



APRIL # 7—Party at Our Teacher's Place

Visuals: Photos of ocean from high-rise, Chinese food, sunset at beach

Warm feelings after a surprise encounter with Sandy last night. But what distressing circumstances! Must start at the beginning....

Our class's favourite teacher, Barry, had a party at his condo in the West End overlooking English Bay Beach. He is on the seventeenth floor—what an incredible view! He lives there with his elderly mother—just part of the evening's insight.

Nicole (Mexican, about 21) has a crush on this teacher. This is interesting to watch. Nicole's real name is Nicolasa, Nico for short, but she prefers the name Nicole as this sounds more serious than simply Nico. Lots of students at the school have chosen a Westernized name. I told Nicole that my legal first name is Erico but my mom intended to name me Erika after a Swedish friend she had been close to university."

"But she didn't do this?"

"My father agreed to this, but when he actually filled out my birth certificate, he wrote Erico on the form. Mom was furious. She has never forgiven him. So my mother and sisters call me Erika, especially when my dad's not around."

"I thought that's what I heard in class."

Nicole admitted something else—that she dreams of walking on the seawall with Barry. I didn't dare tell her how inappropriate it would be for him to single her out in that way. Or that he could lose his job for dating a student and abusing his position of authority.

Fortunately Barry doesn't pay any special attention to Nicole, despite her obvious attempts to attract him. At the party she was wearing a mini-skirt and a form-fitting sweater with plunging neckline and a cross on a chain (partly hidden by her ample cleavage). Could some of her behaviour be just cultural? Is it just the normal way a young Mexican woman responds to an attractive, single man?

Se-Eun (from Korea) and Claudia (Taiwan), at our school since last autumn, are considerably more mature than Nicole.

They are about the same age as Barry (early 30s) and are very serious students. Both Se-Eun and Claudia are teachers and admit to having boyfriends at home. Barry seems particularly comfortable with them. Between coming and going to check the snacks and punch bowls (one with alcohol, one without), Barry was talking quietly with them about how he would welcome the chance to teach in Asia.

When the Chinese food arrived, Barry opened the large, warm, brown paper bags and ticked off on an order form the items received: "Cashew chicken, calamari, spring rolls, beef with black bean sauce, garlic prawns, pineapple fried rice." Several of us helped put the metal containers on serving plates on the dining room table. Then each person helped themselves and found a place to sit including on the living room floor. Most of us ate with chopsticks including Barry. The other night I had been surprised to see most people in the Vancouver restaurant able to use chopsticks, even though mom might consider their handling of them inelegant!

When there was a pause in the conversation in the room, Barry started a group discussion to ensure everyone had an opportunity to speak English.

Song was silent, so he asked her, "What surprises have you found in Vancouver, Song?"

Slowly, she responded, "It isn't as cold as I expected."

Barry replied, "But, unlike Vancouver, much of Canada can be very cold in winter."

Nicole said, "I expected all of Canada to be like pictures of New York City. All skyscrapers and high-rises. But it wasn't like that where I went originally."

"And where was that?"

"Dawson Creek."

"Dawson Creek?" Barry laughed.

"Yes, I went on a Rotary exchange. I was there several months before my parents let me come to Vancouver."

"After much pleading?" Daniel joked.

Barry said, "Can you tell us something about Dawson Creek?"

Knees crossed, Nicole was dangling a sling-back, high heel shoe on her toe that was pointing at Barry. She kept her eyes directly on his face as she responded, "It is in northern British Columbia. Close to the Alberta border. Not near ocean and it is tiny. No skyscrapers at all!"

"And no interesting men, Nicole?" teased Daniel, who seemed to be drinking more than he should.

"Is it good for outdoor sports?" Marina (Liechtenstein) asked.

"In winter it's very cold with lots of snow, so there are winter sports. Summer is hot. My homestay family camped and canoed on the rivers."

"I love camping," Marina commented.

"Well, I don't," Nicole declared. "Too many bugs. And why sleep in an uncomfortable bed in the wilderness? Except maybe for the clean air. My homestay sister had dust allergies. Being in the fresh air helped her."

"But no fresh men!" Daniel laughed again.

Ignoring Daniel's comment, Barry asked, "Do you know that Dawson Creek is famous for someone in the arts?"

Nicole said, "Yes, an opera singer..."

"That's right."

"But I've forgotten his name."

"Ben Heppner. Did you ever hear him sing?" Barry asked.

"Only on radio. My homestay mother listened to opera on the radio every Saturday."

Looking at Bae, who was being his quiet self, Barry asked, "What expectations did you have, Bae?"

Bae looked somewhat pained in having the group focus on him, but Song smiled encouragingly at him (did they know each other in Korea before coming here?). Finally he managed to say, "I thought there would be miles of space between houses."

"Well, if you went to Alberta and Saskatchewan you would find the houses isolated with miles of wheat fields in between."

Song added, "I had another surprise."

"What was that?"

"It was about the Rocky Mountains. When my first school planned a trip to the Rockies, my homestay mother asked me where we were going to go. I kept saying, 'To the Rocky Mountain.' She would say, 'But where?' I couldn't understand what she meant. After going there I realized that there is no one, large Rocky Mountain."

"Yes. The Rockies are made up of many hundreds of peaks separating the West Coast from the Prairies," Barry stated.

"So where exactly did you go?" Claudia asked.

"Banff, Lake Louise, Jasper and a lot of small places. We saw mountains, lakes, and wild animals. Bears came close to the bus," Song said.

Noboru said, "I hope we get a chance to go."

"The school will likely offer the trip again on the long weekend in early September."

"Can we ski then?" Marina asked.

"We won't be skiing, although there is snow on some of the glaciers," Barry commented. "However, it's a good time to see the lakes while they are still blue, before they freeze over."

"But we'll be able to ski locally...." Marina commented, wanting confirmation.

"Yes. Students often ski on the local mountains."

Fernando commented, "I've signed up to go to Whistler next weekend, as I've never seen snow yet."

"I'm going too," Nicole chimed in enthusiastically. Other students echoed this and Marina said, "Oh, I hadn't heard about that, but I definitely want to go too."

Barry returned to his earlier topic. "So did any of the rest of you have surprises when you came to Canada?" he asked.

Sumi said, "I didn't expect to see so many Asians."

"Almost a quarter Vancouver's population is Asian. Some have been in Canada over 100 years. Others have just immigrated to Canada recently."

Claudia added, "A lot of them came to Vancouver just before Hong Kong changed from being a British protectorate to being part of China."

"That's right," Barry confirmed.

For a few minutes people concentrated on eating. When Nicole was finished, she got up and started clearing off the table by placing into a garbage bag used paper plates and disposable chop sticks, while setting aside recyclable bottles and cans. She also returned extra serving spoons and used glasses and plates to the kitchen.

"Barry, will you be able to eat all the leftovers yourself?" she asked.

"No, I certainly won't," he laughed.

"Shall we let people take some home?"

"Great idea."

"So how many want leftovers?" Nicole asked the group.

"I do," several said.

"Fernando, Daniel, Song, Marina, Erika.... Okay."

"Fernando, what would you like in yours?"

Fernando approached the table to look at the options. Smiling, he commented, "A bit of each would be terrific, Nico." Fernando calls her *Nico* without making the name sound diminutive or disrespectful.

"Okay," Nicole said, putting several small portions into one of the metal containers for Fernando. I heard Nicole comment to him, "I'm going to Whistler too, because we won't be having snow in Monterey any time soon."

"That's for sure."

One by one Nicole and Fernando provided the containers of food to all who wanted them and leaving some for Barry and

his mother. Meanwhile many broke into small conversational groups or even pairs. I am proud of Sumi, as she was again being attentive to Bae. I can be proud of her, can't I, since we're from the same country? She seems to be trying to draw him out. Perhaps she wants to find out why he is so self-absorbed (right word?) or anti-social. After a while he actually smiled a slow, impish smile in response to one of Sumi's comments. But I didn't hear this, as Daniel was trying to claim my attention.

Wanting to avoid personal contact with Daniel, who had definitely been drinking too much by then, I went out onto the balcony, as the door was ajar. There was a beautiful sunset. Daniel, however, followed me there pretending to be particularly interested in the view.

He must be aware of his good looks, as he behaves as if I would obviously be interested in him. (Men!) In class, he sits beside me no matter what chair I take around the table (does he come in at the very last moment just to do this?).

On the balcony he stood unnecessarily close to me. In fact he touched my lower back as he pointed out people down on the beach. I tried to move away from him, but I was stuck between him and the corner balcony railing. At one point he removed my camera from around my wrist and took a couple of shots. How dare he do that without asking!

As we came back inside, Sabine looked up with interest. She seemed to be speculating on Daniel's attention to me. So what did she think when the party was dispersing and Daniel asked if he could walk me home. I couldn't think of a way to politely refuse, so I agreed. Most of us said goodbye at the main door of Barry's building, including Sabine who asked me quietly if I would be all right.

"It's such a short distance," I answered her, as Daniel put on his banker's coat and indicated we should set out. Each with our bag of Chinese food in hand, Daniel and I walked the few blocks along sidewalks pink with fallen cherry petals and thick with cherry blossoms overhead.



And.... as we climbed the front stairs of the apartment, Sandy came out. Yes, Sandy! So of course he saw me with Daniel. I felt obliged to introduce them despite feeling self-conscious.

"Daniel, this is Sandford Gibson,"

"Hello Sandford," Daniel said somewhat formally, at that moment looking very much the businessman in shaking Sandy's hand.

"And this is Daniel Bohn, from Switzerland."

"Hello, Daniel."

They said something that I didn't get. I was preoccupied. Was I staring at Sandy? I forced myself to look down at his guitar case. I just remember that I was annoyed when Daniel put his hand on my arm. I moved my arm away immediately, but Sandy must have seen this. Why did this disturb me? Well, I wouldn't want Sandy to think Daniel is my boyfriend.

"Enjoy your Chinese food," Sandy said, as he moved to continue down the stairs.

"Oh, yes, I guess you can smell it," Daniel laughed.

I couldn't think of anything to say fast enough that would negate Sandy's assumption that Daniel and I were going into the apartment to eat Chinese food together. Despite the awkwardness of meeting Sandy, there was, however, one plus. As we watched him open the door to his car, parked right in front of the apartment, Sandy turned toward us and said, "I hope you'll be coming to our gig in Kitsilano."

Immediately he got into the car and closed the door.

As Sandy started the ignition, Daniel asked, "What's a gig?"

"Hey, look. There's a skunk!" I responded, avoiding his question (what a gift, this diversion!).

As Sandy drove away, Daniel and I lingered briefly watching the skunk (truly!) from the top of the stairs. He was wandering along the sidewalk coming closer, his nose to the ground and his claws making scratching sounds on the concrete.

Thank goodness Daniel didn't try to kiss me (I felt he was considering it). I wouldn't want to make an awkward scene. After all, he is one of my classmates whom I will be seeing everyday. We don't want divisiveness in the group.

From: erico.yamashiro@mobilityelite.co.jp

To: yoko.yamashiro@chiclooks.co.jp

Date: Mon Apr 09 23:15 PST 2005

Subject: Another update

Hi Yoko,

So I am sending copies of my journal tapes. As I said, it's okay to listen to them. If you do, I guess you'll be comparing my experience

with your time studying in England. I imagine London is quite a different place than Vancouver.

Hope all is going well at home and your fashion design business continues to thrive. You know I'm always interested in hearing more about how things are going between you and Andrew (any reconsidering?) and Koji (any pressure from Dad?)....

Love,
Erika





APRIL # 8—Visiting Deep Cove and Mary’s Family Home

Visuals: Photos of the main street, yacht club, beach, and Parkside Trail; cultural centre’s list of plays

Mary and I took the bus to Deep Cove. Sabine met us at the bus exchange on the North Shore and came the last half of the way with us. Mary doesn’t own a car. She is a member of a car co-op. But she only uses a co-op car when she needs to drive off a bus route or when she has a lot to carry (such as my luggage!). Mary says her most ardent dream is to see the worldwide abolishment of the private car.

The bus followed the waterfront to Deep Cove, the small community where Mary grew up. I was surprised to hear passengers on the bus saying thank you to the driver as they got off, even when they were leaving from the back door of the bus. I’ve heard Canadians are very polite.

At end of the bus route, the three of us got off and looked out over blue ocean across the cove. Rising out of water are mountains with traces of snow on the tops of them. Beautiful.

“Oh, look! Kayak rentals, Erika. I want to go kayaking.”

“I’ve never tried that.” In seeing Sabine’s look of expectation, I added, “Yet.”

“We’ll have to get our classmates to come and kayak!”

“Good idea.”

“I bet our guys would love it,” Sabine said enthusiastically.

“Probably Sumi would too.”

“Many of my homestay students have enjoyed kayaking here,” Mary confirmed.

We walked along the sunny main street. Cherry blossoms and other spring flowers are emerging, but are not as far along as in the West End of Vancouver. Interesting shops and restaurants. Mary proudly told me that the bistro closest to the water is owned by her nephew and nephew-in-law. On the patio bright yellow umbrellas are over the tables and blankets are on the chairs.

“I bet our classmates would like to try that too.”

“The food is not cheap but is delicious and good value,” Mary stated.



We went into small cultural centre with a theatre and art gallery. In the gallery we looked at paintings and then picked up a brochure listing plays scheduled for the next few months. Mary said we should attend a performance sometime.

Going out by the back door opening onto the park, we walked down to the beach and felt the water. It was cold but clear. A man was throwing a stick for his dog.

Mary asked us if we wanted to walk to her parents' house by the road or by a trail along a creek through forest. Sabine immediately responded, “Oh, let's go by the trail.”



Some leaves on the trees are just coming into bud. There are magenta flowers on what Mary calls salmonberry bushes. Everything smells so fresh. We followed the creek then walked across a park and walked into a lane leading to her parents' house, which is surrounded by the same kind of "bush."

Mary invited us to have tea with her parents. Mary suggested that while she helped her mom make some sandwiches, Sabine and I should sit on the deck.

Of course Sabine wanted to know about Daniel walking me home last night. That got into a whole discussion about guys—Daniel and the irritation of his attention, Sandy and my wish to see more of him, and Sabine exasperated at having a boyfriend who won't accept the fact that they are no longer a couple.

This launched Sabine into giving me advice about how to decide if it's worth giving a guy any attention.

"Only do so if relating to him could make your life better," she stated absolutely.

"Probably good advice."

"Avoid any relationship that is going to complicate your life or lead you away from being the person you aim to be."

"More good advice."

"There's no point in hanging out with a guy once you realize you could never marry him, unless you both agree that you can only be friends."

"Now you are sounding like Juliana."

"Not quite that jaded, I hope."

"I've never considered potential marriage to any guy."

"Well, it's never too late to get into the habit."

"But then, marriage in general doesn't seem that appealing, at least based on my parents' marriage."

"Now who's the jaded one?"

"And looking at my sister's high school girlfriends, I think marriage may be a disadvantage to women. It leads them to give up their own development."

"It can. You have to be determined to ensure that doesn't happen."

"Is marriage something you are so interested in, Sabine?" I asked, somewhat surprised at the topic, as she isn't that much older than me.

"Not now, but eventually I will want to marry in order to have a child."

"My sister loves a man she met in England. She would like to be with him, but she accepts the fact that marriage doesn't seem that feasible."

"Exactly. I hope you never forget this. Having a long-distance relationship would be asking for major problems."

From the way she smiled at me, I could tell she was referring to Sandy. Particularly my hope to get to know him better.

At that moment Mary came to the door and announced that the tea was ready. We joined her and her mom and dad.

Mary's brother arrived to get some tools from his workshop and then he entertained us with a description of his young daughter reading imaginary stories to him.

When it was time to go, he drove Mary, Sabine, and me back to the bus stop that is within sight of the kayak rentals shop. What a nice bus stop!





APRIL # 9—Daniel’s Unwanted Attention on Whistler/Blackcomb

Visuals: Photographs of Whistler/Blackcomb

Despite Daniel’s overbearing company, I did enjoy Whistler yesterday.

The slopes were not crowded. Apparently Vancouver sports enthusiasts who ski all winter turn to spring activities by now—cycling, roller-blading, sailing, playing tennis, golfing, jogging. But it was wonderful to ski at this time of year in fresh snow.

Nicole, Fernando, and even Juliana, seeing snow for first time, threw snowballs at each other and generally acted like kids. Surprisingly, they managed fairly well on the beginner’s ski slopes, although the snow that spotted Nicole’s scarf, hat, and mitts suggested she fell more than rest of us.

Daniel, an excellent skier, stayed at my side all day. I repeatedly told him he should go and enjoy more advanced slopes rather than sticking with me on intermediate runs. Only when I fell in an awkward position was I glad of his presence. Then he helped me to my feet and put my ski back on for me.



After our lungs had been filled with cool, clean air for several hours and our emotions had been uplifted by rides on chairlifts that float over stands of dark evergreens and expanses of new snow, we were ready to face the last run of the afternoon. Then, skis off and either completely or gently exhausted, we tramped awkwardly to a hotel pub for something to eat or drink.

On entering the darkened, warm, fairly noisy environment, I was surprised to see Bae and Sumi already seated and talking quietly together. We walked toward them. How long had they been inside? Had Bae skied at all?

Earlier I had seen Sumi on the slopes with Marina, an expert who skis routinely in Liechtenstein and Switzerland. Again Sumi seems a natural. I suppose her strength and balance from gymnastics and judo help with any sport. I was surprised she gave up some runs to keep Bae company indoors.

Daniel and some of the others clustered some small tables together so we could sit as a group. Then Daniel sat down beside me, acting like my boyfriend—helping me off with my jacket, ordering me some chicken wings, filling my water bottle, etc. I don't know how to get him to stop doing such things because these gestures could just be taken as being considerate, and I don't want to seem critical.

However, Daniel dominates conversations and acts so certain that his opinions are correct on every subject. Everything he does, or thinks, seems so conventional. Has he really ever reconsidered anything? Especially anything Swiss? Does he really believe in everything he's been taught in Switzerland?

Oh, my! Sumi said this is what the Europeans and Canadians think of the Japanese—that we never question or criticize the way things are done in Japan.

Only Marina, kind to everyone, can jokingly tell Daniel to give other people a chance to talk. She even dared to say, "Daniel, maybe Erika would like to decide for herself what kind of drink she wants." (I had hot chocolate; Daniel had hot rum.)

After almost an hour, we reluctantly left the pleasant pub knowing we needed to be on time to board our bus. It was snowing slightly as we opened the heavy door and went outside. When the bus was ready to depart, Noboru was nowhere in sight. Our teacher-sponsor asked Daniel to check the bar, although none of us had seen him there. Yes, strange I was thinking. Noboru hadn't been there taking charge.

Quiet conversation in the bus continued as we waited.

At a pause in the conversation, I overheard Juliana, in the seat in behind me, saying something like, "Falling in love is an excuse for not having to admit a transfer of power. It means you are giving up your ability to direct your own life."

This sounded like fascinating topic of discussion, but whom was she talking with? Perhaps someone not in our class. I didn't want to twist in my seat to look.

Again Sumi was sitting next to Bae. Through the space between the two seats, I could see them immediately in front of me. Is she trying to cheer him up? She seemed to be trying to keep their conversation going. Sometimes there was a long pause while Sumi waited for Bae to respond. But at every word he uttered, she would again encourage him further.

A few minutes later Noboru showed up loaded down, struggling to carry a new snowboard, skis, poles, and boots. Everyone yelled, laughed, hissed. I don't know if this was for holding up the bus or for always spending too much money (students have noticed).

I was annoyed again when Daniel returned and, without asking, sat down beside me. This forced me to move over to sit by the window, which stopped my conversation with Claudia and Sabine across the aisle.

The warm, comfortable bus with high-back, reclining seats seemed so cozy. Such a waste sitting next to Daniel! I was surprised to find myself thinking that with right person beside you, you could fall in love on such a bus, especially on the two-hour return trip from Whistler when everyone is gently relaxed. How would I feel if Sandy had been with me?

I would have done a lot more thinking about Sandy if Daniel hadn't been attempting to keep me in constant conversation. He was talking further about Switzerland's efficient apprenticeship program, effective political referendum process, and secure banking system, etc. Sitting on the aisle, Daniel created a barrier so I was blocked from others, isolated from those talking, laughing, or singing, and sharing snacks across the aisle and at the back of the bus.

On the return trip on the Sea-to-Sky highway, the bus stopped for a planned meal break in Horseshoe Bay to avoid crossing Lion's Gate Bridge into the city at rush hour. We had a leisurely supper at the locally famous seafood/fish and chip place called Troll's, which is within sight of the ferry terminal. Sumi and Bae seemed to float in and sit together without being aware of anyone else, and she managed to keep him engaged again in a quiet conversation during the entire dinner.

I sat at the end of a long table and Sabine came to my rescue at the last moment by sitting at my side, cutting me off from direct contact with Daniel or Noboru. What a relief to be beyond their radar! When I quietly thanked her for this, she seemed not to hear this comment. Instead in she spoke softly about how Sumi seems to be bringing Bae out of himself. So I am not the only one noticing this.

Most of us were tired. We just wanted to get some sleep. The bus dropped us off at the school, so Sabine came back to apartment to stay the night with me. Mary had said a classmate is always welcome to do this after an event and take advantage of the two beds in my room.

After Sabine and I were settled, and we might have been sleeping, we talked about everything that had happened that day. I told her about my impatience with Daniel for always being at my side.

She said, "I warned you of his interest. Why do you think he was drinking so much at Barry's party?"

"At Barry's party?"

I had no idea what she was talking about.

"Erika, you are so naive. Daniel was drinking then to get up his nerve to approach you."

"You think that's why he was being so obnoxious?"

"Now I think you are being unnecessarily hard on him."

"I don't want to be unfair, but I wish he'd leave me alone so I can make other friends and make my own decisions."

"That's fine, but I wasn't surprised at what I saw at Whistler today," she said. "He's obviously attracted to you. He just doesn't know how to go about trying to get to know you in an acceptable way."

"Why should he be any more awkward about this than any other guy his age?"

"He's probably has never had a girlfriend or even dated."

"Why do you think so?"

"Well, he likely went into banking as a teenager, straight from school. That's the Swiss system. And based on his position, I bet he has worked very hard and especially long hours."

"So that proves he has never dated?"

"No, but it's likely true. I've kept my connection with Hans a secret at work because banks don't approve of employees dating each other. Yet if you are working day and night, you don't have time to go to outside activities to meet other eligible singles."

"So one could possibly never date at all."

"Right. Especially if you keep the code of not dating someone you know from within the bank."

That comment ended this subject. I was glad because I began to think that, around Sabine, I should not be so negative about Daniel in case she takes it personally. He is, after all, from her country.

Again she launched into expressing her frustration with ex-boyfriend, Hans, who still phones her almost every day.

"I can't get away from him. He's suffocating me," she complained.

I was thinking this is somewhat like how I am feeling about Daniel.

"Because we don't want other staff at the bank to know about our affiliation, he has more opportunities to manipulate me."

"How does he do that?" I asked.

"Well, at the very least, I have to be pleasant to him in front of others when I might otherwise want to blow up at him."

After a pause, she admitted, "I am considering changing banks when I go home, just to get away from him, although I begrudge having to do this because I like my job."

"And what about Fernando?" I asked.

"Oh, he's cute and so kind, but I have no romantic interest in Fernando. Did you see me switch bus seats at the last moment so he and Nicole could sit together?"

"Yes, I noticed and wished I could switch seats to get away from Daniel!" I added, "Are you trying to promote something between Fernando and Nicole?"

"Nicole and Fernando are both from Monterey. They could at least see each other once they are back in Mexico."

"Is that enough of a reason for them to be interested in each other?"

"No, certainly not. But Nicole is wasting her time pining over Barry. She would just like the status of having a North American boyfriend. Doesn't she see it's a waste of time longing for a teacher when it's against the rules for teachers to date students?"

I responded, "You can't always rationally determine who you are attracted to."

Sabine jumped on this. "I hope you are not referring to Sandy again."

Obviously I needed an outlet, because I ended up saying more about my misplaced attraction and fascination with Sandy, admitting that I can't seem to get him out of my mind, or my bone marrow!

Sabine confirmed what I already know. About how impractical, difficult, and problematic having him as a boyfriend would be. She stressed that I would be setting myself up for heartbreak—that if Sandy and I were to become close, we would just have to say goodbye in a year.

"I know. This is exactly what happened to my sister. She fell in love with a guy in London and had to leave him behind."

"So you do understand."

"I do."

"So...."

“But, just a minute. I didn’t tell you that my sister and this man have created a small fashion company designing and marketing their own line of clothing. My sister is in charge of marketing in Japan. So falling in love with Andrew hasn’t been a total waste.”

“But what are the chances of something that productive and creative happening again?”

“That’s not the point. What if you can’t help being attracted anyway?”

“Definitely not worth it.”

“Even if ignoring your feelings could mean passing up a wonderful experience?”

“Still not worth it,” Sabine insisted.

She ended up saying, “Oh, Erika, now you have me really worried about you!”



Photographs of Whistler/Blackcomb courtesy of Matthew Gemin, France; cherry blossoms image by author



APRIL # 10—The Gig

Visuals: Receipt from club; scenes on Broadway (no photo of club)

This was the weekend of the “gig” for Sandy’s band and I am, well, still feeling a glow.

Friends from school came to the performance too—Fernando, Sabine, Nicole, Marina, Claudia, Juliana, Se-Eun, and Song—but not Daniel or Noboru. Daniel’s homestay sister was having a birthday party; I was so relieved! (I am trying not to feel guilty about Daniel! I just hope he can find someone interested in him so he will give up on me.) And Noboru had to take one of his father’s business associates to dinner—a man who was in town for only one day. At any rate, except for Fernando, it was primarily a girls’ event.

On our way to the club I got to see a bit more of the city—specifically Broadway, a major east-west street. When we arrived at the club, we had to stand in a line-up outside before getting in. However, we didn’t mind, as it was a very pleasant evening and much socializing was going while we waited. We enjoyed the chance to talk with Canadians, although Se-Eun, like a big sister, seemed to think Song needed protection from a man (probably late-twenties) who seemed to find Song’s innocence appealing.

The club is fairly small. On one side there is a low stage and a dance floor. On the other side and around the dance floor are tables, perhaps 15 tables with six to eight chairs at each. Subdued lighting, including candles, and the music made it a pleasant environment.

When we got seated, the band was already playing. I was surprised that the band members were wearing comfortable, everyday clothes. Only Leah, in a long dress of simple lines,

looked as if she had given any particular thought to her appearance, although she would look gorgeous in anything (but then I think Sandy would too!).

I felt privileged to know the band. As I sat down, Leah smiled at me. A little later Sandy and I noticed each other and I felt a surge of affection in the middle of my chest.

When Leah wasn't needed in the next few of songs, she came over to our table. I introduced her to my friends. With her long blonde hair, she is beautiful and very relaxed in meeting people.

After chatting with Leah for several minutes, Fernando, Sabine, Nicole, Song, and Marina got up and danced as a group to the fast music. Fernando is a surprisingly good dancer for someone who appears to be so quiet. After a while a guy who had been talking to us in the line-up asked Nicole to dance and she seemed happy about that. She is a noticeably good dancer too. The man who had flirted with Song in the line was preoccupied with his friends (an equal number of males and females) who must have come in before him. (So Se-Eun could relax her guard!)

In a few minutes everything went quiet for a moment until some subdued, recorded music began an intermission. This was so the band could take a break. The dance floor filled up with couples wanting to do some slow dancing.

Leah signaled to Sandy to come and sit with us. Initially I felt awkward but was glad when he did. Leah encouraged Sandy and me to dance. For some reason I declined at first. After Leah suggested this a second time, by then the middle of the song, Sandy and I walked out to an open area of the dance floor and then wordlessly he placed his gentle hand on my lower back.

At the end of the song, instead of returning to our table, Sandy reached for two bottles of cold water from an ice chest near the edge of the stage and led me to a high stool at the far side of the room. He stood beside me leaning against the wall, our faces at the same level.

We sipped the water. He commented on Daniel not being present. I don't remember my words but I hope I let him know that Daniel is only a classmate, not someone I am interested in. (Did that really come out okay?)

After a few minor comments, I was surprised when Sandy said, "You are planning to go into architecture?..."

(Did my mouth fall open?)

"Yes. How do you know this?"

"Leah mentioned it."

I was quiet a moment, smiling to myself that the two of them had talked about me.

"I'm taking some time out," he commented.

"Time out?"

"From my architectural studies."

"You're in architecture?"

"Yes. At UBC, the University of British Columbia."

"You are?"

"Yes, but I've taken this past year off."

"Why is this?"

"I have to decide if I am returning to the program in September or staying committed to the band and to doing more to touring, which is the part of being in the band that I like least."

"So how is that looking at this moment?"

"At this moment? Well, tonight music seems to be my main passion, because, well, I'm doing it."

"So your feelings change from day to day?"

"Whatever I'm doing at the moment, I seem to like best. My parents hope I will return to architecture, but they are also afraid I might not, because they know I love songwriting and performing locally with the group."

"I took a year off university too," I admitted.

"You did?"

"Yes, I worked full time while taking some relevant courses that I lacked from studying fine art."

"Such as..."

"Physics and math."

"Ah, valuable. So you've done some rethinking too?"

"Yes. By the end of third year at Tokyo University of the Arts, I knew I was more interested in becoming an architect than being an art historian."

"But you must have had an initial interest in fine art."

"Of course. Because I lived at home, being on the wrong track didn't involve that much financial hardship, so I finished my fine art degree as well as those math and physics courses."

When I felt I might have been looking at Sandy's face too intently, I looked at his fingers on the cold, wet bottle of water. Nice hands.

"So you completed your BA and the extra courses?"

"Yes, even though I knew I would still have to present a portfolio and write an entrance exam to get into architecture."

"And you've done all that?"

"Yes. I have been accepted into Tokyo's Institute of Technology to do architecture there."

"You must have done very well."

"Well enough to be accepted."

Again I wondered if I was looking too intensely at Sandy. So I forced myself to look away. Toward the table. I caught Leah's eye and she smiled.

"Shall we dance again?" Sandy asked.

“All right.”

Sandy placed our water bottles under the stool. He took my hand in his, which was now cool from the icy water. He led me to a space on the dance floor.

We talked more as we slow danced, our faces close together.

“So do you plan to begin your architecture program this coming September?”

“No, a year from then. I’m here studying English this year, as I won’t have time to be away once I start architecture.”

Sandy responded, “That’s wonderful. Some of my university friends think I’m highly irresponsible for taking this year off.”

“No, you’re not. It’s far better for you to take time now than to realize later you’re doing something that’s not your main love.”

Sandy’s chin fleetingly brushed my forehead; I wished he had held it there. That momentary touch made me aware of my skin. It’s sensors. We continued to dance. I felt like the two of us were in a cocoon.

When the lights flickered, Sandy quickly accompanied me to the table and then dashed back to the stage. Leah and the others were ready to resume the music.

I felt cutoff by Sandy’s hasty departure. Disconnected. Sabine, the only person to whom I’ve ever mentioned Sandy, gave me a knowing smile and whispered, “You do look cute together.”

After playing a couple more songs, Leah suggested that Sandy introduce a song. I was surprised and felt that she was putting him on the spot. But obviously there is a side to Sandy other than the shy person he appears, to me, to be.

He seemed at ease in explaining that he and Larry had written the song together six months ago and he alluded to what it is about—a break up, I think. At least the end of some kind of a relationship. Larry’s? Sandy’s? Knowing this, I heard the words deeply, as if Sandy were expressing something in a diary that maybe I shouldn’t be “reading.”

A couple of minutes after the song, he looked toward our table. I smiled at him, but then felt self-conscious again about doing so.

I didn’t realize how much I had been preoccupied by Sandy until I heard a confusing snip-it of conversation a few minutes later.

As Claudia had headed off to the washroom, Juliana said to Se-Eun, “What is Claudia thinking of. She’s lovely looking, intelligent, ambitious, and rich. Why is she not choosing someone from Taiwan? She’s got to be highly desirable there.”

Se-Eun defended Claudia by saying, "It's not always easy to find someone. Making the initial connection...that's the hard part. Besides, apparently her Italian boyfriend assumed that, having become a Taiwanese citizen, he would be living in Taiwan permanently."

"Really."

"Yes. He was forced from his position there when the company merged with an international corporation."

"So he didn't expect to end up doing around-the-globe consulting for them?" Juliana commented.

"No, he certainly didn't."

As fascinating as this sounded I didn't try to get in on this conversation. I was back to noticing every nuance of interaction between those on stage. I especially liked it when Leah seemed to give Sandy what looked like an understanding smile.

When those in our group whose homestays are on the North Shore got ready to leave, I felt it was much too early. The band was still playing. How could I possibly leave while I could still watch Sandy on stage?

Claudia and Se-Eun, who also live in the city, agreed to stay longer. In fact they delayed with me until after the "last" song, much applause, and an encore.

As the audience began to drift away, Sandy approached the table and told me he would be helping Leah and Larry transport some of the equipment to their place and asked me if I would like a ride home.

"Yes. Thank you," I responded. I was embarrassed that couldn't think of anything to add besides joining Claudia and Se-Eun in complimenting Sandy on the performance. They encouraged me by saying that they would go on the bus together. They set off, seeming pleased that I wouldn't be left on my own. And, of course, I was secretly delighted.

Leah signaled me to come onto the stage. As band members made trips to the cars and van in the back parking lot in order to load the sound equipment and merchandise (CDs and T-shirts), I stayed with the instruments.

When everything was removed from the stage, I walked with Sandy toward his car. He opened the passenger door for me and, after starting the ignition, he apologized for the heater of his car being slow to warm up.

Driving alone together seemed so potentially intimate that I felt awkward again. After a few general comments about the evening, we were fairly quiet. I was aware of his beautiful hands on the steering wheel. I wished I could touch them. But at that moment there was an almost painful distance between us.

In driving into the parking space under Leah and Larry's window, I recognized this was our last chance for conversation.

I wanted to talk about what we might have in common. I wanted to ask if we could ever see each other again. I wanted to invite him upstairs for tea. So why did I just keep commenting on aspects of the concert and telling Sandy about my cousin and his band?

Finally alluding to the song that he had introduced on stage, Sandy somehow managed to tell me that he doesn't have a girlfriend and that he and his former girlfriend broke up a few months after the band started touring last year. (I hope I didn't imagine all this!)

Why do I have no recollection of what I said in response to this disclosure? I know I felt uncomfortable, ill at ease, despite at the same time feeling glad.

A moment later I was disappointed when Larry and Leah stopped their van next to Sandy's car. The process of getting the equipment inside the apartment meant that Sandy and I didn't complete our conversation. In fact, we hardly even had a chance to say goodnight.

So now I am in my room, in my pyjamas, taping this, still feeling Sandy's presence, and missing him. (Yes, I don't care how this sounds. I am missing him!)

And I am wondering how I will manage to see him again.



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