

Let The Heart Bleed - Excerpt

I'm back in the electrical room. My head is spinning, the lights above me striking off into bright flares before my eyes. The floor beneath me is cold, the grit of the concrete digging into my face.

My cheek burns as if [my mom] has just struck me like she did several months ago. I wince at the pain that isn't there, recalling how it felt when she laid her hand on me for the first time in my life. I slowly drag my fingers at the ground beneath me. I look to my arms in front of me and attempt to move them, but they feel magnetized to the ground. A soft cry escapes my lips.

I wince again. I try to steady my breathing once more, but it feels hopeless. Four seconds in, four seconds hold, six seconds out. I repeat this to myself, my breaths coming out shorter and strained.

Come on, Scarlet. Pull it together.

I think of the Killer dragging Diego through the infirmary, how terrified he must've been. How he must've been carried throughout the staff area, and somehow down the ladder. Maybe even thrown from the top of the hatch. How he was likely dragged through the winding tunnels, the overhead lights and piped walls turning his brain into mush as he attempted to trace his path back to the resort. How now, he was probably propped up in some room, hopelessly calling out for me to find him.

I think back to before he was taken away, when he fought against the Killer to grant me more time to escape. He watched someone murder two people in cold blood right before his eyes, and he still fought to save my life. He knew the potential outcomes and that he might be overpowered, but he felt the risk was worth it; Just for me.

The same way he forced me to open up at the cemetery earlier. How he comforted me and assured me that he would always weather the storm with me. My burdens were not mine to carry alone. We were not just husband and wife. We were a team.

I feel my hands slowly curl into fists above me.

Four-four-six.

My breaths still come out jagged, but I manage to steady them ever so slightly. They almost fall in line with my count.

I think back to how he had cared for me during my heart flutter the night before, how he walked me to the room and comforted me while I sank into the bathroom floor. He stood by my side as I recovered, never once feeling it was worth it to leave. He was there with me until I was back on my feet.

I feel the blood flow back to my hands. I squeeze them together a couple of times until I am able to individually move each of my fingers. I slowly extend them against the ground, feeling the ridged texture of the concrete beneath them.

He had planned this whole trip for me. He had seen what I was going through and decided to take me somewhere where I could distract myself from my situation. He knew it was flawed, but he also knew it would help me get out of my head. He knew a weekend to relax in a place that wasn't our home would be enough for me to feel rejuvenated, and even if it wasn't, it would be enough for now. He got me a room on the top floor because he knew how much I loved being high up when we traveled, and he gave me a balcony facing the canyon so I could watch the sunset.

Four-four-six.

I manage a full set of unbroken breaths. The next one falters again as I feel a chill escape my throat, but I push through to produce another one. I slowly roll off my side, resting my stomach against the ground.

None of what happened was his fault. He could never have predicted that some monster was tracking me, hunting me down like a wild animal. Someone with a vendetta against me, for something I didn't do. Nothing could have possibly happened this weekend that could ruin what it meant to me that he planned this trip for us, for my well-being.

I hold my breath for a moment as I apply pressure to my palms, slowly pushing my body off the ground. I rise one inch, two inches...

A sharp exhale escapes my lips as I slowly release, resting my body back on the ground. I feel a chill flush my system, another cry escaping from my lips as I rest my cheek against the cold concrete.

He has always been there for me. The first time my panic attacks began to rise, supporting my pipe dream of becoming an interior designer, giving me space to grieve when my father died. Standing beside me every step of the way as I fought through my heart failure.

Four-four-six.

I stifle the cry and grit my teeth. I begin applying pressure to my palms again and hold my breath once more as I push off the ground.

Not a day goes by that he doesn't take care of me, even when he doesn't have to. Screw my recovery. From the day we first met, he always treated me with more respect than expected. Giving me space when I was overwhelmed, listening to me when I needed to vent about school or my career struggles, and making me breakfast in the morning just because he wanted to see me smile from the moment I woke up. Not a day goes by that he doesn't make sure I know I am loved for who I am, that I am always enough. That I am worth fighting for.

I rise several inches from the ground, enough to bring my knee forward to rest on. I slowly sit up in place, feeling the blood rush to my head and sending me into a quick dizzy spiral. I place a hand on my head, another on my heart as I feel it pound in my chest.

I think back to what Ophelia said to me the first time I sat with her, how she told me about her Felix and their trips together, and the amazing life they shared. Despite being two strangers sitting next to each other to watch a sunset one random afternoon, she still went out of her way to remind me not to forget the little things in life, the things that really mattered.

My heartbeat begins to slow a bit, the spell from my head dissipating as I open my eyes and face the bright light overhead. I rest my arm on my knee as I focus my breathing, not allowing the world around me to seem so threatening, to remind myself that I am surrounded by nothing more than four walls and a ceiling.

I will never forget what Ophelia told me, how she noticed the sparkle in my eye when I spoke about Diego.

"We need that person to lift us up when we're down and cheer us on, no matter what life throws at us."

Diego is my rock, the person to hold my hand through the storm. The person to stand by my side through every high and low, even if it meant surviving against a deranged maniac in a storm-ridden resort.

"Let's get through this--together."

Four-four-six.

I push my arm off my knee, feeling a bone in my leg crack as I straighten it out. My shoes grip tightly against the gritted concrete, holding me steady as I pull myself to my feet. I let out a soft groan as I allow all my weight to fall onto my legs. I hold my head high, my breath stabilizing as I look at the wall in front of me.

I *must* put an end to this.