

You loved your last book...but what
are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new
books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Blood Sisters

Written by Julie Shaw

Published by HarperElement

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

BLOOD SISTERS

CAN A PLEDGE MADE FOR
LIFE ENDURE BEYOND DEATH?

JULIE SHAW

H A R P E R
element

Certain details in this story, including names, places and dates,
have been changed to protect the family's privacy.



HarperElement
An imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers
1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF

www.harpercollins.co.uk

First published by HarperElement 2017

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

© Julie Shaw and Lynne Barrett-Lee 2017

Julie Shaw and Lynne Barrett-Lee assert the moral
right to be identified as the authors of this work

A catalogue record of this book is
available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-00-814279-7

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted,
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the
prior written permission of the publishers.



MIX
Paper from
responsible sources
FSC® C007454

FSC™ is a non-profit international organisation established to promote
the responsible management of the world's forests. Products carrying the
FSC label are independently certified to assure consumers that they come
from forests that are managed to meet the social, economic and
ecological needs of present or future generations,
and other controlled sources.

Find out more about HarperCollins and the environment at
www.harpercollins.co.uk/green

Prologue

Clayton Village Hall Youth Club, Bradford, 1983

It's late on a summer Friday, the sky just turning peachy, and two twelve-year-old girls who've been best friends since nursery are hiding behind the stage curtains in the village hall.

They're making a solemn oath. It's the most important kind of oath. Which is why they've taken the trouble (which has been both a risk and a challenge) of 'borrowing' the craft knife from the art drawer in the hall kitchen, which they are now using, in turn, to slit the skin on their right thumbs.

The blood forms beads, dark and glossy behind the drapes, as they squeeze, and in perfect synchrony, despite neither of them consciously timing it, they touch their thumbs together, allowing the blood to mix.

'I solemnly swear,' whispers Vicky Robinson, who is the taller of the two, 'that no boyfriend will split us up, or anyone else come between us. I swear we will be sisters for the rest of our lives ... Your turn,' she then finishes, smiling at her friend.

Julie Shaw

'I solemnly swear,' agrees Lucy Briggs, her voice equally low, 'that no boyfriend will split us up, or anyone else come between us. I swear we'll be sisters for the rest of our lives ...'

'Blood sisters *forever!*' they both whisper, in unison.

Then they put the knife back in the drawer, roll up the waistbands of their skirts, and, giggling as they both re-apply a sheen of lip gloss, feel their way round the edge of the musty stage curtains and go back to join the boys in the smoking shed.

Life was good in the summer of 1983.

Part One

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him – a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

Chapter I

Clayton, Bradford, July 1987

The world always seemed to melt away when Vicky was doing her make-up. Particularly her eyeliner, which, being a posh liquid one, required total concentration: lips slightly parted, brows raised, good light and a steady, steady hand. Even Rick Astley, who had up to now held at least half her concentration, seemed to oblige by taking a breath so she could get the line exactly right.

‘Victoriaaaaa! *Door!*’

Vicky swore under her breath as she lowered the eyeliner brush. Her bloody mother. And, judging by the way she was bellowing her name, this wasn’t the first time she’d yelled it up the stairs either.

She slipped the brush back into the tube and reached for a cotton-wool ball. One day, perhaps *one* day, her mam would stop yelling, get up off her fat backside and actually answer the front door herself. But she doubted that would be happening anytime soon.

‘Mam, it’ll be Luce!’ Vicky yelled down through the open bedroom door. ‘Let her in, can’t you? Please? I’m not dressed yet!’

Julie Shaw

Though she ought to get her skates on, she realised. She'd been getting ready for over an hour now, and she still wasn't done. Though, in her defence, she decided, as she spat on the cotton wool and carefully wiped the outer edge of her left eye, this was their first night out as working girls – no more school, *ever* – and she was determined to look old enough to get into every pub and club in town. She just hoped Lucy had done a decent enough job of stuffing her bra with socks. She hadn't yet been blessed with Vicky's natural assets, and they were always so bloody strict down at the Caverns.

'I'm not your bleeding slave!' Vicky's mum yelled back up the stairs, predictably. And she had a point, Vicky conceded, as she redid the final flick of eyeliner. Most of the time, these days, it felt like the other way round. But she also felt the tell-tale breeze that meant the front door was open, so she got up from her dressing table and danced across to her bed, humming along with Rick, in her bra and knickers.

'Whoah,' came a deep voice, moments later. 'Now *that's* what I call a welcome.'

Vicky whirled around, astonished, then grabbed the bath towel from the back of the dressing-table chair. 'Oh my God – Paddy!' she exclaimed, colouring. 'What the hell are you doing here? I thought you were off out with the lads!'

Paddy's gaze travelled appreciatively over her as he shut the bedroom door. Bold as you like, as per usual. What on earth had her mam been *thinking*, letting him come up?

Blood Sisters

‘Well, I’m not now, am I?’ he said, grinning as she tried to wrap the towel around herself. She thought he might try and yank it off her, but instead he nodded towards the tape player. ‘And you can get that shit off, for starters,’ he added, pulling something from one of his jeans pockets and flinging it on the bed. It was a worn-looking cassette tape. One Vicky recognised immediately, because she’d sat there, bored to tears, while he’d made it. ‘Put that on for us, will you, babe?’ he asked. ‘Please?’

That was the thing with Paddy. He walked into a room and had this disarming way of owning it. That and filling her stomach with butterflies. It had been almost a year that they’d been seeing each other now and the way he made her feel never seemed to change. Her mam always went on about how all that fluttering hearts stuff soon wore off and then you saw the sort of man you were *really* dealing with, but her mam was just bitter, because of her dad up and leaving. Still bitter, despite it being years ago now; they’d seen nothing of him since and though Vicky had heard he was with a younger woman in Leeds now, she never dared mention it, because any mention of him got her mother in such a state that she’d go on a crying and eating binge that could last for days.

No, her mam *really* didn’t get it. Paddy wasn’t a bit like her father. He was different. He worshipped the ground Vicky walked on. *Literally*. Only last week he’d flung himself down on the pavement outside the Oddfellows Arms to prove it – just like that, after she’d torn him off a strip, with everyone watching. She’d called him an idiot

Julie Shaw

– it had been raining, and he'd got his new jacket soaked – but, secretly, she'd loved how he didn't care who knew it. Loved that he didn't do that whole offhand thing so many of the lads her own age thought was cool. No, the butterflies were still there, and she loved that.

She breathed in the scent of his aftershave as he ambled across to kiss her. 'And you know, you don't need to get dressed on my account,' he whispered, tugging playfully on the towel.

Wriggling away from him, she reached for the black dress she'd hung out to wear, and quickly slipped it over her head, letting the towel flump to the floor just a calculated couple of seconds before she'd properly smoothed the dress down her thighs.

'I bloody do,' she said, picking the tape up and going over to the cassette player, pressing the button to eject her beloved Rick Astley and replace it with his Northern Soul compilation. She thought she could probably recite the tracks at will. Paddy was a die-hard fan, and used to go to the all-nighters at the Mecca on Manningham Lane all the time before they started seeing each other. Though Wigan Mecca, where it all started, before he was old enough to be a part of it, was like *the* Mecca as far as Paddy was concerned.

'No, you really don't,' Paddy said. 'Trust me, Vic. You were just fine as you were.'

'Pad, babe, I am dressed because I am going *out*. With Luce,' she added, picking the towel up. 'Remember?'

'No, I don't,' Paddy said, as the tape began playing. 'Moonlight, Music and You', one of his favourites. Granny

Blood Sisters

music, she'd called it once. Which had gone down like a lead balloon.

'Babe, don't be dense,' Vicky said. 'I told you about it ages back. *And* I mentioned it Monday. It was our last day today, remember? I am no longer a schoolgirl. And we are going out to celebrate the fact. *Remember?*'

Paddy turned up the tape player. Vicky resisted the urge to turn it down again. Next thing she'd have her mam screaming up the stairs at her. Which she really didn't want, since the one thing she *did* want was to cadge a fiver off her.

Paddy pulled a face Vicky knew well. 'So what about me, then?' he asked her, sticking his lower lip out.

'What about you?'

'What am I supposed to do while you're gallivanting round Bradford with that gormless friend of yours? It's me you should be celebrating with, not her.'

'Don't call her that,' Vicky said. 'And how am I supposed to know what you're supposed to be doing? You were *supposed* to be going out with the lads and I'm going out with Luce and Gurdy. We can celebrate together tomorrow night' – she blew a kiss at him. 'As per the *plan*.'

Paddy rolled his eyes. 'Gurdy? That Paki twat? Jesus,' he countered, 'why the fuck do you want to hang around with him tonight?' Despite his harsh words, he was still grinning as he inched nearer to her, moving in and whispering things in her ear that would have her mother's toes curl if she could hear them.

She wriggled away from him again, despite feeling the familiar tug of animal attraction, and began transferring

Julie Shaw

what she needed into her clutch bag. ‘Paddy, I’m going out. O.U.T. No arguments. Luce will be here any minute. And there’s no point in you trying to sweet talk me, because it won’t make any difference ...’

Though, even as she said the words, it already was. He was nuzzling at her neck now and, infuriatingly, she was enjoying it. ‘I wasn’t planning on sweet *talking*,’ he said, purring the song lyrics into her ear, and pinioning her within the circle of his ridiculously strong arms.

‘Paddy, stop it,’ she said firmly. ‘I’m going *out*.’

He let her go then, and flung himself down on her bed with a heavy sigh.

‘What?’ she said.

‘Nothing,’ he answered. ‘Leave me then. Go on. Leave me all on my lonesome so you can go and chat up all the other lads in town.’ His gaze travelled up and down her again. ‘And they’ll be all over you, dressed in that. Actually—’ He sat up again, grabbed her wrist and pulled her onto his lap. ‘I reckon I ought to come with you. Keep you safe from wandering hands ...’

‘Pad, I’m *sixteen*,’ Vicky pointed out, already imagining Lucy’s face at the thought of having Paddy chaperoning them. Lucy was as fond of Paddy as Paddy was of Lucy, i.e. not at all. And, increasingly, it was becoming tedious to have to deal with. Not least because Vicky loved Paddy, and her loyalties felt increasingly divided, and Luce never quite seemed to get that. Never quite seemed to get that, actually, Vicky didn’t *mind* that Paddy could wind her round his little finger. Because it worked both ways. He’d

Blood Sisters

do anything for her. He'd give his life for her. She *knew* that. Luce didn't quite get that bit either, Vicky reckoned.

Still, tonight was different. They'd made a plan and she was determined to stick to it. 'Seriously,' she added, climbing off Paddy's lap again, 'I can look after myself.'

'That's not what I'm worried about,' Paddy said. 'It's all the lads that'll be trying it on with you, that's what I'm worrying about.'

'Okay,' said Vicky, seizing on a way to turn things to her advantage. 'How about me and Luce go out, like we'd planned, and then we meet up with you later on? We've much more chance of getting into places if you're there, after all. Go on, that'll work, won't it? You go and find someone else to play with for a bit, and then we'll meet up at Jokers. How about that?'

Paddy reached out and slid a hand up the back of her thigh. 'But I want to play with *you* ...'

Nothing for it. She'd have to be firmer. 'I'm telling you,' she said briskly, batting his hand away. 'Cut it *out!*'

'God!' he said, sighing theatrically for a second time, as he grabbed the packet of cigarettes and lighter Vicky was just about to put in her bag.

'Oi!' she said as he lit one. 'Smoke your own! That's all I've got.'

Ignoring her, he drew on it deeply and blew the smoke out in rings. Then stood up and walked through the cloud he'd created, first turning up the volume and then picking up her dressing-table mirror and setting it carefully down on the bedroom floor.

Julie Shaw

He'd done it countless times. He loved to dance, and particularly in Vicky's bedroom because of the lino on the floor. All the better to practise his moves. She stood and watched him, as she always did, even though it wasn't really her music. Loved to watch how he lost himself so totally in the music, his eyes on the mirror as his feet slid and flicked across the floor. He was so good. So impossibly, mesmerisingly good. And then, predictably, almost, he reached out a hand to her, parked his fag in the ashtray and swept her up with him.

It was crazy. There was no room to swing a cat, let alone her. But she went along with it anyway. Giggling as he twirled her, losing herself too, just like she always did when he let her come to the Mecca on Manningham Lane with him, happy to be led by him – he was such a brilliant exhibitionist – basking in the oohs and ahs and loving all the comments about how amazingly they danced as a couple.

And then, as the track ended, he reeled her in towards him, cupped a hand round her buttock and began kissing her again.

'Pad, babe,' she started. 'Look, you know I can't resist you, but I'm on a promise and I *have* to go out, okay? I—'

There was a cough. 'Not on my account, you don't.'

It was Lucy's voice, from the doorway, the light spilling across their feet as she pushed it open wider.

They both span around. 'Luce, you're here—' Vicky started, conscious of Paddy deliberately taking his time lowering the hand that had been kneading her left breast.

'With brilliant timing, as per usual,' he finished dryly.

Blood Sisters

‘So it seems,’ Lucy said, her eyes darting between them. ‘So if I’m interrupting ...’

‘Course you’re not,’ Vicky said, snatching her bag up and shoving her fags into it. ‘I’m just about ready. Just got to grab my jacket and see if I can scrounge a couple of quid off Mam. God, just think,’ she said, conscious that she was beginning to prattle, ‘this time next week we’ll both have pay packets. Can you imagine?’

She was aware of Paddy behind her, crushing his – *her* – fag out. Then bending over the cassette player and getting his tape out. She reached across Lucy to switch the bedroom light off.

‘I won’t,’ Lucy said, and her voice was flat and hard. ‘I’m on a monthly salary, aren’t I? It’s going to seem like an age.’

‘What d’you expect?’ Paddy said, as he slipped the tape into his back pocket. ‘That’s what you get for working in an office, isn’t it?’ He managed to make it sound, Vicky thought, like it was some sort of offence. ‘Anyway,’ he then added brightly, ‘where to first, then?’

Vicky felt her friend’s eyes on her before she turned to meet them. Accusing. Questioning. Boring into her back, as she led the procession back downstairs. She met them at the bottom of the stairs and frowned apologetically. But she could see Lucy was not in the mood for an apology.

Her eyes narrowed and she looked behind Vicky, to Paddy. ‘What, *you’re* coming?’ she said to him.

‘Course I am,’ he told her. ‘Got to keep an eye on my girl, haven’t I? Why?’ His voice was challenging. ‘You got a problem with that?’

Julie Shaw

Lucy ignored him. ‘Seriously?’ she said to Vicky, looking exasperated. ‘*Seriously?*’

‘Is it such a big deal?’ Vicky responded, feeling her hackles rise, despite herself. ‘It’s not like Gurdy won’t be out with us, not to mention half of bloody Lidget Green, for that matter.’

Lucy’s expression hardened. ‘Yes, actually, Vic. Yes it is. Because it means I get to play gooseberry while he bloody paws you. Great girls’ night out that’s going to be. Cheers, mate.’

Vicky could see Paddy’s satisfied grin forming out of the corner of her eye, and for a moment it crossed her mind to tell him that, actually, Lucy was right. That he needed to go somewhere else and amuse himself for a bit – Christ, he knew every-fucking-body, didn’t he? But something stopped her, or at least made her hesitate, and she wasn’t quite sure what it was. Or maybe she did know. It was frustration. Couldn’t Lucy just roll with it for once? Why did she have to make everything to do with Paddy so bloody difficult? Because Lucy knew as well as she did that when they got to the Boy and Barrel or the Crown or wherever they were going first, he’d be off on the dance floor, or off with some of his cronies, within minutes of them so much as stepping into the place. So why couldn’t Lucy just let it go?

‘Look, let’s just go, shall we?’ she said. ‘Let me just go talk nicely with Mam, yeah? Won’t be a second. Where’s Gurdy going to be anyway? He’ll be wondering where we’ve got to ...’

Blood Sisters

Not waiting for an answer, she headed off into the back room, where her mam was, as ever, full-length on the sofa, fag in hand, tea at her elbow, telly blaring.

'I'm off, Mam,' she said. 'And I was wondering ...'

Her mam ferreted in her cardigan pocket before she'd even got the rest out. 'And that's only a sub,' she said, pushing a five-pound note into Vicky's palm. 'Not a gift. And now you're earning, I'll be expecting keep off you too.'

Vicky slipped the money into her bag and headed back into the hall. Paddy was standing on the doorstep, the open door allowing a balmy summer night's breeze in. It had a sweet, exotic scent to it, heralding the start of what she was determined was going to be a brilliant night. Lucy would get over herself. She usually did.

Paddy had his back to her, but turned around when he heard her and smiled.

'Where's Lucy?' Vicky asked, looking past him into the street and not seeing her.

'Stomped off, as she does,' he said mildly. His hair had the same inky gloss as next door's black cat. He ran a hand over it now, smoothing it down, feigning innocence.

'Christ, Paddy! What did you say to her?'

'Me?' he looked astonished. 'That one could start a fight with a fucking plant pot. Stomped off in a huff because I even fucking *exist*. Seriously, babes,' he said, hooking the letter-box knocker to close the door behind them. 'You don't get it, do you? She doesn't *like* me. And there's fuck all we can do about that, is there? Seriously,' he began again.

Julie Shaw

'Pad, I feel *awful*. Where'd she go?'

'I have no idea. She obviously didn't feel like enlightening me.'

Vicky felt dreadful now. Dreadful and, all too belatedly, so bloody *wrong*. 'Well, which direction did she go, then?'

'This way,' he said, as they fell into step. 'She'll be popping up the bar by the time we get there, you wait and see. But you know, babe, you've left school now and you've got to face facts. She's got some high falutin' job now, not to mention seeing a fucking copper's son.'

'So what? What difference does that make?'

Paddy slipped his arm around her shoulder and squeezed it. 'Babe, you really need to ask me that? It makes *all* the difference. Sometimes,' he squeezed her shoulder again, 'you've just got to let friendships go. Hey!' he added, as she raised a hand to belt him, albeit lightly. 'I'm just saying. That's all, babes. Just saying.'