THE LAST ENCORE

ALSO BY REBECCA HEATH

The Summer Party
The Dinner Party
The Wedding Party

THE LAST ENCORE

REBECCA HEATH



An Aries Book

First published in the UK in 2026 by Head of Zeus,
part of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Copyright © Rebecca Heath, 2026

The moral right of Rebecca Heath to be identified
as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with
the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be: i) reproduced or transmitted in any form, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by means of any information storage or retrieval system without prior permission in writing from the publishers; or ii) used or reproduced in any way for the training, development or operation of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, including generative AI technologies. The rights holders expressly reserve this publication from the text and data mining exception as per Article 4(3) of the Digital Single Market Directive (EU) 2019/790.

This is a work of fiction. All characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

9 7 5 3 1 2 4 6 8

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN (PB): 9781035914319
ISBN (eBook): 9781035914302

Cover design: Simon Michele | Head of Zeus
Typeset by Siliconchips Services Ltd UK

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

MIX
Paper | Supporting responsible forestry
FSC® C018072
FSC
www.fsc.org

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
Bloomsbury Publishing Ireland Limited,
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 AY28, Ireland

HEAD OF ZEUS LTD
5–8 Hardwick Street
London, EC1R 4RG

To find out more about our authors and books
visit www.headofzeus.com
For product safety related questions contact productsafety@bloomsbury.com

For Caroline and Rowan

You've known so many versions of me
and loved them all. Thank you.

Sound check – Hours before the show

I exhale hard, making the softest whistle between my teeth. It's done now. Everything is in place, waiting for the star of the show. Ironic, since there will be no adoring crowd tonight.

I'm not sure what I expected to feel. Regret, maybe? That some instinctive desire to preserve human life would kick in?

It doesn't.

Instead, a slow smile spreads across my face.

I should get the hell away from the scene of the crime. Logic would have me far from here when what is about to happen, well… happens. But I linger.

Knowing suddenly isn't quite enough. I need to see it happen. More than that, I want a moment where our eyes meet and there's understanding. For what is justice if no one knows it has taken place?

The shadows provide some shelter, but I'm not exactly hidden away. There's risk in staying here. But still I linger.

My ragged breath is loud in my ears, a backdrop for the staccato hammer of my heart, and I fear I won't hear your approach. There is so much that could go wrong. *So much*. Like the fact that you should have got my note and been here by now.

Sudden, bowel-loosening terror slices through me. Have I made a mistake? Are you not coming?

But then you step onto the stage, and I can breathe again.

You sashay to the microphone, accepting the spotlight as your rightful place. You lean close, take a breath, and then notice the cord isn't plugged in to the amp at your feet. Bending over, you pick it up and frown as though you've never seen that end of a mic before. Maybe you haven't. Maybe you're not as sure you belong up there as you would like to believe. Maybe your palms are sweating and you're worried the note was meant for someone else.

I don't move. Don't breathe. Don't blink. Goosebumps rise on my skin. It's time.

The silver end of the cable's socket catches on the sunshine overhead and glints as you reach down to make the connection. In my head, I practise what I'm going to say.

Something terrible has happened.

A STORYBOOK LOVE:
THE CEDRICS BAND FAN BLOG

13 December 2003

I am typing this through actual tears.

What you've heard is true.

The headlines, for once, are correct, and it seems Jonny – *our beautiful Jonny* – is dead. I know you guys have been waiting for me to post since the news first began trickling through two hours ago, but I've been praying that there has been a terrible mistake.

There hasn't.

Our Jonny is dead in Paris. His body fallen in a foreign land.

I've only just left the stadium, where some of us diehard fans were already gathered outside ready for the show.

I. Heard. The. Explosion.

Guys, I *heard* it. I felt the blast through my body. I can confirm it's true.

Singer and songwriter Jonny Rake is dead at twenty-two.

There are rumours the explosion was caused by an electrical fault, and there is no news of other casualties. However, I wouldn't be surprised if there's something they're not telling us, because there was more than one emergency vehicle at the scene.

I know you guys want all the details, but it is seriously hard for me to even type. I can't stop shaking. When I close my eyes, I hear the sound again. At the time it was barely a rumble, but now I know the truth of what happened… well, now I can feel it in my heart.

We were questioned by the authorities, and I think some of us were shown crying in the background of news reports. Some reporter asked me for comment, but I wanted to keep my words for you guys, the true fans, the ones I know understand what I'm feeling right now.

I've lost more than an idol; I feel as though I've lost a friend.

Our beloved band is broken, literal hours before what should have been their greatest triumph, another stepping stone in an already meteoric rise to the top.

Guys, I can't even begin to process this. Only a few hours ago I was outside the stadium trying to guess the set list for their show. It was supposed to be the best day of my life. Now, I can't imagine arguing whether they should open with 'Be Yours Tonight' or 'Light the Soul'.

Jonny was but a young man, about to hit the best times of his life. I just know he would have gone on to become a legend. I can only imagine the pain the band is feeling right now. Especially Adam, as his beloved brother.

This is a dark day, not just for fans of The Cedrics Band, but for the music industry as a whole. These guys were something special and Jonny the best of them all. We've lost a light today.

Rest in peace, Jonny Rake.

'as long as the spark still flickers,
the flame will burn again.'
LIGHT THE SOUL – The Cedrics Band

Yours,
Ricky
The Cedrics Band Number One Fan

18 Years Later

ACT I

A STORYBOOK LOVE:
THE CEDRICS BAND FAN BLOG

November 2021

I know it's been a while, friends and devoted fans, but you had to know I couldn't ignore the circulating rumours. The Cedrics Band are apparently getting back together for a one-off private show and filming of a documentary, giving unprecedented access to the band.

This will be the first performance for them since Jonny Rake's tragic death nearly eighteen years ago.

As you'd expect, I have the inside word. The show will take place on a remote island off the coast of South Australia and is not to be missed for serious fans. And, well, I'm not missing it.

Surprise!

Yes, I can reveal, just between you and me, that your friend Ricky is invited. Only the most passionate fans are invited, and we all have to sign strict confidentiality agreements. But I promise I will share what I can with you in our little corner of the internet. Even after all this time, I think of you guys as my friends – in fact, practically family. When we lost Jonny, it formed a bond between us that can never be broken.

You can trust me to share everything I can.

However, if you want the juiciest details, including live video updates (depending on the island's internet), you can get it all for just a small fee. Just click on the link below and follow the instructions, and you can live this with me (without seeing my face, of course – because guys like me and Batman need our privacy).

So, settle in and sign up, and in a few weeks I'll be live to your screens with the spiciest of inside looks into The Cedrics Band's reunion show.

'I never thought such a thing could happen,
to a boy like me.'
BE YOURS TONIGHT – The Cedrics Band

Yours,
Ricky
The Cedrics Band Number One Fan