

Ninety-Eight Percent

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Ninety-Eight Percent

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Summary

It started as admiration for the woman's work, but Sybil's growing obsession became her ultimate downfall.

She knew her before they even met. The same records played endlessly as Sybil arranged functions and events from her apartment high above in Cloudbank. Each song brought a smile to her face. Although she wasn't as talented as the singer, she sang along after memorizing the lyrics; words had been Sybil's forte for years, but Red made them dance.

An invitation was extended out to the musician to partake in the up-and-coming artists program. While the intent was serious, Sybil laughed at her own idolization of the woman. Such sentiments were reserved for a young, foolish schoolgirl. Surely Red would ignore the message. Sybil couldn't blame her.

And yet she still showed up.

Sybil's jaw dropped at the divine sight walking in. Locks of scarlet curls framed her face and bounced off of her pale skin. An ensemble of white and blue draped over the singer's body, but it was her eyes which captivated Sybil. She could have stared into those bright blue eyes forever.

"You're Sybil Reisz, right?" Sybil nodded, the blush burning on her face. "I'm Red," she said with a smile. "It's nice to finally meet you."

Even with the event over, Sybil retreated to her apartment, back pressed into the door while embracing herself. She thought she could contain herself in front of Red, that it was simply the woman's voice she fell for. Sybil desired to know the inner workings of her mind, to brush locks of hair out of her dazzling eyes. Anything to provide an excuse to share the same air with Red. A mere taste of the woman wasn't enough.

Which was exactly why Sybil asked Red to meet her for drinks one day. She wasn't lying when she expressed an interest in Red's work; Sybil merely had ulterior motives on top of it.

Sybil arrived ten minutes early. Red arrived five minutes later.

They spoke of the music scene over lattes at Red's favorite cafe. Sybil's treat - she insisted. When their cups emptied, the conversation persisted. Sybil had already listened to countless recordings of Red, but to bask in the woman's voice was a delicacy.

"We should do this more often," Sybil suggested, hiding her anxiety as she waited for Red's thoughts.

When she smiled back, Sybil's heart nearly burst. "Yeah, we should!"

They met weekly and spoke as if they reunited annually. They shared their love for art and good company. Each visit, Sybil inched closer to Red, mentally and physically. Red attended Sybil's events, even the ones unrelated to music, though Sybil had yet to find the time to attend one of Red's prolific concerts.

"Stop by for rehearsal," Red insisted one day. "I promise you'll enjoy it."

It rained the day Sybil entered the Goldbank Auditorium. She shook out her umbrella, fluffed her hair, and followed the sound of the distant singer. Techies brought Sybil backstage for a perfect view of the musician in her element. Red shun like a star with the multiple spotlights on her, but it was her voice that sent Sybil's heart into her throat.

When she finished, Red slipped backstage and pulled Sybil into a friendly hug. "You came! It's so good to see you!"

Sybil gasped against Red, inhaling her scent and absorbing her warmth. A brief exchange, but for Sybil, it was an eternity. She wouldn't fuss over spending the night in the flawless woman's arms.

She waited with Red afterwards, who expressed concern over her absent ride. Painted lips frowned as Red lowered her gaze. Sybil panicked to remedy the problem.

"I can walk you home," she offered. "I don't mind. My umbrella's big enough for two and I can share."

Red lit up at the offer. "Would you? You're too kind, Sybil."

Only for you.

With the red and white striped parasol unfurled, Sybil invited Red in to stay dry. Her perfume tickled Sybil's nose as they walked down the illuminated streets. Reflections of Cloudbank rippled on puddles as the two giggled and gossiped. Sybil wished they'd never reach their destination.

Upon arrival at Red's building, Sybil held her breath, waiting for an invitation to join. Something to waste the time while waiting out the rain. More chatter spent over warm cups of tea. The idea twisted away from the innocent, platonic gestures and revealed more intimate solutions to keep warm.

She gazed at Red, wondering what she tasted like, what made her quiver, what drove her more insane than the anticipation burning up Sybil.

Though as they reached the door steps, Red flashed a smile and thanked Sybil. She fiddled with her keys as Sybil dove in to cling onto Red from behind.

"I enjoyed seeing you tonight," Sybil purred.

Red only giggled and squeezed back before slipping away. "I appreciated you showing up. Thank you, Sybil. For that and the company on the walk here. Feel free to stop by the auditorium again!"

Not another word was uttered as Red disappeared into her building. Sybil wanted to follow, wanted to press herself back into the woman, but Red extended no further hospitality and Sybil returned home alone.

Thoughts of Red intoxicated Sybil. When Sybil tangled herself up in the bedsheets, she pictured the red-headed singer lying beside her, trembling with Sybil as they played out a

performance of their own.

Sybil kept Red's offer to heart and frequented the auditorium during rehearsals. She watched Red from afar with longing eyes, desiring to show her what intensity swelled inside.

But then Red canceled a weekly visit at the cafe, claiming something came up. Sybil thought little of it, but she noticed when Red further withdrew herself at Sybil's events and even during rehearsals. Sybil had been entertaining guests at a gala when she witnessed *him* standing near Red.

She saw him again at another event, the one where Red never spoke to Sybil. She saw him with the singer late one night outside a bistro. She saw him backstage during a rehearsal, pulling Red in for a kiss before she took to the stage.

Red looked at him as Sybil had with her.

Sybil screamed as she smashed her two favorite crystal glasses into the wall. Wasted alcohol pooled on the floor panels as she huddled into a corner. She cried and wailed while violent thoughts consumed her of ending this vile filth keeping Red from her.

Red deserved better. Sybil could offer her the world, pamper her like the goddess she was. And yet *this man* tainted her life. Sybil knew how to deal with people who got in the way. She was a socialite, first and foremost, capable of planting a seed until vicious rumors mentally tore down her target. She had done it before and didn't flinch to do it again.

This man deserved a more permanent outcome.

When she held her events and spoke with Cloudbank's finest, she did so with not only the intent to satisfy her inner social butterfly. The Camerata required only the most prestigious for their machinations. Sybil was their eyes and ears, selecting only the best for the Camerata's purpose.

Sybil found her own intentions intermixing with the task at hand when Red's name popped into conversation during a secret meeting. She agreed Red was a perfect choice and went along with the ploys of the Camerata. She was the one who suggested she could pinpoint Red alone and when they could strike.

"Are you certain?" Grant asked.

"Positive," Sybil lied.

As the meeting concluded, Sybil gathered her belongings and noticed one other member lingering behind, lounging back in his seat while nursing a cigarette. Grant and Asher focused on the ninety-eight percent success rate Sybil assured them of, but it was Cloudbank's finest engineer who focused on the two percent odds against their favor.

"What?" Sybil snapped as he continued to stare.

Royce plucked the cigarette from his lips and exhaled smoke. "I spend hours," he stated with his usual, distant drawl, "maybe even days slaving over formulas, algorithms, and variables

when perfecting a structure. Every number has a place and if I do so much as say, ignore one unknown variable?" He shrugged his shoulders, lips perpetually curled downward. "Why, buildings would collapse and art would turn to trash."

"Get to the point, Royce."

He rose from his seat and slipped his crisp jacket back on. "There is no point. Just a mundane observation. You trust me to fine tune the Process and I should trust you when you say this Red is to be alone. Nothing more." He never nodded or waved or bore any semblance of camaraderie. "Enjoy your evening, Sybil. I'll see you tomorrow evening."

But Red wasn't alone. Sybil smirked when the Transistor struck down the man and she blinded herself to the consequences.

The heartache over Red was calming in comparison to what the Process submitted her to. They tore through her mind and integrated into her until her form slowly morphed to match their aesthetic. Sybil shrieked while the Process consumed her, clutching onto whatever humanity remained.

The Process fixated on her hatred, the insatiable craving for revenge. As the Process reformatted her brain, Sybil focused on the catalyst of her downward spiral. Her idol. Her desire.

Ninety-eight percent of Sybil belonged to the Process when she showed up. Input commands focused on obtaining the Transistor and returning it to where it belonged. And the woman wielding it like a weapon deserved to *die*.

Two percent - the slight glimmer of humanity - crawled towards Red and pleaded for mercy. She refused to die by the clutches of the Process. To perish swiftly by the hands of her lover was a thought that put her mind and heart to ease.

"I saved you." Distorted, grotesque digital echoes flowed out of the Processed creature that was once Sybil. "I *saved* you. I saved *you*. I always... I always wanted to.... Finally... finally... finally, we can be-"

Anything to have her sweet Red back by her side.

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