

HARRIET

*L*ove Blooms - Under the Heartbreak is told from Olive's POV. In one chapter, she is taken to hospital by Tyler which disrupts his plans. This is Harriet's side of the story.

"Are you doing anything special today?"

Arabella, my hairdresser stares at me through the mirror as she puts the finishing touches to my hairdo. I've been sitting in her chair for the better part of the afternoon, getting my highlights touched up, a trim and tidy up, and now a fancy up-do to finish.

"I'm going away for the weekend with my boyfriend," I reply, and I hear the fizzle of excitement that oozes out with every word.

"Oh, that sounds wonderful, where are you going?"

"It isn't far away, but it's this beautiful little boutique hotel. It's got a spa, a swimming pool, our room has a secluded garden for private dining," I gush.

"Is it for a special occasion?" Arabella asks, and the smile I give her through the mirror is ear to ear.

“He’s going to propose. He doesn’t know I know, but I found the most beautiful engagement ring just before he told me he’d booked for us to go away,” I explain.

As I talk, I think about the engagement ring that will soon adorn my ring finger. It’s not my usual style but I could tell it is an antique and expensive. When I hold my hand up to show friends my new ring, they will focus on how much money Tyler spent on it, not that it is a gemstone I haven’t worn before. I’ve heard of women who get a second engagement ring, something less ornate to wear day to day. Maybe Tyler will be open to that in the future. I’ll have the best of both worlds. An expensive, antique ring for showing off, and a beautiful ring for day-to-day use.

“Oh, my goodness, you’re so lucky. How long have you been together?” Arabella asks.

“Not long, but when you know, you know, right?” I ask.

“I think my other half needs to up his game. I haven’t found any engagement ring, and there’s not beautiful boutique hotel in my future.” She chuckles and reaches for some hairgrips.

“Maybe he’ll surprise you at the perfect moment,” I reply.

“Tell me all about him, your future fiancé,” she suggests.

“He’s wonderful. He’s so good looking, he makes my knees weak,” I tell her, laughing at the grin she gives me through the mirror. “He’s tall, dark haired, handsome, and he makes a good living. He works in sales, but I’m sure it won’t be long until he’s the top of his team.”

“He sounds like a perfect catch. Hasn’t he got any flaws or is he the fabled, perfect man?” Arabella teases.

“No, he is perfect.” I beam at her, and I force myself to keep that beam on my face when thoughts of Olive cross my mind.

If I’m being perfectly honest with myself, she’s the only thing I would ever admit was negative in Tyler’s life. Even her name irks me,

how he always calls her Fitz. That's almost as bad as every time I feel myself wince hearing her call him Ty. I know it's only little nicknames for one another, but hearing that constant *Fitz* and *Ty* between them, back and forth with affection, things that nobody else calls them, it grates me. I know it shouldn't. I know they're friends. Best friends. They've both reminded me what feels like a million times about how lockdown formed the bonds of their friendship, that they grew close during lockdown because they weren't able to see anybody else, blah, blah, blah.

Okay, it irks me more than I would care to admit, but it will be something I'll get used to. It's something that I will have to get used to. She's his best friend, much closer to him than Leo, Nate, or Owen. At least it will be Leo who is our best man, I'm sure of it. There's no way Tyler would ask me to let Olive be our best man, surely? I expect he'll suggest I have her as my bridesmaid. Unless we have a long engagement, and I can start the slow process of removing her from our lives, if I have to. Hopefully, once the engagement ring is on my finger, she'll stop interfering, and hopefully Tyler will stop letting her interfere. He's too weak for his own good when it comes to her and her ever present drama.

"So, are you fully prepared for the proposal?" Arabella asks, cutting through my daydreaming.

I'm prepared. Completely. Two days ago, I went for a full body wax. Every inch of hair, other than on my head, is gone. Yesterday, I had a manicure and a pedicure. I've got a carry case full of sexy underwear packed. Hanging on my wardrobe is the most stunning outfit possible, something that will look perfect in our engagement photographs. After I'm finished here, I'm going to have my makeup professionally done. All I need to do after that is wait for Tyler to pick me up and take us away on the magical weekend he's planned.

"I'm ready," I reply.

"Well, let's finish this hair style for you, and then you can get yourself ready for your special weekend," Arabella suggests.

She smiles brightly at me and starts to pin my hair. I sit rigid in the seat, determined that my hair will look perfect, not a single strand out of place. I want everything to be perfect; nothing is going to ruin this for me.

"Are you sure you aren't rushing things?"

Even though I can't see her, I can hear the caution in my sister's tone through the phone. I'm starting to wish that I'd just declined her call instead. I don't need her to kill my buzz.

"Madeline, I know this is the right thing. I love him," I reply. I rummage through the bag I've packed, double checking I have everything I want for the weekend. My fingers skim across the exceptionally expensive and skimpy night clothes that I purchased after my visit to the hairdressers and makeup artist. One final, finishing touch on what will be a beautiful evening.

"I know you love him, Harriet, that is clear. Tyler seems like a nice guy, it just hasn't been long," she points out.

"I just think, if you know, then you know. I know, I can feel it in my bones. Tyler and I are the real deal, and I don't want to wait. I'm not getting any younger," I argue.

"Not getting any younger?" she scoffs. "Hattie, that isn't a reason to get married to somebody."

"I would completely agree with you if it wasn't for the fact that I love him, irrationally and eternally."

“Okay, as long as you’re sure.”

“I am completely sure.” I laugh.

I zip up my bag. I have everything I need. All I need now is for Tyler to get here, whisk me away and change our lives.

“I’m a little jealous about the hotel, it looks amazing.”

“Maybe I’ll convince him we should host weddings there, it would be amazing to get married in the same place he proposes,” I muse.

I’ve already checked out the hotel a million times, I’ve seen the wedding options. Pricy, extravagant, but Tyler can afford it, and we deserve something beautiful. I’ve had more than one beautiful dream that features me walking down their beautiful gardens towards Tyler, past all the beaming faces of our friends and family.

Not once has Olive ever cropped up in the dreams, so they’re dreams I’ve cherished and enjoyed rather than woken up an annoyed mood.

“Daddy will want to host somewhere closer to home, you know that. They’ll want you to get married in the village church, like George did,” Madeline reminds me.

“I know that, but I want something bigger. I’m sure they’ll agree once I show them the place.”

“How about you wait until Tyler actually proposes before you start convincing Daddy to get his cheque book out.”

I laugh. “Daddy won’t need to pay a thing. Tyler earns his own money. He’ll make my dreams come true.”

“So, if the proposal is this weekend, when are you coming up to show Tyler off and, more importantly, show off this spectacular ring you told me about?” she asks, and I can tell the caution is gone from her tone. She seems genuinely enthusiastic about everything.

“As soon as we get home, I’m sure. You know you’ll be my bridesmaid, right?” I ask.

Madeline is only eighteen months older than I am, so we grew up more like twins than siblings. She's like my best friend and older sister; all rolled into one.

"I'd be offended if I wasn't," she jokes.

"Right, I will try to sneak away to send you a sneaky photograph of my new ring tonight, but don't worry if you don't hear from me until tomorrow."

"Have a beautiful night, Hattie," Madeline calls, and then she hangs up on me.

I grab the bag and walk downstairs, bringing my mobile phone with me. I check my watch for the time. I have about an hour before he's due to pick me up. I wander through to the kitchen, looking in the fridge for a small snack. We have a late check-in at the hotel; Tyler's promised a late candlestick lit dinner once we get there. I think a proposal over the candlelight will be beautiful. I just need a snack to keep me going, especially as I'm not going to overeat, not on the night he's proposing.

I reach for a tub of yoghurt, but my phone buzzes before I can pick it up. I leave the fridge and pick up my phone, cursing that I'm wearing one of my dresses that doesn't have pockets for my phone. I didn't want to ruin the lines of my dress, ruin my silhouette. I want everything to be perfect.

I smile when I see the message from my screen is from Tyler, but my smile quickly turns to a frustrated frown.

Tyler: I'm at the hospital with Fitz. I'll call you as soon as I know more.

Well, of course he's got to do something with Olive. Why am I even surprised?

I'm overcome with fury and anger at her. She's *always* interfering, always in the goddamn way. Every single time Tyler and I are supposed to do something romantic or special, something crops up with her, and I'm not entirely sure now that it's accidental.

I've been the dutiful girlfriend, I've never complained, but oh my goodness there is always something. When I met Tyler, I'd been surprised that his best friend was a woman. Wary, even. I don't believe a man and woman can be just good friends, there is always some tension, some unresolved or unrequited feelings. I've never known it another way because every guy I've been friends with has tried it on with me, and most of my boyfriends started out as friends. Tyler had laughed when I asked him if there had been more to his friendship with Olive than I was aware of, reassured me I was being over-dramatic, but actions speak louder than words, so the more times he's cancelled things on me for her, the more frustrated I've been.

Who stands up their girlfriend up because their friend is sad? Who stands up their girlfriend for a work event so they can take their friend to a cemetery?

Who delays their planned proposal because their friend needs to go to the hospital, a friend who has a million other people who could take her instead? Why must it always be him she needs?

Me: You're joking, right?

My fingers fly across the keypad and click spend before I can think too much about the message and tone.

Tyler: Don't worry, she's in capable hands.
They're taking her for tests.

There is a chance he misunderstood my tone and I'm grateful as the last thing I want to do is put our proposal night on a sour note. Or a sourer note that it is already given I'm not exactly in a friendly mood right now. I'm sure I'll be fine by the time Tyler arrives. I'll see his gorgeous face, he'll look me up and down in the way that makes me feel like he wants to devour me, and everything about Olive will fizzle away.

Me: I hope she's okay. Keep me updated. I love you.

I watch the screen, looking for those dots to show he's typing a message back, but there isn't anything. I'd do anything to see him reply that he loves me, but I can wait. I can wait until we're face to face tonight. I've been waiting long enough to hear the words. He'll tell me tonight, as part of his proposal. He's just not the type of person to say it all the time, but I know he loves me. Tonight, he'll tell me those beautiful words, and I'll say it back, and we'll seal our love when he slips that ring onto my finger.

I can't wait.

My phone ringing seems to echo around the room. It startles me but at least it stops me pacing the floors, waiting for confirmation when Tyler is on his way.

"Hey, Hattie," he says as soon as I answer the call.

I already know this is going to be bad news. It's in the tone of his voice. I can feel the disappointment running through me already.

"How's Olive?"

"It's bad. She's really sick," he says. I hear the little hitch in his tone; the type he always gets whenever something is going on with her. I've heard it a lot during our relationship.

"What's the matter with her?" I ask. I've spent the last forty minutes imagining all the things that could be wrong with her, all minor things she could hype up for his attention. I wouldn't put it past her, even a little tumble off her bike managed to derail my night.

"They think maybe an infection," he replies.

"An infection sounds like it should be easy for them to fix up," I murmur.

"Right now, she's delirious."

"Is Blake going to stay with her?" I ask. I check my watch again. If we leave soon, we'll be okay for check-in and get this night back on track.

"Blake isn't here. I got home, she was in a bad way, he'd left her to go out with his friends," Tyler spits.

I grit my teeth. Blake's a nice guy but he's young and makes poor choices when it comes to Olive, and I know it's something that frustrates Tyler. It frustrates me too because Blake's actions impact me.

When I first met Olive and Blake, I was actually reassured by him. All those little niggles I had about the stories Tyler had told me about his wonderful best friend, they melted away. How could the best friend be a threat when she had a boyfriend looking like Blake? He's gorgeous, funny, flirty, and he looks like he knows his way around a woman's body. More than that, he looks like a man who would spend hours dedicated to the task. Somebody who has a man like that should be content, not meddling in another woman's relationship.

Yet, meddle she does. All the goddamn time.

"Are your friends going to go to the hospital so you can leave?" I ask.

I hold my breath as I wait for an answer. With every second that ticks by, I feel like I lose another ounce of hope.

"I'm so sorry, Hattie, but I can't leave Fitz, not when she's like this. She's really sick. They've taken her for some more tests but whenever she's back in A&E, she's only calm when I'm around. I think they'd prefer me to stay, if only to keep her quiet."

"Tyler." I grit my teeth.

"I'm really sorry. I know you really wanted to go to the hotel, but I just can't. I wouldn't feel comfortable leaving when she's sick. I'd be worried about what was going on. My mind would be half here. You understand, right?"

"I understand," I reply, bitterness washing through me.

I know there is no point me trying to argue with him or trying to convince him he's making the wrong choice. When it comes to Olive, he always refuses to see sense.

"Look, I know it would be far from what you imagined, but why don't you still go?" he suggests.

"You want me to go to the hotel without you?" I scoff.

"You could take your sister, or a friend. The spa facilities, the pool, they're all things you should still enjoy, you don't need me there for that. The hotel is paid for anyway, so somebody should get some enjoyment out of it."

I take a breath. We can salvage this. It might be the night that is ruined, but we have the whole weekend at the hotel.

"Why don't I go there tonight, and you join me tomorrow, once somebody takes over from you for looking after Olive?"

"I think it would be better if you just go enjoy it with your sister or a friend. I don't know what time I'm going to get out of the hospital, I don't even know what's wrong with her. She's really sick, and I don't want to leave her. I'm sorry, Harriet."

"Saying sorry doesn't make me feel any better about this, Tyler," I snap, even though I don't want to let him see how annoyed I am. I'm usually so good at keeping my emotions under control when I'm talking about Olive. "I'm sorry, I'm just frustrated. I was looking forward to everything you'd planned this weekend. I'm disappointed."

"I understand, but there isn't anything I can do. I can't split myself in half," he points out.

If I were a lesser woman, I'd break down and cry, tell him that he's never splitting himself in half because when it comes to situations like this, I never get fifty percent. He's always given more to her than he does to me.

Telling him won't do me any good. He'll argue and remind me that she's his best friend, ask me what I would do for my best friend. I'd walk through fire for my best friend, I just wouldn't walk over Tyler to do it.

Instead of telling him everything I want to say, I bite my tongue, hold my nerve.

I know my best course of action. It's to keep quiet, act nicely, keep the peace, bide my time, and when he proposes, I'll slowly start working a wedge between them, pulling Tyler's affection from her and to me, where it belongs.

"I know you can't split yourself in half. I wouldn't ask you to, either," I concede, because I know that's what he wants to hear from me.

"I am sorry, Harriet," he says with a sigh.

"You should get back to Olive."

He doesn't argue, he just says goodbye and hangs up on me, clearly rushing back to wherever she is, ready to pick up the baton for whatever crisis she's concocted.

I click to connect a call to Madeline.

"Already?" she exclaims. "I didn't think you would even be at the hotel yet. Was he just so excited he couldn't wait?"

"Maddie? Do you fancy getting away with me this weekend?" I ask.

"What's happened?"

"All I need to know is whether you're free for the weekend, to join me in a nice hotel with a pool and a spa, drink a load of alcohol with me and let me vent," I snap.

"Did something happen between you and Tyler?"

"Yeah, Olive happened, again," I grumble.

She sighs. "I thought you'd spoken to him about this?"

"I asked him if they'd ever slept together, and I asked her too, like you suggested," I protest.

"I didn't tell you to ask them that. I told you to sit down with Tyler and tell him that it made you feel insecure. I thought you'd done that, if you were considering accepting his proposal," Madeline chides.

"That was what I was doing," I argue.

"No, you weren't addressing that you feel insecure about how close they are, or how much time he spends with her," she counters.

I hate arguing with Madeline, once she has a point to make, she doesn't like to let it go.

"All I'm really asking, right now, is whether you're free this weekend to join me on a paid for stay in a fancy hotel," I grumble.

"Yes, of course, I'd love to join you, but I will be talking about this again. You can't accept a proposal when you're feeling like this because if he doesn't know, things aren't going to change."

“If you promise not to talk about this over the weekend, I promise I’ll talk to Tyler when we get back.” I cross my fingers and hope she’ll agree. I don’t want to miss out on the hotel, even if Tyler isn’t there, but I don’t want to go alone, and I don’t want to listen to Madeline telling me her opinion all weekend.

“I promise,” she replies.

“Fine. I’ll come pick you up. Don’t forget to pack your swimwear.”

“See you in a bit, Harriet,” Madeline sings down the line.

I throw my phone into my bag and then search for my car keys. I change my shoes given I’d expected Tyler to be driving us to the hotel. My phone beeps from within my bag.

Tyler: Are you going to the hotel?

I’m surprised he could tear himself away from Olive for long enough to message me, but I’m suddenly bolstered by the fact he did. He does care about me. I know he does. He loves me, even if he’s never said it before. He wants to propose, of course he loves me. I just need to make Olive see that she shouldn’t interfere with us. As soon as he puts that ring on my finger, her needs are going to come after mine. I’m going to come first. I’ll make sure of it.

Me: I’m going with Maddie. Don’t worry. I understand. See you Sunday x

My fingers fly across the screen for my response. I know it’s the right approach. Criticising Olive, especially over text, isn’t going to work. It’ll just make him dig his heels in, and when I talk to him on Sunday, I

don't want any comments about how I'm being unreasonable. I want him to recognise my feelings, recognise that he chose her when he should have prioritised me, our weekend, his proposal.

He's not the one I need to vent my frustration to. I'll just make Tyler aware of my feelings, how hurt I feel, when we talk, but then I'll vent my frustrations with the person who deserves it. I smile to myself at the idea of finally telling Olive exactly what I think about her. The idea of it stays with me as I lock up the house and get in the car, ready to pick up Madeline. It fizzes inside me as I drive, and the whole way to meet Madeline, despite my disappointment with Tyler, I'm smiling.