

# BLEEDING HEART.

## PART I

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They remembered how they were first found.

Two children traversed across the wild woods hand-in-hand, their clumsy and uncoordinated feet constantly tripping over the thick tree roots that burrowed into the earth. With every tumble they took marked another red cut on their little legs, for if one fell, down came crashing the other.

Their wounds mirrored each other, both bearing the same bruises in the same places on their scrawny bodies. Yet they picked each other up and limped forward with smarting knees and scratched elbows, simply because they knew nowhere else to wander.

The duo ended up stumbling in circles, their confusion leaving them constantly changing directions out of uncertainty. The scenery around them remained stagnant no matter where they turned, towering evergreens choking the horizon out of sight at every corner. Surrounded by the unfamiliar forest, the two of them wondered where their home was, or if they were too far away from it to ever return.

One recalled being around the age of six, the other, no less than the age of four. The resemblance between them was quite striking, sharing the same unruly ginger locks that tickled at their shoulders and green eyes that gleamed like emerald gemstones. Yet their matching appearance was the only fact to ground them amidst a sea of surging questions. All they knew for certain was that they were siblings, although they had no clue where they got wind of that truth. Still, it was something like an indisputable reality of life, in the same way that the skies were blue and the clouds were white. It just was, and it was only natural.

The dirt crunching underneath their soles soiled their white sneakers the same, their t-shirts sticky with sweat from the humidity that cloyed at their skin. What seemed like hours of aimless walking had done them no good, leaving them no closer than before from escaping the never-ending tunnels that appeared to only lure them further in. The heat beating down on the duo was dizzying in intensity and merciless in intent, inciting exhaustion from weary bones and thirst from dry throats. The siblings weren't sure how long they could last without food or water.

But just as their thoughts were growing grim, they heard chattering and laughing in the distance. Two voices rose above the eerie silence that swabbed their ears, painting visions of aid and hope in the children's minds. They scrambled with fatigued footfalls towards the source of precious sound, soon spotting two adults that heard their approach, quickly taking notice of the scraped up siblings.

The duo were fussed over by the couple, who appeared to be wed to each other, asking for a home address, a parent's name, a town they lived in. The children could only look at each other solemnly and shake their heads, for they knew none of those things.

But they did quickly answer when the couple asked for their names.

Arabella, and Ashton.

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## PART II

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*Poverty.*

*Barely enough space for the family of four.*

*The strangers had taken them in as their own, yet they didn't have much to provide.*

*The children didn't mind, so long as they had a warm bed under a loving roof, they were alright with retiring at night with unsated stomachs. The couple was kind and humble, and their affection dulled their hunger, imbuing the siblings' hearts with contentment and stability. They felt like they belonged in the rustic town of Brumberlocke, quickly becoming acquainted with the other kids of the village.*

*They drank in the listless days like clockwork; eating vanilla ice cream under the melting sky and leaping into piles of ruby red leaves; hoarding carrots, buttons, and scarfs to make snowmen and riding bikes along the trails lined with blooming flowers. They held races and took risks and rejoiced over meaningless triumphs, and their hollow laughter and vain laments were quickly forgotten by the dawn of tomorrow. The worlds they wove were destined to be short-lived and bittersweet, scattered to the wind to be reconstructed by the new seasons all over again. Each summer renewed the vow to live fastly and freely, swimming in the frivolity of fleeting youth and happily-ever-afters. They charged forward with careless abandon through the dayless months, brave because they knew all would be forgotten when the next year would roll around again; faithfully, unerringly, predictably.*

*They were year-long lionhearted.*

They childishly thought it would last forever, those delectable days so sweet on the tongue. Alas, they failed to notice the funds dwindling more and more with each passing year, the furniture in their house growing scarcer and scarcer, the late-night arguments about money when the children fell asleep.

When the siblings packed their tiny bags that fateful afternoon, they did not want to leave from Brumberlocke. Looking up at the forlorn, yet dotting faces that were sending them away, their hearts broke as the security they came to cherish was being ripped from under their feet. They looked at each other and cast their eyes to the floor in understanding, walking down the road in resignation to step into the car of their more well-off aunt and uncle.

The younger coughed at the scent of cigarette smoke.

As they were driven away, they pressed their faces to the backseat windows, anxiously watching their treasured childhood grow tinier and tinier in the distance.

Where was the year-long lionhearted soul that sought the wind?

In the stuffy car with stale air that tasted like drops of poison, they could not find it.

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## PART III [EXCLUDED]

\*\*DUE TO POTENTIALLY TRIGGERING THEMES, THIS PORTION IS EXCLUSIVE TO  
RPNATION.

THE REST OF THE BACKSTORY IS AVAILABLE BELOW. ENJOY!

# BLEEDING HEART.

## PART IV

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They couldn't take the hand dealt to them in their new house that was all but home, covering up their unmet needs in public with painted, plastic smiles.

They couldn't take cowering in the presence of their uncle, who brandished a belt or his ringed fists in the name of cruel, relentless "discipline".

They couldn't take standing under the scrutiny of their aunt, who only sneered at them as if she didn't want them here, telling them to be "grateful" in spite of their various woes.

They couldn't take the nights shivering outside in the cold whenever they failed to meet an absurd expectation, left to the mercy of the weather and the creatures lurking in the dark.

They couldn't take going the entire day hungry because meals were withheld from them.

They couldn't take being unloved.

They couldn't take being hurt.

They couldn't take being trampled underfoot, slowly wilting under the cruel pressure from their caregivers that despised them so.

Six long and grueling years after arriving in the city of Brismond, the children had enough and took flight at sunrise, not willing to submit to yet another beating should they remain complacent. Their departure was hurried and made on a whim, carrying only a few of their most precious belongings along them in a drawstring bag. They hoped to hit the road and head back to Brumberlocke, then beg their parents to take them back. Tell them that anything they could spare them was better than suffering at the hands of their sinister relatives. The marks that had marred their skin black and blue would surely convince them.

And against the odds, they did arrive rather quickly. The siblings traveled by bus to Brumberlocke, and after several hours of strategic planning, waiting and riding, they found themselves back in their old neighborhood. Their past city wasn't too far away in the first place.

With the new address of their parents in a townhouse, the familiar streets they used to wander as kids carried them to their front doorstep. But when their parents opened the door...

The siblings would never forget the pale look they had on their faces. Their hearts sunk further and further as their parents began to scold them about running away from their poor relatives, ordering them to go back to their "home" in rushed tones.

The duo tried to speak about what their uncle and aunt had done to them, but their parents quickly cut in with their foreheads crinkled in stress. They said that their aunt and uncle were the only people willing to take them in, and that they truly had no other alternative than casting them out into the street. That they needed to be financially stable before they could welcome the children back into their lives. Through pleading words and exasperated tears, their prayers for safety were returned with implorations to go back. That it was the only place where they could get a good education and free room. That they needed to look at the positives.

The cold rejection stilled the siblings, rendering them speechless at how their own parents were telling them to return to a knowingly violent environment.

They couldn't speak.

They weren't prepared to justify the suffering they've gone through.

They had expected their parents to understand the words that went unsaid, that they'd be able to empathize with their anguished expressions and malnourished appearance. Out of anybody in their lives, they had expected their parents to leap to their defense the easiest. The parents who had showered them in love and care for so, so long...

The very same fear of being punished if they elaborated on their pain paralyzed them, catching them off guard in a place where they thought they were the safest. Where they felt the most protected.

Yet...the adults who they felt safest around...couldn't save them.

They never felt more alone than in that moment, trembling on the porch with the icy wind whipping against their cheeks.

And so they turned away, leaving the townhouse behind dejected and torn.

They were on their own.

# BLEEDING HEART.

## PART V

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" "

*"What do we do now, brother?"*

*"I don't know."*

*"Well, I think that we shouldn't be walking around like this without a plan--! We only have so much energy and so much food bef--"*

*"We have no other choice."*

*"...Huh?"*

*"Neither of us are old enough for a job, so we can't get our own income. No money means no food, water, shelter...at least out here, we have two out of the three to start with."*

*"Are you nuts?! We can't live out here, we'd get eaten alive! Haven't you learned anything from the nursery rhymes 'bout this*

wood? It's dangerous here-- who knows what creepy crawlies are running 'round!"

"It's a necessary risk."

"You've gotta be kidding...what if you get hurt? What if I get hurt?!"

"It's nothing we haven't experienced before. We'd live."

"At least we had Advil at home! Christ, if you had this planned for us, why didn't you bring along some painkillers?!"

"I *didn't* have this planned."

"Exactly! We're not prepared in the **slightest** to survive out here!! I don't suppose you brought any thingamabobs to start fires, or to hunt squirrels and whatnot, or to set up a camp?!"

"I have the blade, that's already a good start. If that's not enough, whittling down thick twigs into sharp spears could work..."

"This is crazy-- I-I don't think we can live like this!"

*“We can find a way. Have some faith.”*

*“But what happens if we **can’t** find a way?!  
Nobody is coming for us! We’d be TOAST!”*

*“We just don’t accept failure as an option,  
then. There’s nothing else we can do...we’d  
starve in the streets, begging in the city.  
No matter how you look at it, we’re in the  
same situation regardless of our  
environment...  
homeless.”*

*“But I’m **scared**— what about all the  
monster attacks? Those same monsters come  
from this forest— **please**, let’s go!”*

*“And go where, exactly?!”*

*“Somewhere else!”*

*“We’d DIE in the city!”*

*“Then I...I...”*

*I wish we never left Brismond...”*

*“...What?”*

*“I said,*

*I wish we never left Brismond!*”

*“...Did you forget what they did to us?”*

*“But I-- AH, AAAAH!*

*STOPSTOPSTOP--”*

*“This hasn’t healed yet, has it?”*

*“ ”*  
*...*

*“It’s been two months, you know.”*

*“It’s...not like it’s going to heal now, either...”*

*“But at least you can’t be hurt by another person ever again.”*

*“But...we still had everything! I—it was painful, and hard, but we could still live!”*

*“...Are you...  
Siding with them now?”*

*“We could still...play...pretend...”*

*“Aren’t you SICK of the mask you had to wear for all this time?! That you had to*

disguise your wounds because it would  
“inconvenience” others?!”

“But it wasn’t...that bad...  
we’re still...**here...**”

“It wasn’t that bad?”

WHAT HE DID TO MY NECK  
**‘WASN’T THAT BAD?!’”**

“Brother--!”

“WHAT SHE TOLD THE DOCTOR  
WHEN YOU ARRIVED TO THE  
EMERGENCY ROOM **WASN’T**  
**THAT BAD?!”**

“BUT WE **SURVIVED**, AND WE HAD THE  
TOOLS TO CARE FOR OURSELVES WHEN  
WE GOT HURT--!”

“THAT WE HAD TO **SNEAK**  
**AROUND TO GET IN THE FIRST**  
**PLACE!**

THEY DON'T CARE FOR  
YOU!"

"BUT AT LEAST WE'RE  
LIVING SOMEWHERE WHERE  
NOBODY CAN EASILY KILL  
US!"

"CAN YOU REALLY CALL  
THAT 'LIVING'?!  
YOU'RE BETTER OFF ON  
OUR OWN!"

"BUT I CAN'T LIVE ON  
MY OWN!"

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN  
YOU 'CAN'T'?!"

## “BECAUSE...!”

---

Two siblings got in a fight in the woods.  
But things didn't go as they thought they would.

Spindly white fingers rose from a pond  
To a horrible monster, no doubt they belonged.

The ruckus afar had alerted it's senses  
Caused it to awaken on the offensive

It's syringe-like digits, silent and sly  
Darted to pierce through the taller one's thigh

Crying out in pain, the target collapsed  
Immobilized, the monster had them trapped

The smaller one screamed in alarm  
But quickly acted in order to disarm

While the taller was dragged across the grass  
They snapped off a branch and began to attack

Yet the albino horror would not release it's hold  
Set on it's dinner, it did not fold

Into the water, it's victim was yanked  
After him the other dove, aiming to shank

Yet the small one underwater was terrified by what they saw  
A fiendish beast with beady eyes and a ginormous, gaping maw

In terror, they began to blindly whack  
Their sibling would not die as this beast's snack!

The smaller shoved their twig down the monstrosity's throat  
Sputtering and seizing, the titan began to choke

Seizing the opportunity to grab their kin  
They hauled them out of the water with strength within

Not wasting time, the small one towed them away  
As quick as they could so they're not caught as prey

But as they heaved their sibling uphill  
They noted that they were oddly still

Pausing to place a hand on their chest,  
On the little one's face alighted a dreadful frown  
For there was breathing, nor a single heartbeat,  
Meaning that their beloved sibling had drowned.

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## PART VI

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A young Blushing hiked through the overgrowth, pushing branches aside to clear his intended path. With a sigh, he brushed his curly brown locks out of his sight, his dark eyes scanning the forest floor. Had one of the orphans really gone this far to drop their sock monkey...? The further he marched, the more he felt like this was just some prank the kids had pulled on him so they could get away with being unsupervised...

He facepalmed himself with a gloved hand, already tired of dealing with these giggling devils. It had only been a week since he's been on the job, and he was already being played for a fool.

He wondered if he should go back...until he caught a glimpse of a person far in the distance.

Narrowing his eyes as he suspected it to be a mischievous kid that had decided to ditch school time, his strides carried him over towards the figure, determined to give the rat a good lecturing.

**"HEY! Just what do you think you're doing?!"**

But they didn't react how he expected them to at all, flinching so hard that they slammed against the tree behind them. Their hand immediately flew to their chest as their head snapped towards him, quaking as if expecting the worst.

'Well, that certainly startled them,' he thought.

The oddities didn't end there. upon getting closer, he was able to survey the kid's ginger hair tied back into a ponytail...a teenage boy with green eyes, somebody he had never seen before. It took a bit for him to piece two and two together, the realization striking him once he caught wind of the lad's bloodied to hell clothing.

Oh, fuck.

This kid wasn't one of the rugrats at the orphanage.

They were one of the kids of Peter's Island that lost themselves in the forest. It seemed to be a popular spot for parents to abandon their kids...

But this kid was bleeding-- shit, what had happened to him?! Did one of the beasts get to him first?

Stopping a few feet from the poor boy (the closer he got, the more the other shrank away), he got a good look at him...a bit on the short side. Likely around twelve or so...?

"Hold on...you're not from the White Rabbit Home, are ya? What's your name, kid?"

The boy just looked at him with fearful eyes, remaining silent.

"...Okaaaaay, better question. Are you lost?"

...A curt, reluctant nod.

"Do you remember if you have a family?"

The kid remained silent and still, so he assumed that was a no.

"Do you remember a phone number or address? Any contact information?"

No reaction after a minute, so another no.

"No names of anybody in your life either? Do you not remember your own name t-"

"A-Ashton."

"Huh? That your name, kid?"

A pause, and he nodded.

"Last name?" Not like it mattered...the chances of them being able to track down their actual family were close to none anyway.

"...Murphy."

"Okay, Ashton, you're gonna be fine with me. There's an orphanage right down this path, aight? I work there. We'll get you registered and patch you up, just follow me."

Indecision flashed in the boy's emerald eyes, as if debating whether or not to follow. After a few seconds of internal debate, Ashton cautiously walked to the male blushing's side.

The blushing gave the kid a wry grin and began to lead him back on the trail towards the Orphanage. He started towards a tall hill with jagged rocks jutting out unevenly.

"Well, the name's Cody. Don't wear it out, though.  
Watch your step, on this mound you don't want to fall.  
Anyway, tell me more about yourself, Ashton."

"Um..

...I'm 14...

And I went to middle school..."

"Don't remember the name of it now, do you?"

Ashton didn't reply. He knew the drill by now.

"Are you hurt?"

"No."

"Eh? You're not lying? What's up with the blood?"

Silence.

"There's no need to hide anything, it'll cost you nothing to fix up those injuries."

"..."

Cody shot Ashton a glance over his shoulder.

"They're gonna perform a physical examination on you if you don't tell me here, so you mi--"

"It's not mine." Ashton cut in, distress seeping into his voice.

So...who's blood is it, then?"

At that question, Ashton suddenly froze in his tracks, hugging himself tightly.

"...Somebody else's."

Noting the boy behind him had stopped following him, Cody turned on his heel and raised an eyebrow. But Ashton wasn't looking back. His gaze was focused on the floor and his bangs fell over his eyes, making it hard to read his expression.

"No shit. I'm asking for a who though."

"...A girl's."

"What?" he commented incredulously. "Who exactly is this girl, and how did her blood get on your clothes?"

"I... she..."

...  
My sister...

..."

He didn't continue on after that, but he sounded...confused.

"So you do have a family? Alright, what's your sister's name?"

"Arabella..."

"And was she with you in this forest?"

"Y-yes..."

"What happened to Arabella, Ashton?"

"...What happened to... my sister...?"

Ashton's head lifted to meet Cody's stare, but his eyes were a million miles away.

"My sister..."

She....

...Ah...

...

WAAAAAAAAUUUUUUGH!!!

SHE'S DEAD

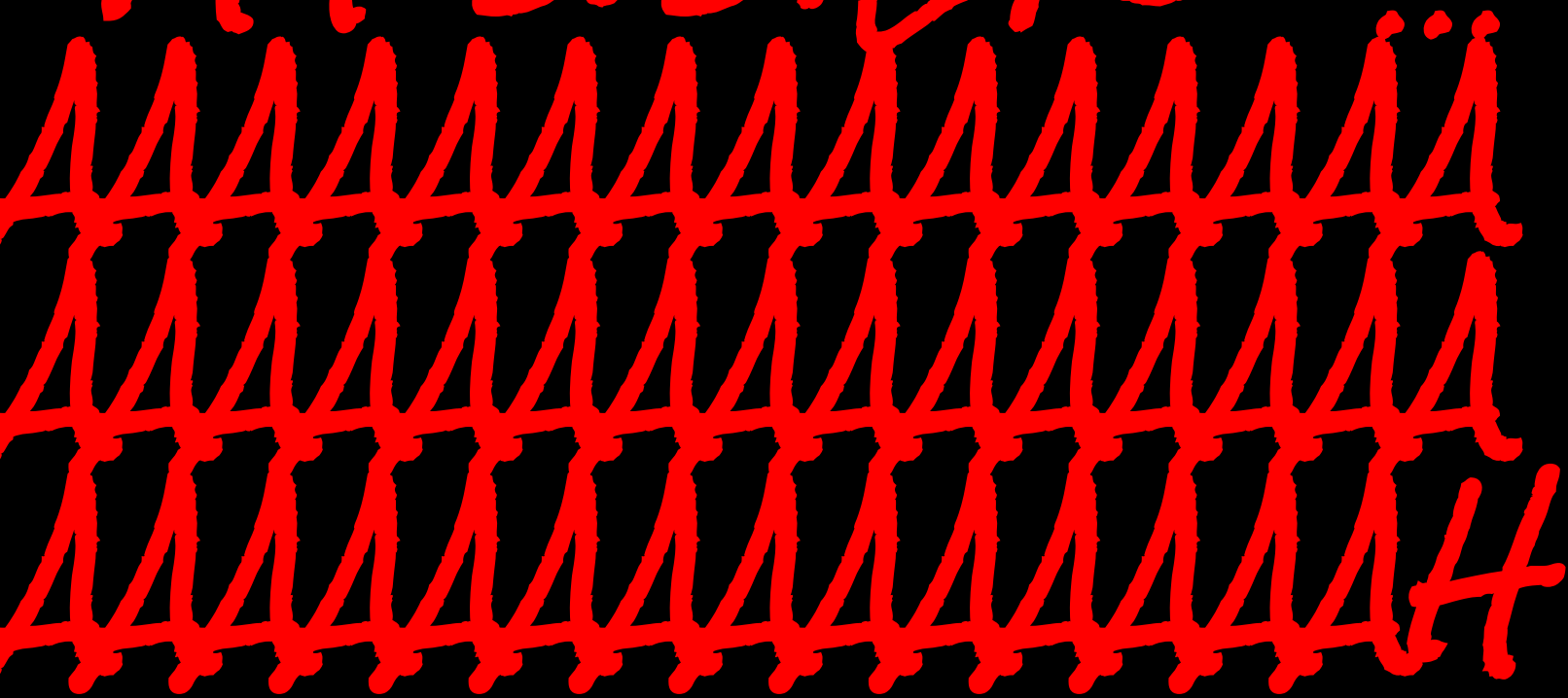
MY SISTERS DEAD

HOW?!

WHY?!

AND IT'S ALL MY  
FAULT

IT'S MY FAULT  
MY SISTER---!!!



"WOAH KID, CALM DOWN!"

THE BLOOD

IT'S SPILLING OUT

*The Blushing grabbed Ashton's shoulder to try to get through to him, but it was the biggest mistake he made in his week-long existence.*

"ASHTON--"

~~"AAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!"~~

NO!

NO!

DON'T  
TOUCH  
ME!"

Violently jerking his shoulder out of Cody's hold, the boy shoved the Blushing back with a surprising amount of force.

Stumbling backward, Cody's heel hit one of the boulders lodged into the hill with a cry. Causing him to tip over. His head mercilessly *slammed* into the firm ground, sending the servant rolling down the steep slope, his body smashing powerfully against the protruding rocks.

Ashton stood there, not fully realizing what he just did until the Blushing had rolled all the way down. Peering over the scarp, he saw Cody's limp body..

Motionless. There was something *red* pooling out from under him..

He didn't know how long he stood there, his heart hammering in his chest, before he tried to call out his name that he barely remembered.

*"...Cody?"*

Silence.

..

**IT'S ALL MY FAULT.**