
Under the Summer Storms Additional Scene 3: The Alternative Ending

When I was writing Under the Summer Storms, I was initially unsure how I would conclude on Luke and Kiki's relationship. I'd left the status of their relationship up for interpretation at the end of Summer Sun. I knew I would need to make a choice for Kiki during Storms, but the more I wrote about their relationship, and their backstories, the more I thought they would choose to stay together.

I was uncomfortable keeping them together after Summer Sun, mostly because of how I described Luke. In Storms, I was able to soften him slightly given things were from Kiki's point of view, mostly post therapy when her mind was clearer.

The story confirms that both Kiki and Luke had months and months of therapy to deal with their own individual issues as well as therapy together to work as a better couple. I did my best in Storms to turn their relationship into something healthy; to make them stronger individuals too.

About halfway through writing the book, I started playing around with the idea of a different fate for them as a couple. I started to think that maybe neither Kiki nor Luke got to decide how their future lay. Maybe circumstances would choose for them, because we don't always get to plan what we want in life. We can dream and hope, but there are curves in the roads we never plan, things that take us off courses set, forcing us to adapt to new realities.

Through the second half of the story, I held this different fate as my conclusion for them but I changed direction because I wanted to give them something beautiful. Instead, I focused more on their therapy and growth as people, making them better people, and choosing to work to make their relationship better.

This, though, is how I would have written the epilogue, if I didn't believe in Luke's redemption arc. It's set a little later than the epilogue in the book, and I hope people see the beauty in the bittersweetness of this alternative.

As usual, additional scenes are unedited so you may see errors.

Copyright: Roxie Holland

Epilogue: Eighteen Months Later

I take another look in the mirror, checking my make up is perfect. I smooth down the silk of my dress. Satisfied that everything looks okay, I gather my things and then walk through to the other room of the suite I'm staying in.

"How are you feeling?" I ask.

Poppy turns to look at me, smoothing down the skirt of her wedding dress. She looks so beautiful, radiant. Her auburn hair is in a beautiful updo, little crystals woven into the strands.

"Do I look okay?" she asks.

"Okay? What an understatement. You look stunningly beautiful. I'm not even sure how you dare ask me that question," I scold. I give her another smile, and I move closer to her, straightening up her veil.

"Were you this nervous?" she asks.

"Yes. A mix of nerves and excitement. It'll be a beautiful day. Beatrice has this planned like military precision. All you need to do is remember to breathe, and focus on Nate," I soothe.

"The mothers have been driving me mad today," she says.

"That's what mothers are for," I remind her.

"Thank you for keeping me sane these last few weeks."

"You're welcome. Now, are you ready?" I ask. I glance at my watch. The battered strap and watch face seem like a contrast to the beautiful dress Poppy has dressed me in and the rest of my items, but it gives me a warm feeling in my heart.

"I'm ready," she says. She picks up her bouquet of flowers, beautiful white roses presented and held in place by some beautiful folded, dark green foliage.

"Come on then, let's get you married," I say, beaming at her.

I link an arm through hers. We walk out of the suite. It's a laid-back affair compared to the wedding I'd had with Luke. Poppy and Nate

decided to hold their wedding in a small country cottage. Poppy insisted that she didn't want a big fuss, but things have a way of escalating, especially when Amelia, my mother, and Nate's mother are all involved.

"Thank you for doing this," she says.

"Doing what?"

"Giving me away," she explains.

"Oh, Pops, don't make me cry. I was honoured when you asked me," I remind her. I cried the night that she asked me. She told me she wanted somebody to walk down the aisle with her, but she couldn't think of anybody better than me. It might be unusual, but it seems fitting that I get to walk her down the aisle to Nate, like I'm exchanging her as my platonic soulmate and handing her over to Nate, her true love.

We reach the door to the hall where the ceremony is taking place. I know, through the door, despite Poppy and Nate keeping it small, there are around a hundred guests, all waiting for the first glimpse of her.

One of the members of staff opens the doors for us and then the hymn she'd chosen starts to play. I keep my arm linked through hers as we walk up the aisle together.

Luke once told me that with the right person, a second can feel like an infinity. An ever-lasting moment where time stands still, perfection captured.

I see it being played out for me, right now, as Nate looks at Poppy as she walks down the aisle towards him. He looks stunned and speechless, in awe of his bride, and I know she is beaming just as brightly back at him.

Poppy and I draw level to where Nate stands waiting for her, still looking besotted and awestruck. I give Poppy a kiss on the cheek and then take my seat next to my mother and Amelia.

The reverend starts the ceremony, and I try to keep my attention on Poppy and Nate, listening to them exchanging their personalised vows. They're in their usual quirky and joking style, earning chuckles from the guests. Even my mother and Amelia chuckle as they sit in the front pew, watching Poppy and Nate's union.

I try to focus on everything that is said, keeping myself in the present, trying not to cry when I think about who is missing – somebody who would be holding my hand right now, beaming at his sister as she marries the love of her life.

Luke would have loved today. He'd have been so proud, so happy.

Like they can sense I'm feeling emotional, Mum reaches over and takes my hand in hers, giving it a little squeeze. She smiles at me before returning her attention to Poppy and Nate. I watch as she reaches for Amelia's hand, holding hers too, providing the same comfort and a balm against the missing piece of her heart.

I glance up at the faces of my mother and Amelia, wondering if their own minds are wandering back to their own wedding day, something that only took place six months ago. We were too wrapped up in grief after losing Luke for their original wedding date. Our lives all changed beyond recognition when we lost him. Everything we'd been looking forward to earlier that night and all the promises we'd made about a happy future was suddenly gone. House moves, concerts, even a long waited for wedding seemed like prosperous ideas.

Luke's death and our grief should have been something that united us, but it didn't. It swallowed us up whole, into separate bubbles. Amelia fell into the darkness, Poppy fell to pieces, my mother was unable to help, and Nate felt nothing but guilt at being unable to save

him. Me, I fell so far down that I didn't know what way was up. All I knew was that Luke's death had been like a bowling ball—something that had flown towards us at high speed, shattered and scattered us like pins after a direct hit.

After his funeral—a small and private affair for his family—we all retreated. I couldn't stay at the house, and I couldn't stay at the cottage. Everything felt so painful, and I felt overwhelmed by my loss, especially with how much I blamed myself. I told my family I was staying at the house in London, temporarily taken off the market, ready for the upcoming legal hoops I'd have to jump through in settling Luke's affairs. The London home became my fortress from the world. We kept in touch by email and text, a necessity when speaking was too hard.

Alone, I rattled around the house. There were days where I wandered aimlessly from room to room, or times when I buried myself under his bed covers, inhaling his scent, trying to nurse my broken heart and assuage my guilt.

The night I lost him; the doctors had called it a widow maker. All I could think about was the odds about how somebody like Luke had suffered such a fate. He'd been strong and healthy. He'd been fit, exercised a lot, and ate healthily. He'd been so young. And the only conclusion I could settle upon was that I'd put him through so much stress and pain over the year that it had broken his heart.

One night, almost two months after his death, I unable to sleep. I pottered around the bedroom, wearing Luke's pyjamas, running my hands over his things – like I was trying to feel his presence. My hand had trailed across his bedside table. I opened his drawer and found a box of envelopes. They were all addressed to me. A love letter he wrote every day in throughout our separation.

I flicked on the bedside lamp, squinting given everything had been so dim, and I sat on the floor, cross-legged and I opened letter after letter. He'd dated the envelopes, so I read them in order. I sobbed at every single one. His prose, his emotion, the depth of his love; all things that had leapt from the page and wrapped around me like a comforting but heavy blanket.

A letter written on the day after we separated:

Words could never convey the depths of my love for you, Kiera. We'll get through this, and we will be stronger together the other side. I miss you. I love you. I hope you're okay.

A letter written after the first weekend apart:

I have the worst headache, Kiera. I can't ever drink rum again. I think most of my vital organs are pickled. But my heart still beats, as always – for you.

There were so many beautiful and poignant letters. I read them like they were a meal and I was a woman starved.

He wrote on the day he found out about Christian. My hands had shook when I pulled it out of the envelope, telling myself that nothing good would come from reading the letter. It had made me sob, but his closing lines had felt like a soothing balm:

I still believe in us, Kiera. I always will believe in our love.

The letter dated for the next day had felt like a warm hug:

If I'm not your destiny, if our journey has come to an end, I would challenge the gods themselves until I was spent and forced to accept my fate. I don't believe this is our fate, but if we are at the end, please know that I'll always love you, and I wish you nothing but joy for the future. Somebody like you deserves the joy, my darling. I'll cherish our time together for the rest of my days.

By the time I finished reading the letters, dawn was breaking. I climbed back into bed and felt like I slept for a week-long stretches

under the covers, the curtains drawn, only the darkness and my tears as company—and I dreamt about Luke. Sometimes I woke convinced I felt his presence next to me. I would reach out for him, fingers aching to meet something solid, and then cry myself back to sleep when all I felt was the nothingness that surrounded me.

Eventually, days and nights became more separate. I didn't sleep all the time. I forced myself to get up, to eat, drink, bathe. Eventually I returned home to Cornwall. I found myself in Poppy's arms, finally catching up face to face rather than the messages we'd stuck to. Slowly, we started to pull the family back together, trying to form ourselves as a whole and trying not to cry at the absence we all felt.

I sold the house in London. Luke's business sale also went through. I sold the big house in Cornwall. I gave most of the money away, to charities I knew Luke would have been passionate about. I designed the little cottage exactly the way we'd talked about in the days we'd been hidden away.

Conversations in the family became a little easier. There were days we could talk without crying. Soon, the non-crying days outweighed the crying ones. We started to talk about the future, including the wedding for Mum and Amelia.

'Luke would have wanted it to go ahead,' I insisted. I knew he'd have wanted us to move forward, to find a way to live our lives. It was the first celebration we had without him with us. The second was the opening of the wellness retreat for Poppy and Nate. The third is now, for Poppy and Nate.

As the ceremony draws to a close, I wipe the tears from my eyes. I beam a big smile at Nate and Poppy.

I watch as they share their first kiss as husband and wife, and I'm overcome by a wash of emotion. People get swept up in the emotion, clapping and giving little whoops of delight. As they walk down the

aisle, hand in hand, I rise from the pew. I'm surrounded by my mother and Amelia, ready to join in with the celebrations of love.

"How's it going, sister-in-law?" Nate asks as he walks over to me in the garden. I laugh at him.

"You know me and Poppy aren't sisters," I remind him.

"You're as good as," he says, smiling at me.

"Can't believe she's made an honest man out of you," I tease.

"She made me an honest man the day I met her." He chuckles.

We both glance over to where Poppy stands on the little bridge, having more photographs taken of her. She looks back over at me whilst the photographer changes his lens, and she pulls a face, making me laugh.

"You're not required to participate in these photographs?" I ask.

"There's already a million of shots of us together. Look at her, though. What a beautiful set of photographs this'll be," he muses, such affection in his voice. I survey where Poppy's having the photographs taken and Nate's right, they'll look beautiful.

"I'm looking forward to the meal. I don't think I've ever been to a wedding where the cake has been served as a pre-starter course."

"I can't deny Poppy her cake," Nate proclaims.

The photographer finishes taking the shots of Poppy and she gives him a grateful nod before walking over to me and Nate.

"Is it nearly time for food?" she asks.

"Almost, Freeloader," Nate teases.

"We probably have just enough time left for a surprise, right?" Poppy suggests.

“What kind of surprise?” I wonder. I’m pretty sure that the whole day has been timed to the absolute minute by Beatrice. Given she’s a guest at the wedding, looking beautiful on Matt’s arm and standing across the garden from us, I’m sure she’ll notice if things go even a millisecond off course.

Both Poppy and Nate appear to be staring at the opposite side of the garden. I follow their gaze and then I find my heart giving a little hitch. I watch as Christian walks towards me, two glasses of champagne in his hands.

It’s been a long time since I saw him last. I didn’t see him for months after Luke’s death, but I saw Christian a few months ago and he offered me his condolences about Luke’s death. We caught up over coffee. He told me he was still single. He told me how he’d spoken to Poppy and Nate a few times since Luke’s death, and I understood that any of Poppy’s animosity towards him had gone—smoothed by his genuine compassion at our loss.

When the conversation had started to stray towards difficult topics—him, me, our emotions, the things that happened back then— it had become too much, so I’d bid him farewell, accepting a kiss on the cheek as a fond farewell. I expected nothing more.

“I know you said you didn’t want a plus one,” Poppy starts.

“We know you’ll probably hate us for interfering,” Nate adds.

“But... it would be okay, you know. Luke wouldn’t want for you to...” Poppy falters.

“I know,” I whisper.

We watch as Christian draws closer to us, a warm smile on his face.

“Congratulations. I wish you both so much happiness,” he says to Poppy and Nate. He hands me one of the glasses. “Kiki. You look lovely,” he adds.

“Well, we have to go start our welcoming people for dinner, before Beatrice throws a clipboard at us,” Nate proclaims.

Poppy chuckles and takes his hand, pulling him away from us.

“Very subtle,” I mutter.

“I hope you don’t mind me being here. If you are uncomfortable, I’ll go. I’m not here to upset you, Kiki. That’s the last thing I would want to do.”

“I’m not upset,” I counter. I take a sip of my drink. “At least you’ll get a good meal, I guess.”

“It won’t be as nice as my paella, but I’m sure it will be good,” he replies. It makes me laugh. Loudly enough that some of the nearby guests look at me. He smiles at me, a warm and affectionate smile. “It’s okay to laugh, Kiki. It’s okay to feel joy. It doesn’t diminish anything you felt for him. Luke knew you loved him, but I’m sure he’d want you to be happy. It’s okay to choose happiness.”

“I don’t know how ready I am, for anything,” I whisper.

“You only have to be ready for today. Tomorrow, you only have to be ready for tomorrow. You can take everything else a single day at a time,” he soothes.

I stare at him, and then I marvel at the beautiful way the sun shines through the trees behind us. It’s like an extra beam, a dazzle of happiness and warmth. It feels like a gift. Whether he’s here as a gift from Poppy and Nate, or from Luke, I’m not sure.

All I can hear is Christian’s words from the last night we’d been together. *Maybe in another lifetime*. It feels so vivid as a memory.

“So, I know there’s a whole lot planned for today – the meal, the drinks, the dancing, the laughing, a potentially cheesy disco, maybe surprise guests to do some singing,” I rattle off some of the things I know is on the itinerary today.

“Sounds like I’m in for a fun experience,” Christian replies.

“Yes, of course. Tiring, though. So, how do you feel about a nice walk on the beach tomorrow, and maybe cooking me some paella in the evening?” I ask.

He looks thoughtful for a moment. “Well, Kiki, are you going to make me some banana loaf?” he asks.

“I think I can manage that.”

“Then I would be delighted to spend the day with you tomorrow,” he replies.

I raise my champagne glass. He clinks his against mine. We sip our champagne and then walk towards the hall where we’ll greet the newlyweds and then start the celebrations.

As we walk, he slips his hand around mine. It’s warm and comforting.

Maybe in another lifetime, Kiki.

I take a deep breath as we continue walking. I don’t know where things will go. This could fizzle to nothing, or it could ignite to a fire that burns long and strong.

All I know is that we’re taking the first steps into that ‘another lifetime’ that lies ahead of us. Hand in hand we walk, and my heart is wide open to all the possibilities.