

A Love Cut Short

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A Love Cut Short

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Summary

The last intimate moments of the songstress and her boxer before fate tears them apart.

Chapter 1: The Performer of the Month

The audience is already on their feet before the performer of the month draws her last note from between her scarlet lips. Boxer can barely hear her finale with the cacophony of joyful cheers, claps, and whistles that engulfs the Empty Set. However, that doesn't stop him from letting out some rowdy whoops of his own from his place just backstage. The fans' euphoria is certainly infectious, and Boxer is practically vibrating with their shared energy and adrenaline.

In the midst of it all, Red stands behind her mike, a goddess swathed in shimmering gold. She gazes about the auditorium as if in a trance, a humble and awed smile on her glowing face. Boxer can't help his grin as she is bathed in seemingly endless praise and adoration. She deserves every bit of it.

One zealous attendee in the upper seating area tosses a bouquet of colorful flowers at the stage. Red gasps and rushes forward, catching the arrangement in her soft hands before it can hit the floor. She takes a moment to appreciate the sweet scent of the blossoms, and Boxer sees more than hears the bashful giggles escaping her grinning mouth.

All too soon, the great stage curtains begin their journey to create an impregnable wall between the songstress and her audience. Red waves to her fans merrily, allowing her hand to drop only when the curtains snuff out the last of the Empty Set's flashing lights. She stares at the barrier in front of her, as if she can look right through it and see the members of the audience stumbling out into the night. Boxer allows her some space; Red tends to zone out a little after a satisfying performance.

Red's gaze falls to the flowers in her hands, and her dazzlingly white teeth flash in a new grin as she squeals in delight, clutching the bouquet close and jumping in place like a crazed rabbit. Boxer decides to step in before she breaks a heel. Picking up Red's lithe form easily, he spins her around and around, his deep laughter echoing throughout the stage as he joins in her jubilation.

"Boxer!" Red cackles, engulfed in the man's arms. "You made me drop the flowers!"

"And why are you so worried about a bunch of plants some ruffian threw at you?" he jokes, setting the singer down, but not yet freeing her from his embrace. "It seems my fiancée's got another admirer I need to pay a visit to."

"Of course you do, tough guy. Pick them up, please?" Red tilts her head up, piercing Boxer with a sapphire gaze they both know he can't resist.

"Alright," he sighs, releasing her and turning to the discarded bouquet. He makes a show of rolling his broad shoulders and bends at the waist, taking his time to gather up the flowers as a not-so-thinly veiled reminder of who and what Red was engaged to.

"Her Majesty's bouquet," says Boxer, straightening and thrusting the flowers back into his fiancée's face. Red crosses her arms and purses her lips adorably, eyes darting between her

man and the blossoms in his hand. Boxer offers a hopefully charming smile and winks.

Mouth curling up in a slight smile, Red sighs and takes the bouquet once more, slender fingers caressing its velvety petals. "Why, thank you, kind sir."

Boxer takes this as a small triumph. Red never stays annoyed at him for long.

The singer moves closer to her fiancé, leaning into his chest while toying with the flowers. Boxer holds her tenderly and rests his chin in her fiery locks, knowing she has something on her mind she wants to share with him, and only him.

"They loved me." Boxer can hear the smile in her giddy voice. "They really loved me."

"You were amazing out there," he murmurs huskily, a calloused hand taking Red's chin and tilting her mouth towards his. "How could they not adore you?"

They kiss, and the crew members packing up for the night melt into the background.

Boxer breaks contact first, staring into Red's brilliant irises. The fact that he alone has the privilege of beholding the sensational Red so shamelessly still sends a thrill down his spine and through his gut.

"Boxer," she whispers, raking a hand through his messy hair and letting it rest against his rough cheek. "This performance...was one of the most important concerts of my career. The Empty Set was anything but empty, and...I'm sure nearly everyone else in Cloudbank was watching it live."

Boxer hums lowly, nuzzling her hand encouragingly. "And that's great, right?"

"Yeah, of course it is!" she chuckles breathlessly. "This is a dream come true for me. It's just...my career's probably going to take off soon, and I may not have as much time to spend on other things...important things," she adds softly, rubbing her fiancé's stubble with her thumb.

"What I'm saying is that," Red gulps, averting her gaze to a spot on Boxer's white button-up shirt. "I want us to get married soon. Like soon, soon. Before I get caught up with work and everything else."

He processes her request, nodding and taking her hand in his own. They haven't been engaged for, well, however long people think is acceptable for couples to be engaged. However, looking down at the beauty before him and imagining her in a flowing, white gown, he realizes he couldn't care less what the others thought.

"I think that's a great idea," Boxer concedes, certain he is grinning like an idiot. "Hell, if we do this fast enough, we'll have more time to spend on the honeymoon," he suggests, wagging his eyebrows.

"Alright, big guy," Red giggles, pushing lightly at his chest. "Don't get too ahead of yourself. We can start planning everything tomorrow, OK?"

“OK,” Boxer replies contentedly, capturing his fiancée’s lips in his once more.

He’s never felt this “OK” in his whole life.

Chapter 2: The Camerata

The minutes pass the young couple by, heedless of their embrace on the Empty Set's stage. After what feels like hours, Boxer and Red step apart and look about the area. It seems that all of the stage hands have turned in for the night. The auditorium has been vacated, the only remaining sounds being those of the stragglers searching for an exit.

"Ready to head home?" asks Boxer softly.

"Hmm," hums Red, pressing her rosy lips together in consideration as she glances back at her lonely microphone. "Actually, there's something I want to do first."

He raises an eyebrow as his fiancée pulls him towards the sound system tucked away in the corner of the stage.

"There's a demo on here that I've been meaning to rehearse," she explains, booting up the system and searching through the audio files. "It should be around here somewhere. Would you mind finding it for me? It's called 'She Shines'."

Boxer nods, scrolling through the list as Red strides over to her microphone and carries it closer. "Well, well," he chuckles, eyes bright with mischief, "Am I actually getting a private performance by the lovely and irresistible Red herself?"

"Keep being a smartass and this is the last 'private performance' you'll ever get," Red retorts with a smarmy smile. "Just play the track."

"Yes, ma'am."

Red begins singing right as the ballad starts, her low tones amplified by the stage's acoustics. Boxer watches her with bated breath; it always takes her a moment to lose herself in the music, but soon enough, her eyelids flutter shut and her fingers curl gently around the microphone stand as she rocks to the leisurely tempo.

As Red belts out the first chorus, he wonders vaguely from who she drew the inspiration for this song. It doesn't sound like any person he knows, more like...a guardian of some kind. No...perhaps a place?

Whatever muse Red chose, she sure seems to appreciate and revere its watchful presence.

"Lost in the clouds, like tears in the rain. Winking along...Boxer. Boxer! Cut the music, please!"

Boxer starts out of his little reverie and fumbles with the sound system until silence reigns the Empty Set once again. He looks over his shoulder, wondering what caused Red to cut her little rehearsal short.

"Sybil! I thought you already left."

Boxer fights back a scowl as his fiancée crosses the stage to meet the woman in white who just appeared in the wings. He's never been too fond of Red's eccentric event planner, and he's certain the feeling is mutual. But, he's learned to tolerate her presence, for Red's sake.

"Oh, no, honey!" Sybil giggles, the sound sending a chill through Boxer. "How could I leave without congratulating you on that wonderful performance? I'm glad I was able to catch you."

"Thank you, Sybil," sighs Red, glowing with sincere gratitude. "But I couldn't have done it without your help."

"Red, you give me too much...oh. Am I interrupting something?" asks Sybil, eyes narrowing imperceptibly as she notices the man standing a ways from where she was conversing with the songstress.

"Hello, Sybil," Boxer greets with a smirk as he steps forward, hands thrust in his pockets. "We were just having a little jam session. No biggie." He revels in the fact that he's irking the Camerata member, ignoring Red's warning glance to behave.

He expects Sybil to brush off his remarks as usual, but this time, something about her mannerisms feel off. Her fingers clutch the handle of her parasol so hard it may very well snap, and her gaze moves between Boxer and Red almost frantically.

"Oh, er...I see," the blond replies, the strain in her normally chipper voice not lost on the couple. Red looks to her fiancé confusedly, and opens her mouth to speak more when another voice drifts onto the stage.

"Sybil. Sybil, Sybil, Sybil, you told us she would be here alone," intones Royce Bracket with a hint of admonition. Boxer steps close to his fiancée, hackles raised as the famed engineer strolls out of the shadows, followed by Asher Kendrell and his infernal cat.

"The Camerata?" murmurs Red, stepping back and looking between the three white-clad socialites with wide eyes.

"Well, it appears I was mistaken, Royce," says Sybil, her words laced with sweet venom. "Don't fret, for I believe we'll have no trouble taking what we need." She fixes Red with a nearly predatory leer.

Oh, no. This freakish situation is not escalating any further on Boxer's watch.

"I'm gonna stop you right there and tell you that we don't know what you want, nor do we have it," Boxer interjects, a dangerous glint in his steely eyes. Grabbing Red's hand, he declares, "Red, we've had a long night. Let's head home."

"Right," she agrees shakily, regarding Sybil as one would a duplicitous stranger. "Goodnight, Sybil."

"I'm afraid we cannot allow you to depart so soon, my dear."

The couple wheel around to face Grant Kendrell as he enters stage left. The distinguished Administrator is not empty handed; he carries with him a large, translucent weapon adorned with a blood-red orb on its wide blade.

Boxer's blood runs cold, his mind racing faster than Preston Moyle on his prized motorcycle. What was this? A setup? An ambush?

"Wha...what's going on? Who are you people?" Red tries her best to sound defiant, but Boxer can hear the fearful tremors in her voice. He pulls his fiancée to his side immediately, fixing Grant with an intimidating glare.

"You know who we are, Red," Asher speaks up, scratching his cat's chin as it perches on his shoulder. "The Camerata has always dedicated itself to the betterment of Cloudbank. However, we've realized that we cannot uproot the stagnant system of capricious polls that rule this city on our own."

"That's why we're collecting people like you, Red," Sybil croons, taking tentative steps towards the stunned couple. "Your exceptional talents will aid us in bringing true change to Cloudbank; because if everything continues changing, nothing will."

"Back. Off." Boxer growls, tense and ready to defend his love from these nutjobs. "We don't want any part in this!"

"Wait... 'people like me'?" breathes Red, clutching his arm and looking back and forth between the three gathered before them and the Administrator blocking their escape. Suddenly, a righteous fire ignites in her blue eyes, and, in a moment of boldness, she separates from Boxer and advances towards Grant.

"You!" she cries, pointing at the elder man accusingly. "You're the reason everyone's been disappearing! What have you done to them?!"

"Well, in actuality," says Royce, despite the fact that no one is paying attention to his phlegmatic words at the moment. "It was mostly a team effort requiring collaboration on all our parts."

"Red, stop!" yells Boxer, rushing after his fiancée right as Grant's lips quirk into a triumphant little smile.

The next instant, the Administrator's large weapon is flying across the stage, right at the woman Boxer swore to protect from harm.

A wordless cry tears from the man's throat as he reaches Red, knocking her out of the way as the sword sails closer and closer to its target.

And then...actually, Boxer isn't too sure what happens to him after the sword pierces his gut.

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