
Under the Summer Sun - Additional Chapter 2

*U*nder the Summer Sun is told by only Poppy's point of view. This is a small section told in Nate's point of view, after Poppy leaves. This contains spoilers to the overall story, so best read after Under the Summer Sun. As usual, additional chapters are unedited, so expect the odd typo.

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I have officially lost my mind. There is no other explanation for it. Why else would I be filling in an application form for a dating show? She's made me lose my mind. Poppy. Hilarious, teasing, smart, funny, absolute Goddess and the highlight of my summer. No, scrap that, that's not the right sentiment. She's been the highlight of my life.

She's also currently listed as my greatest regret, and she seem doomed to remain that way if I can't put this right.

I *have* to put it right. There is no other option. I'm pretty sure I'll be a ruined man for the rest of my life if I don't.

I pull my phone from the table, out of the drawer where I placed it only minutes earlier, with a vow I'd wait at least half an hour before I allowed myself to refresh the messages, to check if she finally replied, like there would be a chance I'd have missed the notification.

Nothing. Still silence.

I can't seem to settle about why there is silence. Is it because she's still angry with me? Is it because she's preoccupied with whatever is going on with Kiki? Has something worse happened? Maybe the silence from Poppy and Luke is nothing to do with me, but because Kiki did something else and, this time, was successful. That idea twists my stomach, fills me with dread, makes me want to scream. I force it from my head as an option. I refuse to focus on that. It's like tempting fate. The very idea Poppy is somewhere, hurt and grieving, is far too much to take.

I'm pulled back into the memories of that night. Memories I've been trying to push away because they feel far too painful to deal with right now. I know that's not healthy, but it's a gut punch every time I'm pulled back there. Kiki's limp body. Poppy's stunned cry. Luke's ashen face. The way Poppy curled up later and let me hold her, her body shaking. I recall how she felt as fragile as her namesake flower, and all I wanted to do was fix everything that had shattered. Her peace. Her heart. Her trust in me.

I shake off the memories, especially the last one I have, how small she looked when she left me the next morning. How hurt she sounded, how wounded she was by my secrecy, but all minor when it came to her trying to unravel and understand Kiki's pain.

The lack of response from Poppy is unsettling but so is the fact my messages are consistently showing as unread. Is it possible that she has she blocked me, that the woman who never blocks anybody is so angry with me that I'm the first to drive her to it?

I scroll up through my messages with her, right to the top. It's like a bit of self-inflicted pain, especially those first exchanges. Jokes about tampons and then *boom*, like a switch was flicked, the filthiest text messages I've ever exchanged—both sent or received. Sweet and innocent Poppy, Miss 'I forgot how to have fun' Stanton, making me blush, laugh out loud, and pray we'd be alone the next time we were in the same room after receiving them.

The idea we won't ever exchanges messages like this again is disheartening, but the idea I never get the chance to apologise to her is far worse. I need her to know I'm sorry that I didn't tell her the real reason I was staying at Luke's house. I need her to know how sorry I am how everything unfolded; with Kiki as well as between us. I need her to tell me she understands, because I cannot live with the idea that she won't ever forgive me, or that she thinks I didn't care for her.

My fate and happiness rests in her hands, which is a pretty big responsibility to give the woman I told not to go falling in love with me. Apparently, I'm not very good at following my own advice, but I'm fairly sure I'd already fallen part way in love with her before I made that declaration. How could I not fall for Poppy? Everything about her is mesmerising and enchanting, from her smile to her wit, the way she lights up at the merest hint of a sugary treat to how caring she is. I had been slowly falling, inch by inch, until I thudded the rest of the way down, when I heard myself urging to hold onto the woman who ignited my world with colour.

I should put my phone down and get back to the application for the dating show, but like always when I open this thread of messages, I

can't stop myself reading every single one we've exchanged, then onto all the messages I've sent her since the day Luke told me to leave.

Hey, I know Luke said not to message you, but I guess I'd rather hear it from you, and I'd rather have the chance to apologise face to face, if you'll let me.

Poppy? I hate messaging again and interrupting, but I'd love chance to talk.

Poppy... I don't think my messages aren't getting through. I tried calling and didn't get through, either. I'm not sure if you've blocked me or if you just don't have your phone, but I'm going to risk seeming like a crazed person and I'm going to text you every day, just in case. If it's because you have your phone off, I can only apologise for the way your phone will update when you switch it on.

Maybe a bit of context will help. I'm not messaging every day because I'm some stalker (I promise). I'm messaging because... well, I love you, Poppy. Didn't think I'd ever tell somebody that on text rather than to their face, but... I just wanted you to know. I do. I didn't expect you, and I clearly didn't listen to my own advice, but I don't know how I was ever supposed to resist you. You're a thief, Poppy. You stole my breath, my thoughts, and how easily you stole my heart.

I took the train to London and went to Luke's office today. I kept hoping that maybe you were in the city and I'd magically bump into you. Got my toes trodden on instead a few

times. Luke's receptionist shooed me away. Apparently, Mr Hewitt is far too busy to talk. I don't know what I was thinking. I was just hoping he'd update me, because I'm torturing myself with ideas something terrible has happened. I need to know, Poppy. I need to know you're okay, that Kiki is okay, and I need to be able to apologise properly. I can't rest until I do.

Today I had a Poppy special. Sweet items for breakfast and pudding before my dinner. Made me miss you like hell. I hope you're okay, I hope Kiki is okay, and I hope one day you'll both forgive me.

Did you listen to the new Blake Daniels track? Beautiful. The line about fearing love can be taken away... I felt it in my soul.

I miss you every day.

Yoga doesn't hold the same appeal.

To be fair, nothing holds the same appeal. Not even giant lollipops. Chocolate eclairs. Cupcakes. Colourful, swirling meringues. Swimming. I miss you.

I think I'm going to go home to see my parents. I took a long walk on the beach today to say goodbye. I walked the same coastal path I did with you and Kiki, I went to the same beaches, I took the ferry across the estuary. Not as fun when you're not around. Made me miss you, but going home will be nice.

I'm setting off tomorrow evening. Thought I'd have one last morning on the beach, just to say goodbye to everything here. I'll watch the sunrise, and I'll think of your smiles on the beach, how I've never seen anybody light up the way you do. I hope, wherever you are, you are smiling.

The world deserves your smile, Poppy.

Isn't it weird how a sunrise doesn't look the same when I'm not watching it with you? I didn't know there were colours I stopped seeing after Gabriel died, not until you helped me see them again. I wish I could talk to you because I don't want to lose these colours, and I don't want to lose you.

I read through the rest of the messages, the ones where I described being home, told her about being with my parents, talk about little random facts from my day. I scroll to the last message, the one sent yesterday. One message, every day, since she left. All undelivered. All unlikely to ever be delivered. Continuing with the messages may seem like a madness, but I can't shake the idea that one day, she might see one of these messages. That one day, she might reply. But... messages don't feel like it's enough. Something tells me I need a grander gesture.

I put my phone down and return back to the dating application. It's a television show run by the company Poppy once told me she worked at. One of several dating shows and buried within a handful of other shows they're calling for talent. If my messages to the universe aren't getting me anywhere, then I'm going to add another track. I'm going to apply for these shows, hoping she's back at work like she planned, that she will see my application and that she'll want to talk. My soul

won't rest until I've had chance to apologise. She deserves my apology. She deserves to know things between us were genuine.

She deserves everything.

I submit my application. The little *whoosh* of the email alert gives me a flutter of anticipation in my stomach. A mixture of anxiety and hope.

I pick up my phone. I type my message for today.

So... today I did something that you might find amusing. I applied for one of your dating shows. Why are there so many dating shows? You'll have to fill me in at some point. I'm not applying because I legitimately want a date with a stranger. How could I, when you stole my heart away? But if it gives me chance to talk to you... a chance to apologise... a chance to put things right... I have to take it. Who knows. Maybe you'll be there and I'll just get to tell you everything so it can stop weighing me down. Maybe this is just another step towards madness. Or, maybe, this is the best idea I've ever had... time will tell, Free-loader.

