

Let The Heart Bleed - Excerpt

I'm back in the electrical room of suites twenty-four and twenty-five. My head is spinning, the red lights above me piercing my vision and furthering my dizzy spell. The floor beneath me is cold, the grit of the concrete digging into my face.

My cheek burns at the memory of my mother striking me. 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 drag my fingers across the ground beneath me. I look at my arms in front of me and attempt to wiggle them, but they are 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-four-six, I repeat to myself, my breaths coming out shorter and strained.

Come on, Scarlet. Pull it together.

I imagine the Killer dragging Diego through the infirmary, how terrified he must have been. How he was carried through 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 red lights and piped walls turning his brain to mush as he tried to trace his path. How now, he was probably propped up in some room, calling out for me to find him.

I think back to before he was taken away, when he fought the Killer so I had more time to escape. He saw two people murdered right before his eyes, and he still fought against the culprit to save my life. He knew he might be overpowered, but he felt the risk was worth it. He did it for me.

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

My hands curl into fists.

Four-four-six.

My breaths still come out jagged, but I manage to steady them ever so slightly. They almost shape identically to my count. The blood flows back to my hands. I squeeze them together a couple of times until I am able to individually move each of my fingers. I extend them against the ground, feeling the rigged texture of the concrete beneath them.

He planned this whole trip for me. He saw what I was going through and decided to take me somewhere I could distract myself for a few days. He knew it was flawed, but that it would help me 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 got me a balcony facing the canyon so I could watch the sunset.

Four-four-six.

I manage to get a full set out, no short breaths. The next one falters as a chill escapes my throat. I roll off of my side, resting my stomach against the ground.

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

I hold my breath as I apply pressure to my palms, shakily pushing my body from the ground. I rise one inch, two inches...

A sharp exhale escapes my lips as I release, setting myself back on the ground. Another chill shoots through my entire body and I murmur another cry as I rest my cheek against the cold floor.

He has always been there for me. The first time my panic attacks reared their ugly heads, supporting my pipe dream of becoming an interior designer, allowing me 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 was necessary. He gave me space when I was overwhelmed, listened to me when I needed to vent about school or my career struggles, and made me breakfast in the morning just because he wanted to see me smile. 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, the blood rushing to my head and sending me into a quick dizzy spiral. I place a hand on my forehead, another on my heart as I feel it pound in my chest.

I recall 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 us being two strangers who decided to sit 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, the spell from my head dissipating as I open my eyes and face the red lights 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 was 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 a deranged maniac in a storm-ridden resort.

"Let's get through this—*together*."

Four-four-six.

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

I have to put an end to this.