



# MIND'S EYE

Gillian Philip

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All the others had grown their hair again, to hide the scars – except for the girl who'd obviously just had hers. Conor Smith seemed protective of her. Braindeads stuck together like that. You could see how dangerous they'd be in a pack. ”

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SHADES 2.0

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## **SHADES 2.0**

Mind's Eye

by Gillian Philip

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## ONE

'Freaks, that lot. They ought to give them a separate canteen, my mum says. Separate *school*.'

Billie was glaring over my shoulder at the table where the telepathic kids sat together. I wasn't bothered, but I knew Billie's mum had a thing about them. So did Billie.

'Ignore them,' I told her. 'They can't hurt



you. Not when they've got implants.'

'Bunch of Braindeads.' Billie wouldn't let it go. 'See that bigger boy? Conor Smith?'

I turned, trying not to be obvious. It was clear which one she meant. He was much taller than the other five, with shadowy eyes and cropped hair, and if he hadn't been a Braindead I'd have thought he was pretty good-looking. His shoulders stiffened, as if he could feel me watching, then he lifted his head. As his glittering eyes locked with mine, full of contempt, I snapped back round, reddening.

'The nerve of him,' said Billie indignantly. 'Staring at a normal kid. Hey, Smith!' she shouted at him. 'Go back to your remedial class!'

There were times I didn't like Billie all that much. But she was bright and popular and bubbly. She was my best friend, and I

adored her. Besides, her popularity rubbed off on me.

Leaning over, she whispered, 'Conor Smith nearly killed somebody.'

'Really?' I asked in awe.

'Before he got his implant. His parents objected, went to court to try and stop the operation, and while they were wasting all that time he attacked a boy. Poor kid was in a coma for a week, and he still gets headaches.'

I shivered. 'They should have *made* his parents get him an implant.'

'After that they did.' She added indignantly, 'His parents should be in jail. Him too.'

Too right. Braindeads were scary. When did they start appearing: twenty years ago? Just evolution, some said. A bunch of kids started hitting puberty and turning far too

smart and – well, it was bound to happen.

Maybe it was mischief, maybe it was malice, but bank accounts got emptied, PIN numbers weren't secret any more, health and employment records were rifled, identities stolen ... Of course the government had to rush through legislation. Of course telepaths had to be controlled. They weren't *all* bad, but we had to be protected, the government said. My dad said something different, but the day Dad agrees with the government about anything, I'll eat a bucket of slugs.

So thirteen years ago, when government scientists came up with implants that immobilised the bad bit of their brains, everyone (except my dad) was delighted. The implants gave the Braindeads terrible headaches, so they tended to miss a lot of school, and that was why they needed

remedial teaching. But it was for everybody's good, after all. Even theirs.

With a scrape of chairs the Braindeads stood up, gathering books, while the other students eyed them suspiciously. The tall, crop-haired guy stared right back, defiantly. Conor Smith seemed kind of rebellious for a Braindead, and he'd kept his hair shaved, so you could see the implant scar on his scalp. Like he was making a point or something.

All the others had grown their hair again, to hide the scars – except for the girl who'd obviously just had hers. She was pale and timid, and she kept rubbing nervously at her cropped scalp. Conor Smith seemed protective of her. Braindeads stuck together like that. You could see how dangerous they'd be in a pack.

A crowd of boys shoved past the

Braindeads, and one of them shouldered the new girl, making her stumble. Billie giggled, so I did too, but Conor Smith turned and lunged at the shover. Martin Leary, the ugly little troublemaker. Typical.

A Braindead girl grabbed Conor's arm just in time, dragging him back.

'Come on then, ya Braindead,' jeered Martin. 'Come on, if you're hard enough.'

Conor stared at him, silent. Martin shivered, shook himself, then fired a gob of spittle onto Conor's sleeve.

'Good shot, Marty!' shouted Billie.

All Conor Smith did was give us a look of contempt, then walk away with the other Braindeads. He made me feel like a piece of dirt. Scowling, I turned to Billie.

'Come on, then,' I said.

She was still ogling Martin Leary in romantic admiration. Billie had no taste in

men. My dad called Martin a nasty little thug, but these days Dad seemed to hate everyone on the planet. Funny, because he wasn't always like that. He wasn't so bitter when Mel and I were little – just sad – but maybe being a single parent to two teenagers had pushed him over the edge into full-blown grumpiness. Dad and I were always fighting and slamming doors, since I was pretty bad-tempered too, but I had an excuse: the irritating buzz in my ears. Tinnitus, pronounced my know-all sister, from playing my music too loud.

'Come on.' I nudged Billie again.

'Come on where?'

I sighed. 'Computer room! You wanted to look up that band Martin told you about?'

'Yeah.' She gave me a funny frown.

'Yeah, 'course. Let's go.'

She was quiet on the way. I was pushing

open the door when she spoke again.

‘I never said anything about this,’ she said.

‘What d’you mean?’

‘Coming in here. I never mentioned it.’

I shrugged. ‘You must’ve.’

‘No, I never. It was a spur of the moment thing. I only remembered when I saw Marty.’

For an instant my spine tingled, but I shook myself and shrugged again. I didn’t know what she was getting at.

Martin’s precious band snapped her out of her odd mood. I was leaning on her chairback and offering unhelpful suggestions, making her laugh as she tapped at the keyboard, when Mr Galt rapped the door.

‘There you are, Lara.’ He frowned. ‘Mr Jaffrey’s looking for you. Could you go to his office, please?’

Billie raised her head, puzzled, fingers hovering over the keyboard.

‘Now?’ I asked stupidly.

‘*Now.*’

I shrugged again. Lately it seemed I couldn’t do anything right around Galt. He never said anything, but I got the feeling I’d annoyed him, big time.

‘See ya later,’ I told Billie, hefting my schoolbag.

I half-turned so she could reply ‘Alligator’ like she always did.

But, pretending not to hear me, she glowered at the screen, battering her keyboard like she was trying to do it a permanent injury.