



Shaping Kate: Coming of Age in the 1950s

Hazel Stearns

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Motivated by insatiable curiosity and undaunted by rules, young Kate McCallum entertains herself in a 1950s world without television, computers, cell phones, or iPods. Captivated by her heroes, Kate envies Huck Finn's freedom and Amelia Earhart's independence, and weighs all of her forbidden plans against the stinging pain from her mother's red plastic belt filled with small round holes. Curious, she reads books and body language, questions religion, hypocrisy and authority, learns about murder, incest and decapitation, and pressures her mother to explain shock treatments, vagina and falsies. When Kate wakes to bloodcurdling screams from the bed next to hers, she discovers family skeleton; when she wakes to her own terrifying nightmares, she breaks a promise and reveals a horrific secret. After listening to years of hell-and-damnation preachers, and puzzling over unfamiliar strings of sexual feeling, Kate reluctantly gives up her tomboy's world of dirt and adventure and enters her teens, uncertain about the church and God, confused about life and love, but eager to discover the mysteries and freedom of the long-awaited adult world.

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