

*The Shape of a Girl*

By Joan MacLeod

*Braidie: A fifteen-year-old female.*

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*Braidie speaks to her absent brother Trevor.*

BRAIDIE: I woke up this morning to this sound. This sound that feels far away one second then from right inside my gut the next. Very pure with the potential to be extremely creepy. But before I've even opened my eyes this other thing worms its way in and wreaks its usual havoc: the voice of mum.

I tell you Trevor, she's gotten even worse since you left. She is yelling that THIS *is* IT. What IT is I still haven't figured out. At this point in my life being kicked out would be incredible. All I know is her voice chiseled, no burrowed into my brain before I was fully conscious. By the time I'm actually awake the voice of mum has reached this pitch that is making the paneling beside my bed vibrate. *Braidie—I have had IT!*

And then I remembered that day, that truly outstanding day Trevor when you told mum that in another life her voice is going to come back as an ear wig. I was thinking of that exact thing when that sound comes again and this time I know what it is. The blind are back, back at their summer camp across the bay—which is highly weird because it's hardly April. That sound is the gong that tells the blind folks to get up or come for porridge. It just seems like it's really close, sound carrying across water and all that.

And for some reason today, on this particular morning, at this particular point in time, after living on this stupid island my whole life, I am acutely aware for the

first time that sound carries across water BOTH ways. Did that ever dawn on you? Did you ever have this really ugly image of mum's voice snaking around the blind camp? There they are: lying on their bunk beds, innocent as pie. *You're your own worst enemy!* That'll get them sitting up or worse yet shuttling off to the cook shack, mum's voice attacking them from above like some crow gone nuts. *Keep your shoulders back! You are walking like an ape!*

That is how my day begins, that is how I greet the morning. And from across the water the gong from the camp sounds again. I think, briefly, very briefly, about actually going to school. I also contemplate apologizing to mum for the basic snarkiness of my disposition—all inherited of course—but she's already left for work. Then I'm pretending we're all Muslims or Buddhist monks or anything except who we are. And that gong is calling us to prayer or at least ending this round.

That the sound means—STOP, don't move a muscle, help is on the way.