

“Blood Sisters”

Regan and I became blood sisters the summer before sixth grade. She and I had a knack for making summers in seemingly dull southwestern Wisconsin pretty exciting, but that summer, in particular, was a turning point for us, a coming of age, as they say. It was the first summer we were left without true adult supervision. Regan’s mom had decided not to take the summer off like she usually did, leaving Marissa in charge of us. Marissa, being fifteen, was in her “locked in her bedroom listening to The Cure” phase, which meant that no one was paying attention to what Regan and I were doing at all. Gone were the days of innocently exploring the fields and forests that surrounded Carlisle. Gone were the afternoons of trekking down the road to the pond, swinging from the big tree that stretched over it, and free-falling into the water. These were fun things, but they were kid stuff. Regan and I were about to enter middle school and had decided at eleven that we wanted to be teenagers. So, that was the summer we learned how to shoplift. It was the summer we shared our first cigarette, the pack being the first we thought of to steal, of course.

But as August progressed, the weather made most of our adventures unbearable. It was the hottest point of the year. Just walking to the mailbox a couple yards away from the house would leave us so drenched with sweat that it looked as though we had just showered. And the air reeked. Nobody was cleaning their barns or, if they were, it just wasn’t making a difference. The breeze was as warm as a drunk’s breath and it carried the smell of shit on it. The last few weeks before school started were never pleasant enough to be outdoors.

My father dropped me off at Regan's every day on his way to work. I would arrive around eight a.m., go up to Regan's room and shake her awake, shouting, "If I'm up, you have to be, too!" She would roll over, her long chocolate-colored hair tangled in impossible, sweaty knots, her tanned face pillow creased, and before she opened her brown eyes to glare at me, she would groan, "I hate you," attempting not to smile. As soon as Regan got dressed and grabbed a bowl of cereal from the kitchen, we retreated to her parents' room, the only room in her house with an air conditioner at the time. The next summer, her father installed a central air system himself. His family owned some sort of heating, cooling, electrician, handyman type business.

They didn't get cable TV until the next year either. If they had, Regan and I probably would have watched MTV the whole day, but instead we had to make do with network programming. We watched game shows all morning, soap operas until about two, and then there was always a movie on channel eight. We saw a lot of Chuck Norris movies that summer, which neither of us were very impressed by. My green eyes would start to glaze over until Regan tossed a chip at me to wake me up. The week that they played *The Breakfast Club* every day was definitely the highlight of the month. We dreamed about the day we could go to high school and end up in detention with guys as cool as Bender and girls as weird as Allison. The name of the movie that inspired us to become blood sisters escapes me. It was definitely of the straight-to-video variety, a part horror, part action, part terribly cheesy drama flick about four teenage guys who were obviously the outcasts of the community because of their rebellious, scraggly mullets and matching leather jackets emblazoned with pentagrams. They made a pact to murder all the people they didn't like. This ritual took place in the woods, of course. The leader

stripped down his leather pants, his zit-pocked face and scrawny chest sweating from the heat of an enormous fire, and sliced his arm with a dagger as he declared, “Dark Lord, we are bound by blood to you and to each other. We are brothers united by Darkness!”

Regan and I had just started that phase that we never quite grew out of where we decided that anything boys did, we could do a thousand times better. After the blood oath, it went to commercial. Regan’s brown eyes glittered, her wide grin accentuated by the majestic cheekbones she inherited from her Winnebago grandfather as she proclaimed, “Emily, we should be blood sisters!”

“Why? They did it because they didn’t trust each other. We keep secrets just fine,” I said.

“But it was cool,” Regan stated simply.

I had to agree with her on that. Blood. Big knives. Fire. Definitely cool. I didn’t really think we needed to make a pact, but since Regan seemed so attached to the idea and there wasn’t really anything to do besides watch the rest of the movie, I agreed.

“Should we go get a knife from the kitchen?” I suggested.

“Nah, those knives are pretty dull. We could use one of Marissa’s razors.” Regan decided, racing down the short hall to the bathroom she shared with her sister. It adjoined their rooms, so the first thing Regan did was to lock all three doors. Marissa’s room was suspiciously silent.

“Maybe we should just take the razor and go back to your parents’ room,” I whispered.

“No way! We could get blood on the carpet,” Regan hissed. “Just keep your voice down, it’s not like this is going to be a very noisy thing.”

I wondered if she was right. Since we were both tomboys, we were always acquiring bumps, bruises and scratches, but I had never intentionally cut myself. I hoped I wouldn't uncontrollably scream. I kicked some towels and dirty jeans aside and walked over to sit down on the closed toilet. Regan started tearing through the cabinet below the sink to find the package of Lady Bics. Regan and Marissa's bathroom, like their rooms, was very messy. The floor was covered with clothes and magazines. The sink was littered with Marissa's makeup, the shower spotted with the black dye she had recently put in her hair. However, the walls were still painted as they had been when the girls were little, pale blue with a rubber ducky border around the middle. By the time Marissa turned twelve, she was embarrassed by the ducks and had started to paint over them with nail polish. Regan, eight at the time, refused to be outdone by her sister, so she had joined in on the vandalism. The ducks had X's over their eyes, rainbow colored feathers, and comic strip style thought balloons above their heads, which were filled with back-and-forth conversations and arguments between Regan and Marissa. My eyes fell upon a Regan duck that threatened, "If you don't pay me for my bracelet that you flushed down the toilet last night, mom and dad will get a list of every bad thing you've done since I was born." Marissa's duck poetically retorted, "Sisters that betray, die in gruesome ways."

"AH HA!" Regan declared a little bit too loudly, quickly clapping her hand across her mouth. She held up the bag of Lady Bics, smiling.

"But won't we just be shaving our arms, not cutting them?" I asked softly, taking one of the razors from her and demonstrating.

“That’s why we have to break the blade out of the plastic,” she explained, snatching the razor back and pulling on the plastic safety guard that surrounded the blade. She was hasty as always, and quickly sliced her thumb. “Owww—” she muffled herself by sucking the blood from the injured thumb.

“Don’t do it with your hands. Use some sort of tool,” I instructed, standing up to look in the medicine cabinet for tweezers and a nail file. I sat down on the floor to begin my dissection of the razor blade. Regan recovered quickly and looked on with interest. It was tedious work. The bathroom was boiling; the only air that came through the barely opened window was that sickeningly hot breeze. My cut-offs were sticking to my thighs and sweat glued my long, black hair to my neck. When I finished, Regan picked up the tiny blade and sighed, “Cool.”

“So, what do we do now?” I asked.

“We cut each other,” Regan said matter-of-factly. Her eyes looked as calm as they would have if she was telling me that we were having macaroni and cheese for lunch.

“Ok, but who goes first?”

“You decide.” Regan always made me make those kinds of decisions and I always went about it the wrong way. I hesitated, not wanting to go first, but not wanting to look like I was about to chicken out. The same thing happened five years later when we got our matching tattoos. The guy asked which one of us was going to go first. I paused, Regan said, “Well, I can,” and I was left to watch her in pain, knowing it was happening to me next.

Regan handed the blade to me and held out her arm. “Where do you think I should do it?” I asked, trying to see where her veins were so I could avoid them.

“Right here,” she said, pointing to the center of the underside of her forearm. “If we do it there, we can just put our arms together like this.” She slapped her arms together, forming an X. I scrutinized the area she was pointing to, thinking it was awfully close to a vein, but before I could object, she insisted, “Just do it!”

I sliced across her arm on an angle, a line of blood immediately following in the razor’s wake. I lifted the blade up immediately and saw that I had made an inch long, diagonal cut exactly where she had pointed. It was bloody, but I hadn’t hit any veins. It was bleeding like any cut would. Regan winced slightly, bit her lip, but didn’t yelp. Her arm shook a little bit, but she was smiling that devilish smile that every adult except her mother feared. “Now, it’s your turn,” she instructed. I had made Regan’s cut on her left arm and was trying to figure out, which arm would be best to put mine on. She must have been reading my mind because she added, “Hold out your right arm.”

She looked from her cut to my arm for a moment to establish an identical spot, but she sliced suddenly, without even warning me. “Dammit!” I shouted, pulling my arm away. I felt woozy. She had cut me a lot deeper than I cut her. I could see the rift in my skin. Regan’s cut had been a surface wound, but my flesh was actually parted. I thought I could see the first layer of fat beneath my skin and there was a lot of blood.

“Oh my god, Emily, I’m sorry!” Regan exclaimed.

“Shh!” I hissed through gritted teeth, swallowing hard to try to keep my suddenly sour stomach from churning into my throat. I knew we had to keep quiet. I was not going to suffer just for Marissa to come in and interrupt our ceremony. “Let’s just finish the ritual.”

“Oh, yeah.” Panic washed across Regan’s face as she watched my blood drip onto the pink towel I was sitting on. If she had had an idea of what was supposed to be said, she had totally lost it.

Marissa started banging on the door. “Are you guys *both* in the bathroom?” she demanded.

I pressed my arm against Regan’s hard, hoping that it would also assist in clotting my wound. “Sisters forever,” I declared.

“Sisters forever,” Regan repeated.

“What the hell are you doing in there?” Marissa yelled.

“NOTHING!” Regan shouted back.

“I know that’s bullshit!” She was probably picturing us smoking, attempting to dye each other’s hair, or giving each other tattoos. “Do you think I don’t know how to unlock this door?” she threatened. There was a scratching noise coming from her end of the door. No doubt she was using a hanger to poke through the little circle on the cheap door knob that lead into the mechanism of the lock

“Shit!” Regan exclaimed, stuffing the bits of razor in the overflowing trashcan. I tried to wipe the blood off of my arm and the floor, but it just kept spurting like a freshly-tapped oil well.

The lock popped open and Marissa slammed the door open. She took one look at us, the big-eyed, eleven year-old girls she had been left in charge of, forearms covered in a mixture of our (mostly my) blood, and started screaming, “JESUS CHRIST! WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO? JESUS! DO I HAVE TO TAKE YOU TO A HOSPITAL?”