

Handprint on My Heart

Dee Recore

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High school leaves its imprint, but not necessarily because of what's taught in the classroom. What most people remember from their teen years are relationships, both platonic and romantic. In her dramatic debut novel, *Handprint on My Heart*, Dee Recore looks at those formative years through the eyes of three women whose close high school friendship faces a very adult crisis.

Handprint on My Heart opens on an intense emergency-room scene in the year 2022, where Recore quickly establishes the identity of a badly injured motorcycle accident victim as fifty-year-old Charlotte "Charlie" Mack. The only names on Charlie's contact list belong to two younger women she befriended and mentored over a decade earlier, journalist Caroline Carmichael and actress Annie Ashcroft. After being notified, Caroline and Annie rush to Charlie's hospital bedside, where they learn that her survival is in question. The emotionally charged situation drives the younger women to talk about how they met Charlie, and each other, and what those friendships mean to them now.

Both the current-day hospital scenes and the flashbacks to high school days are vividly detailed, although the time changes can be a little abrupt. Recore keeps the tension high with each update on Charlie's deteriorating medical condition, but the bulk of the book's action takes place twelve years earlier, as told through the memories of Caroline and Annie.

Recore perfectly captures the twenty-first-century social life of teens, seamlessly weaving text messages with party banter and heart-to-heart talks. The telephone is practically another character in the story, and Recore's integration of this important mode of teenage communication suggests a familiarity with teens that likely comes from her experience as an adolescent counselor and workshop leader.

Strongest when she lets the girls speak for themselves with believably casual, natural dialogue, Recore occasionally lets her narrator's voice intrude. For example, she explains people's backgrounds in unnecessary detail and reiterates lessons she has already made clear through story. Teen banter, however, is her specialty, and the discussions at the local hangout—the delightfully named restaurant, *Such a Bagel*—ring true. As the students struggle to figure out the world while sipping blueberry iced coffee, the reader is transported back in time.

The "handprint" from the title, which is beautifully rendered on the cover, makes an appearance in the story, bringing the women's story full circle. *Handprint on my Heart*, however, is only the first installment in a planned trilogy, and Recore leaves readers guessing about what will happen next.

SHEILA M. TRASK (June 4, 2013)

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