

Charlotte remembers coming home well into the day. It was raining lightly and was not that dark yet. Her head felt swollen from the inside, and though she stood in the shower, warm water streaming down her shoulders and arms, the scent of mint steaming as it mixed with the air coming through the crack though the screen in the open window in the wall of the shower, Charlotte felt dry all over: her face and scalp, her hands and legs and eyelids.

She rinsed her cheeks, moving her long fingers and palms over the bones of her nose and forehead. Where did my friends go? She didn't think Timmy was home. She couldn't remember the last person she'd said goodbye to last night, and when she'd woken this morning at Dave's apartment, he'd already left. On purpose, she guessed. Though she didn't know him very well, she couldn't imagine he had a job or even very many friends that might have precipitated any urgent errand.

No amount of herbal tea or food-grade aloe vera gel was going to calm her down this evening.

Timmy could sense Charlotte was feeling bad, so he suggested they go to Jamba Juice for a large smoothie, and maybe sit on the couch later and watch a movie. The TV did not fit in the octagonal-shaped room with the stale green overstuffed faux suede couch; it was heavy and square with a long part behind. The room was part of a pointy-roofed structural detail that could only be described as a turret sticking out from the building, an old pink Victorian mansion split up into several 3-bedroom apartments.

There was a front yard with a picnic table and a few scraggy rosebushes, and a wooden gate. The backyard was inaccessible but could be seen from Charlotte's large bedroom window. The windowsill was wide and long, enough to accommodate herself or a visitor as a seat while they talked and listened to records and smoked weed among her piles of clothes and old papers.

Tim's arms and chest were punctuated with quirky cartoon tattoos: a cat smoking, a guy with moustache and sunglasses, a monster waving his arms in the air, a diamond, a keyhole.

One day they had been biking along the scenic route from the flats of Strathcona to the hills of Mount Pleasant, passing through an undeveloped complex of recycling centers, discount grocery outlets, and open lots behind the old Pacific Central train station on Main Street, right outside Lacey's house. The smooth new pavement was even blacker than usual, soaked from the week-long rains that were, for now, petering out to a generalized mist that hit your face when you pedaled hard but wasn't falling fast enough to feel if you were just walking.

Timmy said, "hey, I want to show you something, check this out," and as they sped around the corner of the Gourmet Warehouse they saw two huge billboards printed in color on the side of the ReUseIt Center. In clear digital color, there was a photo of a little boy cowering in front of his father, probably, and the right hand of the rectangular frame was green, with light blue font that read: "Stupid. Stupid, stupid, stupid. You are so, so stupid." The second billboard showed a grandmotherly Asian woman holding a little girl, waiting at a bus stop and petting her head. On a pink background in orange font, it said: "You so smart. Me so proud. Me so proud you so smart."

Charlotte smiled, dipping her small chin and short bangs and long brown hair, and pedaled with her long legs.

The day she stopped talking to Dave, Timmy said: "Me so proud you so smart, Charlotte." In a serious tone of voice, like a warning, "better not do it again."

Charlotte didn't have a job. She went to school when she wanted to. She had other friends, not just students and dropouts from the art school, but older boys who'd never started college. Some of them didn't work either. They traveled and had their photos printed in skateboarding magazines. They'd disappear for two months and the next time she saw them they'd be driving a tall sport-utility vehicle. On one of Lacey's first nights in town, Charlotte took her to a bonfire in the alley behind another student's house. It was after 2:30 am, and they were sluggishly grouped on makeshift seats of wooden palettes and cinder blocks. One of the skateboarders rose and wordlessly slung an unopened pack of cigarettes into the fire. He stood there, emptying the pockets of his leather jacket, letting handfuls of change and bills fall to the dirt. Finally, he reached into his back pocket and whipped out a hard little piece of silver plastic with a glowing display. He tossed it into the fire, walked over to a nearby chain link fence, and climbed out of sight. They watched his cell phone promptly spark and grow black, nestled under a section of glowing orange wood. It lay still for a few moments, then leapt and shattered, eliciting shouts and sporadic applause.

One of Charlotte's teachers had a studio out this way, in the same building as a tire shop and a new young commercial gallery, owned by two girls in their late twenties with long ex-model figures and uncomplicated but noticeably high end jeans and simple gold jewelry. It was a shabby groomedness that was like a negative exposure of the groomed shabbiness of Charlotte and her girlfriends from the art school, fiddling with their restricted palette of American Apparel and vintage. The artist girls were too polite to discuss it beyond saying that the gallery girls were very pretty or looked nice, but it leaked out from behind their teeth, in their uncertain smiles and fearful eyes.

They ate well and jogged. Charlotte knew this because one day she had been chatting with the only intern they had ever hired out of the art school - an acne-plagued but svelte girl from the southern US - and one of the directors strode past them on her way out and pouted, "I want to take a nap. But I think I'll go for a run. Sigh. Nap or run. Sigh."

This girl struck Charlotte as the person least in need of a jog that she'd seen all day. She remembers feeling pure befuddlement as she looked out at the overcast sky and wet sidewalks, imagining the director lacing up a pair of silver and orange sneakers, her calves striding along the white railings of the waterside exercise path.

That exchange stuck with her to this day. The clearest thing that she noticed on that cloudy day, in the dimly-lit gallery office consisting of a raw pine sheet with an iMac and a tray of business cards.

The teacher was a small man with short gray hair who usually dressed in belted jeans and a sports coat. He was sometimes a teacher at Yale, a place nobody either of them knew had ever even visited. He had been a student at Charlotte's school in the 80's and left before finishing his degree to be a painter in New York, where he had supposedly been friends with a famous gay icon and an assortment of young abstract painters. His sexuality was ambiguous. He was known to invite male and female students over to his studio late at night. He had promoted one of Charlotte's acquaintances, a figurative painter, maybe enough to have helped him find commercial representation in three American cities and Italy. His own paintings, dense planes of geometric surfaces and interlocking shapes, remained barely changed since his youth.

Kayla Guthrie

# Hands Across the Sea

July 30 2010 4pm - 9pm

Hannah & Aaron Beehre

Amelia Bywater

Jacquelyn Greenbank

Robert Hood

Paul Johns

Sonya Lacey

Simon Lawrence

Emma Mettrick

Sarah Jane Parton

Nathan Pohio

Zina Swanson

Sanjay Theodore

Erica van Zon

&

Fiona Burke

Kayla Guthrie

Judith Hastie

Anya Henis

Jack McLean

Giuseppe Mistretta

Kate Montgomery

Risa Tsunegi

George Ziffo

VICTOR & HESTER 11 Woodlands Drive Glasgow

[www.victorandhester.com](http://www.victorandhester.com)