was anyone retrieving her phone. “How did he find out?”

“The news, Pipes. The news.”

“Right.” She sighed, smoothing her hands down the rumpled skirt of her dress. “Nothing the lawyers can’t handle, right? Hopefully he’ll let me get in a shower and some sleep before one of his famous lectures. I’m a walking *after* photo.”

“Shut up, you look great,” Hannah said, her lips twitching as she completed the paperwork with a flourish of her signature. “You always look great.”

Piper did a little shimmy.

“Bye, Lina!” Piper called on the way out of the station, her beloved phone cradled in her arms like a newborn, fingers vibrating with the need to swipe. She’d been directed to the back exit where Hannah could pull the car around. *Protocol*, they’d said.

She took one step out the door and was surrounded by photographers. “Piper! Over here!”

Her vanity screeched like a pterodactyl.

Nerves swerved right and left in her belly, but she flashed them a quick smile and put her head down, clicking as fast as she could toward Hannah’s waiting Jeep.

“Piper Bellinger!” one of the paparazzi shouted. “How was your night in jail?”

“Do you regret wasting taxpayer money?”

The toe of her high heel caught in a crack, and she almost sprawled face- first onto the asphalt but caught the edge of the door Hannah had pushed open, throwing herself into the passenger side. Closing the door helped cut off the shouted questions, but the last one she’d heard continued to blare in her mind.

Wasting taxpayer money? She’d just thrown a party, right?

Fine, it had taken a considerable amount of police officers to break it up, but like, this was Los Angeles. Weren’t the police just waiting around for stuff like this to happen?

Okay, that sounded privileged and bratty even to her own ears.

Suddenly she wasn’t so eager to check her social media.

She wiped her sweating palms on her dress. “I wasn’t trying to put anyone out or waste money. I wasn’t thinking that far ahead,” Piper said quietly, twisting to face her sister as much as she could in a seat belt. “Is this bad, Hanns?”

Hannah’s teeth were sunk into her lower lip, her hands on the wheel slowly navigating her way through the people frantically snapping Piper’s picture. “It’s not good,” she answered after a pause. “But hey, you used to pull stunts like this all the time, remember? The lawyers always find a way to spin it, and tomorrow they’ll be onto something else.” She reached out and tapped the touch screen, and a low melody flooded the car. “Check it out. I have the perfect song cued up for this moment.”

The somber notes of “Prison Women” by REO Speedwagon floated out from the speakers.

Piper’s skull thudded against the headrest. “Very funny.” She tapped her phone against her knee for a few seconds, before snapping her spine straight and opening Instagram.

There it was. The picture she’d posted early this morning, at 2:42, accused the time stamp. Kirby, the traitorous wench, had snapped it using Piper’s phone. In the shot, Piper was perched on the shoulders of a man whose name she couldn’t recall—though she had a vague recollection of him claiming to play second string for the Lakers?—stripped down to panties and boob tape, but like, in an artistic way. Her Valentino dress was draped over a lounge chair in the background. Firecrackers went off around her like the Fourth of July, swathing Piper in sparkles and smoke. She looked like a goddess rising from an electric mist—and the picture was nearing a million likes.

Telling herself not to, Piper tapped the highlighted section that would show her exactly *who* had liked the picture. Adrian wasn’t one of them.

Which was fine. A million other people had, right? But they hadn’t spent three weeks with her.

To them, she was just a two-dimensional image. If they spent more than three weeks with Piper, would they scroll past, too? Letting her sink into the blur of the thousand other girls just like her?

“Hey,” Hannah said, pausing the song. “It’s going to be all right.”

Piper’s laugh sounded forced, so she cut it short. “I know. It always turns out all right.” She pressed her lips together. “Want to hear about the wet boxers competition?”