

Synopsis – *The Shape of a Girl*

The Shape of a Girl by Joan McLeod tells the story of Braidie, a fifteen year old girl who recounts her memories and flashbacks of herself and her friends to her absent brother, Trevor.

Braidie is woken by the sound of her mother yelling, “Braidie -I have had IT”, (Mac Leod, 21). She speaks to her absent brother Trevor who is now living up the country. Braidie describes her relationship with her mother and how the sound of her mother’s voice reminds her of the day Trevor said that when their mother died she would come back as an earwig. Braidie remembers their childhood days, days of watching the summer camp of the “blind people” (Mac Leod, 22), across the water and hearing the bell that sounded during the day. Braidie misses her brother and throughout the play discloses to him how she feels about herself and what has happened over the past few years.

Braidie has decided not to attend school for the last few weeks. Instead, she watches a television show called, “MOST DANGEROUS AND AWFUL MOMENTS EVER” (Mac Leod, 25). Braidie has started to read a poet called Stevie Smith and is reminded of a line of her poetry, “This thing about not ‘waving but drowning.’ ” (Mac Leod, 25). Braidie has become obsessed by the tv news of the trial of a group of girls who are accused of murdering a girl their own age. The images of the girls in newspapers, magazines and on the television remind Braidie of herself and her own group of friends. Braidie considers that she her group could be like those girls. (The news story Braidie is obsessed with in the play is loosely based on the real life tragedy of Reena Virk, a young fourteen year old girl who was killed by a group of girls and a boy her own age in Vancouver in 1997.

Braidie has flashbacks throughout the play of memories from her childhood and of more recent memories. When she remembers particular incidents she asks her brother questions. Braidie talks about her first memories of her friend, Sofie. Braidie recalls how Sofie, Amber, Adrienne and her all played together and how one day it all changed. That day Adrienne decided that they would have a ‘penalty day’. “And then one day, one normal un-special day Adrienne comes to school and announces that it’s penalty day. We don’t know what penalty day is. Adrienne explains that on penalty day one girl is chosen and everyone is mean to that one girl for the whole day. *Why?* Adrienne doesn’t know. It’s just a part of school...I don’t know why it was Sofie. It just was.”(Mac Leod, 30 -31)

Moving from her own experience to the story on the news, Braidie discusses with Trevor how the fourteen year old girl was attacked, that it started with butting out a cigarette on her forehead. She then talks about how girls treat each other:

“When I look at her picture, when I look at the picture of the dead girl in the paper, part of me gets it. And I hate that I do; I hate to be even partly composed of that sort of information. But right now, if you put me in a room filled with girls, girls my age that I’ve never seen before in my life – I could divide them all up. I could decide who goes where and just where I fit in without anyone even opening their mouth.” (Mac Leod, 34)

Braidie tells Trevor how, when they were twelve, she warned Sofie not to go on a field trip and she talks about the role of the bystanders, the observers who watch

other people being assaulted and assaulting but do nothing and questions why they are never prosecuted. How much of a role does the observer have in all of this?

Briadie recalls how Adrienne smacked Sofie's head on a rock on the beach and chased her, how Braidie watched. We learn that it was Trevor who acted in this instance, how he hit Adrienne with a smooth black rock from his catapult. That stalled her and allowed time for Sofie to escape.

She remembers trying to fit in with the gang of girls, to be 'the same', laughing in unison with her friends, fighting with her mother. In a parallel look at other behaviour, Braidie reads detailed accounts in the newspaper of how the girl was murdered in November 1997.

And in the final attack on Sofie by Adrienne in the school bathroom, Braidie recalls how she watched while Sofie called to her for help. Braidie is sickened by her own and Adrienne's actions and sees Adrienne now in a different light:

"And she's gone. The friend I loved is gone.

All that's left is the shape of a girl." (MacLeod, 56)

Braidie decides to talk to Annie, her old pre-school teacher, in whom she confides.

Annie says she will support Braidie when she tells the Principal.

The play ends with Braidie as an eight year old in her innocent youth as part of a group of "perfect - girls" (MacLeod, 60) brimming with dreams and possibilities – dreams and possibilities that we now know were never achieved.