



FEBRUARY # 7—Flying to Toronto

Visuals: photographs of Toronto houses and downtown

On the plane, I still couldn't believe Toronto is five hours away. And that isn't even on the opposite shore of Canada, just somewhere in the middle.

Feeling the effect of the stress I've suffered around Dad in Vancouver, I am anxious to stay away from him during this trip. I don't want to have to endure more scenes where he is trying to "talk some sense into me." By this he means giving me more reasons to stop seeing Sandy and to open my eyes to what Noboru could offer me.

Luckily I was across the aisle from Dad on the plane, not next to him, so I didn't feel compelled to talk to him at any length (thank goodness). But we will be thrown together for five days! I am now more sympathetic to Yoko with the situation that she has sketched out in her emails—about Dad pressuring her to break up with Andrew and to make a commitment to Koji.

What will it be like when I am back in Japan now that Dad and Noboru know each other? I never considered this when I looked forward to Mom and Dad's visit to Vancouver. Now I wish that I had never introduced Dad to my friends or at least to Noboru!

Over Christmas when Claudia had asked me how I intend to deal with Noboru in returning to Japan, I didn't see Noboru's interest in me as a major difficulty, because he knows I have no romantic interest in him. However, I wasn't envisioning Dad involved in this dynamic. I certainly didn't see him welcoming Noboru into our world and encouraging a permanent connection between us. What a source of potential conflict!

When Mom and Dad and I finally landed in Toronto International Airport, we got out into the cold air to go

downtown to the hotel. Having left Vancouver with daffodils and ornamental cherry blossoms unfolding, I am shocked at how frigid it is in Toronto. Apparently a snowstorm is threatening. Mary told us to bring winter clothes—obviously a good idea.

We've only just had a snack at the hotel bistro and settled into our room on the eighteenth floor. Twinkling lights are below the window but not a hill or mountain in sight. The dark area to left is Lake Ontario. So we are in Toronto, but I haven't seen anything that I will recognize in the morning.



Tomorrow's schedule, as recommended by Mary, is to include the Art Gallery of Ontario, Royal Ontario Museum, University College and the Art Gallery at the University of Toronto, the textile museum, and Yorkville. Yes, I know that sounds like a lot to do.

I am writing this by hand. Mom and Dad are trying to sleep (we're sharing a room) so they are anxious for me to put the light out. I'm still feeling Sandy's presence. I wish he were here so I could give him a very long hug. But no flute practice today.





FEBRUARY # 8—Toronto Gallery Hopping

Visuals: photographs of art school, Royal Ontario Museum, Yorkville Galleries, UC Gallery Art Gallery and quadrangle

Sure enough, when I awoke this morning, and looked down from the window of the hotel, I could see snow blanketing the city. Cars and streetcars moved slowly along the streets, leaving gray tracks in the snow. Warmly dressed people in long coats, with hoods or bulky hats, moved with their heads down watching where they were stepping in their boots.

As planned, Dad had already left for the first event of his conference (hurray!). That was being held in the hotel. Mom and I had breakfast downstairs and then we put on our warmest clothing, including boots, in order to tramp from one gallery to next.

Sandy had asked me to photograph the art school, which is just around the corner from the Art Gallery of Ontario. It is a very controversial building that gives me a sense of unease. It certainly doesn't make any attempt to fit in with the surrounding buildings. For my taste, it is too literal in its attempt to suggest art making (crayons and coloured pencils leaning against a pencil box?!). Nevertheless photographing it for Sandy made me feel close to him.

The art gallery was in the process of changing shows so we spent some time looking at the permanent collection (Henry Moore sculpture and Canadian painting) but (dare admit) almost as much time in the gallery shop. They have a wonderful collection of books on architecture, some with inspirational renderings.

To avoid the full impact of the cold, we took a very short subway ride to get to Yorkville. We wanted to see mainly art, so we headed for the old houses that have been converted into colourful galleries. Some of the exhibitions are purposefully challenging the viewer's attitudes toward what art is.

From there we walked to the Royal Ontario Museum. It offers so much to see—from medieval armour, 19th century textiles, First Nations carvings, to modern furniture design. I loved the building, but marble floors are hard on one's feet. We had lunch in the cafeteria.

After leaving there we walked a couple more blocks to have tea in the downstairs of the University of Toronto's Hart House—another of the attractions Mary listed on the walking tour map she made for me.



The University of Toronto's University College is next door. And the Art Gallery Centre is part of that. We wanted lots of time for this gallery even though it is very small. Mary's sister had said that it was exhibiting architectural drawings of campus buildings from the earliest built in middle of 19th century to most the recent ones. I wish I could have access to copies of these plans to study various rendering modes and drafting styles over the past 150 years. I was fascinated by everything from lettering on floor plans to elevation sketches. Unfortunately there was no exhibition catalogue.

I especially wished Sandy and I could have been looking at this exhibition together. This made me really miss him, almost to point of feeling nauseous. Does this make sense?

Is this what being in love is?



On our way back to hotel, Mom and I went to the textile museum, but we had only an hour to see three floors. Not nearly enough time to enjoy all that was being offered for viewing! Certainly not time to read the documentation accompanying the striking textile pieces—contemporary quilts, historic international textiles, and articles of clothing owned by famous people at pivotal times of their lives.

We left reluctantly but Mom and I knew we needed a few minutes back at the hotel to get changed before meeting Dad to go out for dinner. Still Mom was patient with me when I stopped to photograph a few individual buildings along the way. She is willing to stand waiting, whereas Dad always tries to talk me out of photographing architecture.

Mom and I could have easily managed supper without one reference to Noboru but Dad, in referring to his conference, said more than once that he wished Noboru could have been able to attend some of the sessions. In talking about the architectural exhibition that Mom and I had seen during the day, Sandy's name came up more than once. Without any actual comments or comparison to Noboru, Dad made his attitude toward Sandy patently apparent. "Useless infatuation" continues to be his summary statement about us.

Four more days to go of having to put up with Dad's statements criticizing Sandy and discrediting me for loving him.



Photographs of Yorkville, University College, and University of Toronto Art Centre courtesy of Michael Roy Baker, Toronto, Canada; above doorway by author



FEBRUARY # 9—Photographing in Toronto Sculpture Park

Visuals: photographs of Toronto houses, and architectural fragments and sculpture in Guildwood's sculpture park

I was glad that again Dad had left for a conference session before Mom and I got up. Mom and I walked from the hotel to University Avenue and then along a few blocks of Bloor Street (two main Toronto Streets) just to get a sense of the city. We noticed that there are noticeably fewer Asians in Toronto than in Vancouver.

Mom had planned to visit a large display room of medical equipment for the sake of her business. So when we arrived there, we went our separate ways.

I set off on the subway to visit Daphne at her intriguing old apartment in a residential area. Like some of the homes there, her apartment is nearly 100 years old.



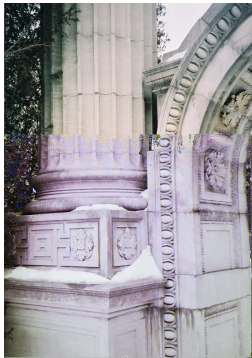
Daphne welcomed me graciously and she served freshly baked muffins and a bowl of homemade soup. Then, warmly dressed, we headed to a streetcar to go to Union Station to meet Mom again. Streetcars seem like a friendly mode of transportation as people hop on and off in middle of the street. Even in snow, the streetcar was clanging and rocking as it moved slowly through areas that suggest diverse cultures of the city. Daphne confirmed for me the Korean, Portuguese, Italian, and Chinese sections.

Daphne and I met Mom at the entrance to Union Station, a stately, old-for-Canada, architectural space that takes its inspiration from a Roman temple. The three of us caught a Go-Train to Guildwood to visit the sculpture park.

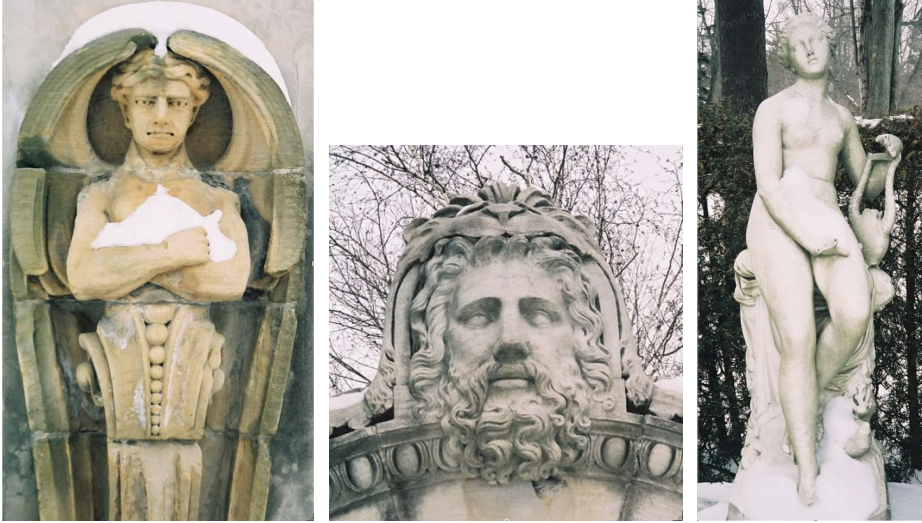
As the train pulled out of Union Station's dark, cold, high-ceilinged track area, my eyes were shocked by bright sunlight. I could see warehouse buildings that were part of Toronto's original waterfront. I had read about them an article in an architectural magazine at Sandy's house. This is a reclamation project that finds new uses—art galleries, restaurants, housing—for old buildings while maintaining the essential, historic character of the area (originally a distillery!).

Go-Trains run on time and are very comfortable. Backyards flash by as the train streaks through fenced neighbourhoods. Trains stop slowly, quietly, and pull away without any apparent delay. Cynthia, Mary's sister, met us at a Go-Train station and drove Daphne, Mom, and me to the sculpture park.

What a fascinating place! Some of the grounds are lightly treed with trails from one area to another, but there are also large, open meadows, all displaying segments of architecture and sculptures mostly from 19th century buildings. The now overcast sky meant there weren't any deep shadows in the recesses of the architectural pieces, and the light reflecting off the snow perfectly lit the details of the cornices, entranceways, decorative windows, archways, reliefs, colonnades, and freestanding sculptures. I can't wait to go over my photographs with Sandy!



During my couple of hours of photographing, Daphne, Cynthia, and Mom, chatting easily, followed behind me. One wall relief amused me as it reminds me of Darcy (Colin Firth) as he appears in *Bridget Jones' Diary*, a movie that my classmates and I saw recently. A sculptured head looks similar to one that Sandy created in an art class and refers to as his King Herod head. And the statue of the female, well, I just like her grace.



When I had completed photographing the pieces that particularly interested me, we drove to Cynthia's house. It is a tastefully decorated, recently renovated suburban home, where her children had been raised. I was pleased to hear something about Cynthia's son marrying a young woman from Mexico suggesting such out-of-country unions do happen.

Cynthia said, "Yes, our children are part of the international community. The world is their oyster. It is different than the world we grew up in where we didn't know anyone outside our small community, and we rarely travelled."

Mom added, "Yes, their generation makes the world seem a lot smaller as a result of their willingness to learn each other's language and understand each other's culture."

I was totally pleased when Laura, Cynthia's Mexican daughter-in-law, unexpectedly arrived at the door. She was returning a small appliance she had borrowed from Cynthia to try out before determining whether to buy one for herself or not.

She said she was in a hurry, but on the way out, when I accompanied her alone to the front door, she revealed that she knows I have a Canadian boyfriend. She paused and mentioned some of the difficulties involved in marrying a Canadian when you are from another country. Of course she noted the time and expense involved in traveling back and forth to spend holidays

with each other's family. But she also admitted it's worth it to be with the person you love.

"You speak English very well. Were you proficient before you moved to Toronto?" I asked her.

"I knew basic English then. I did get fluent enough to graduate from university here with a lot of language help from all of Cynthia's family."

"Plus your own efforts, so you have done very well."

Laura looked at her watch and apologized for rushing, having only 20 minutes to get to a client's place. As I said goodbye I wished that we'd had more time to discuss details of the problems of going long periods without seeing family, completing university in a non-native language, and being a wife to someone from another culture. Do I dare I admit these are challenges that I hope I might need to face? Do I really confess to having such hopes!

I rejoined Mom and Cynthia in her large kitchen. I think that they had continued with a similar conversation as that of Laura and me, because Mom revealed that I hope to study architecture at UBC in September. Again, how thrilling it is to hear someone verbalizing my dream!

Soon it was time to say goodbye. Mom and I went back to the hotel and dressed for dinner and to go to a symphony. While Mom put on her makeup, I had a few minutes to practise my flute. We went alone, as Dad was involved in a late conference activity (no comment!).

Our program featured the music of Robert and Clara Schumann, including his piano concerto and many love songs with commentary by the conductor. I am embarrassed to say I wept through some of the performance, so I was glad only Mom was with me. So romantic. However, the explanation was disheartening regarding Clara's father's life-long opposition to their union. Too easy to identify with!



Photographs of Toronto houses, sculpture, and architectural fragments by the author



FEBRUARY # 10—Overnight Stay at Niagara Falls

Visuals: Photographs of Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake

We are now in a hotel at Niagara Falls. Keeping a journal without my tape recorder or computer seems so laborious, and Mom and Dad are again anxious for me to turn out light.

Good view of frozen falls from our hotel window. Went on a tour under the falls that scared me. Glad when that was over.



Also saw lots of touristy shops. For all the popularity of the falls with foreign visitors (especially the Japanese!), there really isn't that much to do, although we had a very nice dinner at a restaurant tonight with a view of the falls lit up in the dark. However, I particularly enjoyed our time at Niagara-on-the-Lake, a restored, small 19th century Ontario town. The homes of that time have been converted into intriguing shops and galleries.

Mary had recommended a particular shop for its delicious fudge (she was right!) and another one for ice cream.

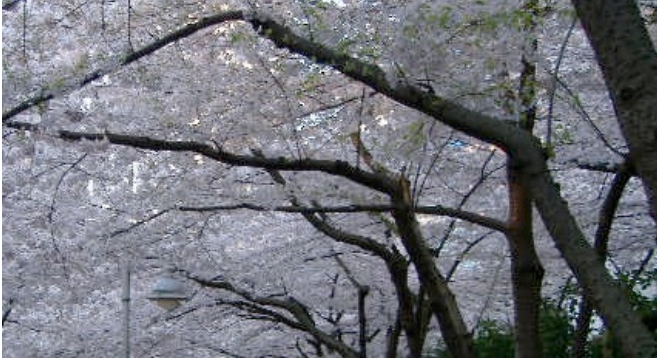
But being here in the cold, eating ice cream just didn't appeal to me.

I'm missing Sandy as usual. Can't talk about this when Dad is around as it only makes him angry, although Mom seems to know how I am feeling. Also, Mom understands that when I am able to get in a few minutes practice on my flute, I am doing this with Sandy in mind (more honestly, in my heart). Dad, on the other hand, thinks this devotion to practice is commendable because it shows some discipline on my part. If he only knew what I am feeling when I play!

Thank goodness we will be heading back to Vancouver tomorrow morning. Snow is threatening again so Dad has arranged for us to fly from Niagara to Toronto airport rather than driving.

Apparently the return flight to Vancouver won't seem as long as coming here was, because we will be traveling with the sun rather than against it. (Why does this suggest an image of warmth? Could this be misleading?)

Photographs: Opening image of Niagara Falls courtesy of Gail (Bullen) Baker, Vancouver, Canada; other Niagara Falls images courtesy of Martha Ho, Vancouver, Canada



FEBRUARY # 11—Return to Vancouver

Visuals: photographs of airport, airport sculpture, and cherry blossoms

Well, my comment from last night's diary entry—about returning to Vancouver being quicker than the flight east to Toronto—didn't turn out to be true.

After flying from Niagara in a small plane (and I don't like small planes) and then changing to a regular one at Toronto International Airport, we sat on the runway for over an hour. Snow was coming down heavily; the plane needed to be de-iced. At one point we thought we might not get to leave Toronto at all then.

When we did finally take off, I worried about being more than an hour late. Would Sandy be able to stay at UBC that long so he could visit me on his way home? I wanted to see him so badly. Butterflies? For sure my stomach was feeling something unusual.

To try to divert my mind, I watched a so-called romantic movie.

It documented the dissolution of a marriage between a highly placed mining executive (husband) and a psychiatrist (wife). When the husband begins to question his part in directing unethical international mining operations, he is ready to leave his job without having an equally lucrative position to go to. The wife, a materialist unwilling to even consider lowering her standard of living, begins to manipulate him on a daily basis to stay in his job despite his increasing depression.

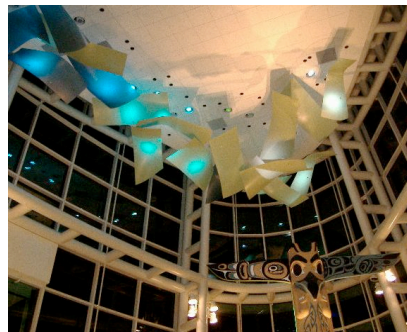
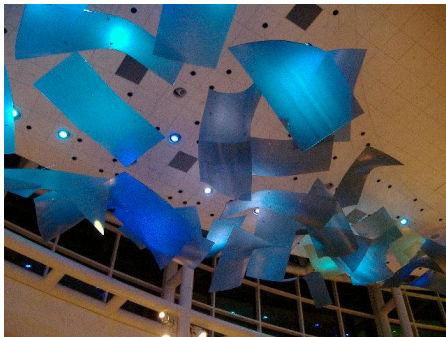
Meanwhile his administrative assistant, who he has been close to for sometime, quits due to the company's immoral business practices. He realizes that to free himself to do the same, he must leave his wife. In doing so he begins a hopeful, new relationship with this younger administrative assistant. While his interaction with her is idealized (of course she is beautiful), the movie is still believable as they struggle to create a new, more ethical life for themselves.

However, when the ex-wife shows up again and artfully works at reclaiming him and ruining his new relationship, this man forgets everything he had learned about her ample manipulating power revealed in the past. How could a guy be so gullible? In watching the extent to which the wife was a user and manipulator, I was reminded of Sandy's ex-girlfriend. How had I not thought of her even once during my trip? I had forgotten that she is back in Vancouver—on her own—and wants to get Sandy back again as her boyfriend.

When Mom, Dad, and I landed in Vancouver, we walked outside the airport terminal to pass some time, as they had a layover prior to a connecting flight. An appealing, treed walkway, designed primarily for people to walk their dogs, is also a pleasant place for humans to stretch their legs.

The air felt so warm by comparison with that of Toronto. It was becoming dark but we could see cherry blossoms and some early spring flowers, and we could smell new leaves emerging on the trees.

Secretly feeling anxious about the time, I went back into the terminal with Mom and Dad to collect my luggage and have some tea before their flight. I confess I kept peeking at my watch, wondering if I still would be able to see Sandy.



On our final sip of tea, without discussion, Dad directed us outside to where the taxis are parked. Mom and I were teary-eyed, as we knew we would miss each other immediately. Dad seemed glad to have something specific to do. He hailed a cab, put my luggage in the trunk, and slammed the lid closed.

"Safe trip home, Mom and Dad. Thanks for everything. See you in April and give hugs to Yoko and Kiri for me."

"Of course," Mom responded.

I strained to turn around in my seat to watch the two of them as my cab drove away. Mom continued to wave until I was out of sight, but Dad immediately turned to walk back into the terminal.

Along Granville Street, I saw more cherry trees in bloom under the streetlights. And, compared to my first drive from the airport, I felt a reassuring sense of familiarity in knowing about the diversity of that street—from the mansions on the hill to the down-and-out hotels on a strip just after you cross the Granville Street Bridge.

I was so relieved when the taxi dropped me off at Mary's. I felt as if I had been away for weeks rather than just five days. Of course I was yearning to see Sandy. But I was still worrying—had Sandy been able to wait this long before heading home?





FEBRUARY # 12—Sandy’s Devastating Confession

Visuals: Photograph of mezzanine in apartment

When Sandy phoned almost immediately, I was thrilled just to hear his voice. He was calling from a phone on campus so he simply asked me if he could drop in on his way home.

“Absolutely!”

But when he arrived and hugged me without kissing me, I sensed that something was wrong. That something had happened while I was away.

“So glad you are back.”

“Me too.”

Mary was pleased to see Sandy again so we chatted a few minutes. At the dining room table I showed Sandy some photographs on my camera of the architectural park in Guildwood.

“What an incredible idea. An architectural sculpture park. I look forward to seeing those photographs once they are on your computer.”

“Could I make the two of you something to eat?” Mary asked.

Sandy looked at me questioningly.

Perhaps interpreting his look, Mary said, “But you maybe want to go out together.”

“Shall we go and get something?” Sandy asked.

“Sure, although I’m not actually hungry, as we ate on the plane.”

I got my jacket and bag and told Mary I’d be back shortly.

But as we headed down the first flight of stairs, Sandy indicated that we might sit in the mezzanine saying, “Actually, it’s probably more private to talk here than in a cafe.”

“What is it, Sandy? Something’s wrong.”

A new wave of fear went through me as I sat down beside him on the small sofa.

"I don't know how to start," he said, looking down and then rubbing one running shoe against the other, his hands in his lap, not touching me.

My major insecurity reared up and I felt I needed to know immediately, so impulsively I grabbed onto a couple of his fingers and blurted, "It has something to do with her...."

"Yes."

More fear, so without thinking (or not believing this possible?), I blundered, "You've become sexually involved again."

"Not quite."

"Not quite!" I dropped his hand. "Sandy, what does that mean? You and I are not quite sexually involved. How can that be for you and her too?!"

I didn't mean to raise my voice.

"Tell me immediately the worst of what has happened."

"I want to explain the circumstances, Erika."

"I need to know what happened!"

I guess tears were in my eyes already, because Sandy responded as if to get it over quickly.

"She arrived at the house when I was home alone the other night. She was distraught. She ended up in my bed. We were both nude."

"Nude! Nude! Sandy, you and I haven't even been completely nude together," I jumped up feeling outraged. "How could this just happen?"

"Er, please try not to make this any more difficult for me than it already is. While that was bad enough and you need to know that, you also need to know that nothing happened. Nothing happened, Er."

"You say, 'ended up in bed together,' as if no one was responsible. But if you were there, Sandy, how did you 'end up' in bed with her and nude? How could this happen to your rational, capable self? Things like this don't just happen against your will."

Maybe I didn't even want to know more, couldn't bear to hear the details, as I spilled out, "You've been jealous enough of Noboru. How would you react if I had 'ended up' in bed with him, nude? That's something I've wanted to save to share only with you."

"I know, Er, and I am so sorry. Beyond sorry."

He reached up and took my hand. I was weeping, and I suppose he was not surprised by my reaction because he offered me a small package of tissues. I sat down again and wiped my eyes.

"How can you expect me to be understanding about your being in bed with her, even if there were the most extenuating circumstances, even if nothing technically happened? Sandy, I'm sure that wouldn't seem okay if that were me with Noboru!"

"I know, Erika. But please, let me explain."

I was too emotionally exhausted to object, so I listened as he spoke, but I did not look at him.

"The night before last, Serena's girlfriend, the one she's been staying with (in the house where you and I drove her), well, she was away for the evening. Serena was home with this friend's husband and two sleeping children. About 10:30 the husband ordered Serena out of the house and told her not to come back. I don't know the circumstances."

"Perhaps she tried to get him in bed."

"Perhaps, but I don't know that. Anyway, she got a cab and came directly to my place. While she'd never visited before, she somehow got my address so she arrived without giving me any warning. Despite seeing that she was distressed, I told her she couldn't stay. I made some phone calls to see who could take her, where I could drive her. That included phoning Gordon, whose wife, knowing her as band manager, has been relatively friendly with her. But with their two babies and enough interruptions to their sleep, Gordon said they couldn't have her stay at their house. The other band members who Serena knows are away on tour, so I wasn't able to ask any of them to take her."

"And would they have taken her?"

"Perhaps not. But it was getting too late to make any more calls. And that's when it got worse."

"Got worse?"

"Yes, her sister called from London. London, England. On Serena's cell phone. To tell her that their mother had just died."

"Died. Really? Died? Could she have been making that up?"

"No. I talked with her sister after a few minutes, after Serena's sobbing kept her from talking. I met Paula once when she came to Vancouver. She is a decent person and is sympathetic to those used by Serena."

"Despite having such a sister...."

"Anyway Paula explained that Serena had been in London in early January. To visit their mother who was dying of cancer. London is where the sisters grew up before moving to Edmonton in their teens when their mother remarried. But a couple of years ago, their mother moved back to London. Anyway, in January, Serena returned there when their mother

was not expected to live much longer. And Serena, broken up with the Edmonton guitarist...."

"With Shane?"

"Yes."

"So she is not even his manager now?"

"No, apparently not."

A shot of fear went through me. So it's true. Serena alone. Looking for an attachment. Someone to use.

"Well, anyway, Serena was free to go to London without worrying exactly when she would be back in Canada."

Sandy continued, "But rather than sharing her mom's last few days, well, their mother seemed to rally. It wasn't feasible for Serena to stay with her sister indefinitely in a cramped bed-sitting room in the city close to the hospital. Yet a daily commute to their mother's house, about an hour and a half out of London, seemed out of the question. So Serena returned to Edmonton apparently intending to try to reconstruct a life on her own. That is until she heard about our 'Reunion Gig.'

At that point she decided to come back to Vancouver. To see the show and look for work here."

"And to get back together with you."

"That might have been what she had in mind."

"Does she plan to stay here?" I asked impulsively as another wave of dread went through me.

"If she can find work. She intends to apply for a job as a manager of a record store."

"If she can find work...."

"Please, Erika, let me continue...."

"Yes, do."

"We had been in the kitchen when she received the phone call from Paula. In receiving the news of her mother's death, she was understandably upset. I stayed in the kitchen with her for a long time, trying to calm her, until she agreed to try to sleep. I showed her to the guest room and gave her a robe to sleep in."

"The white one. The one I have worn?"

Sandy stated firmly, "Erika, don't make this harder on both of us."

But then his voice faltered in saying, "She was pleading with me. Telling me that she didn't want to be alone that night."

"Or any night."

Sandy ignored this comment.

"Well, when I thought she was settled there, finally asleep...."

"You stayed with her until she went to sleep...."

"Yes, and then I went to my room and got into bed."

"Nude?"

"Yes, as I often do."

"But alone in the house with a woman who wants to get back sexually involved with you?"

"With her arrival I had not finished doing the wash that I had started. I hadn't put my pyjamas into the drier."

"So, predictably, she came into your room?"

"Yes. She did. I was in the state between being half awake and half asleep."

"And of course she was nude too."

"Yes. And sobbing."

"So you 'comforted' her?"

"Er, please don't use our language on her."

"But you didn't jump up immediately, get dressed, and take her out to the kitchen to talk or call her a cab to get her to a motel or to a women's shelter."

"No, I regret I didn't do any of those things."

With a raised voice, I stated, "Sandy, I was away less than five whole days. Five days! If she lives here, what will happen if I am away for five months?"

"Er...."

"How can you let her back into your life? How could you let yourself be in bed with her?" I cried. "I don't want my partner comforting another woman in bed. Is that too much to ask? Because I don't think it is."

Finally looking at me, he said, "Please, Er, I'd like to finish telling you."

I stayed quiet, but he looked down at his hands again and seemed to have trouble continuing.

"She didn't have any money, so going to a motel was out of the question. Anyway, she finally fell asleep..."

"In your arms,"

"Erika.... Please, don't.... When she fell asleep..."

"And you slipped out of bed..."

"I got into my robe..."

"The robe you should have been in all along!"

"True. Then I gathered up some bedding and spent the rest of the night trying to sleep on a sofa downstairs."

I stood up again.

"Sandy, if she stays in Vancouver, how can I know that this won't happen again? It seems to me that she will always be able to count on you whenever she is in need. So it is to her advantage to always be in need. So she can have you back. Will I ever be able to be secure about us with her in the picture?"

"I want you to feel secure about us."

"Yes, but how can I? I need to know we have some special ways of relating that we don't share with anyone else. I thought we assumed that this is what we want."

Looking up at me, he said, "It is. It is what I want. You know that, Er."

"Are you forgetting, in your compassion for this woman, that you broke up with her because she thought it was acceptable to be sexually involved with two men at once?"

Looking down at his shoes again, he said, "I have never regretted breaking up with her."

"But how will you make certain that this can't happen again? I need to know that for sure, Sandy."

He seemed exhausted and didn't respond. Without looking at him I began to pace the mezzanine's carpeted floor between the high stained glass window and the stairs.

"If the circumstances seem understandable to you now, Sandy, how can I know that they won't seem acceptable to you again? That you won't react in the same way? If I go away, will she have you back completely? If that is what you want, then please tell me. But if you want me in your life...

"You know I want you."

"Then I have to know how you will stand up to her and not succumb to her need. That her need won't come before our commitment. I have to know how you will say, 'No,' to her when she crosses the line and expects you to do something that feels wrong to you or to do something that you will be embarrassed to tell me about."

Sandy really did look beaten, but I couldn't make this easier on him. I knew that this had to be a turning point for us. I couldn't be in relationship with him if we would always be threatened by someone having an undefined power over him.

"So how are you going to get her to realize that you are not available to her? That you are simply not there for her? You need to figure this out, Sandy, because I must know this for us to go on."

I was a bit surprised that this came out so strong. Now his eyes were filling too.

"I will let her know my commitment is to you alone," he stated looking down.

"Have you talked to your mom about what happened?"

"No...." he responded without looking at me.

I decided I would stay silent.... to see if he would resume his commentary.

"Mom and Dad returned from Seattle early the next morning. Mom had dropped Dad off at the studio. I'd left a note on the fridge saying that Serena was in my room and that I was downstairs. I had awoken early, put my washing in the dryer, taken a shower downstairs, and been able to get dressed from the contents of the drier without going upstairs. Then I made more phone calls to find a place for Serena to stay."

Sandy looked at me and then continued, "By the time Mom came downstairs, I had talked with a university friend who seemed pleased to have someone available immediately to housesit her cat and plants in her basement suite near UBC. Due to an emergency, this friend needed to leave that morning. She said that she would put the key under the mat since she needed to leave before Serena could get there."

"How did your mom respond to all this?"

"Mom asked no questions but was obviously alarmed about my renewed contact with Serena. She offered to drive her to my friend's place and drop her off on her way to somewhere. I didn't question that 'somewhere' at the time, or consider that I could easily drop Serena off on my way to campus."

"Your mom probably offered to drive Serena just to get her out of the house without further contact with you."

"Yes, I think so. Mom didn't ask any details about the previous night, although she may have wondered why both my bed and the guest room bed had been used and that I was downstairs."

"So what did your mom do?"

"She brought me my backpack, runners, car keys, jacket, and the lunch that I had packed from my supper leftovers. I left by the patio door and went off to university without going upstairs. Without risking meeting Serena. Apparently Serena got up as I backed up the driveway. She was miffed that I would just go off without any discussion. This was despite the fact that I had found her a free place to live for a week. Mom, who had never met her before, apparently didn't get into any extended conversation with her then or as she dropped her off."

"But haven't you talked to your mom about how she came to be there and what happened?"

"No. I don't care to discuss any of this with anyone, Erika."

"Well, even if you don't tell your mom the details, maybe you could ask her advice on how not to be used by Serena in the future. It seems to me your mom wouldn't want to see you continuing to be controlled by her."

Quietly he responded, "It's true. She wouldn't."

"So take some time to determine this, Sandy. We, you and I, need to know how you will cease to be manipulated by her. When you can prove this, phone me. But don't contact me until then."

(Did I really say that!)

Sandy did not speak. I could see how hurt he was. How worried. He looked seriously at me as he stood up. We did not touch or say goodbye. I watched him walk down the stairs, his shoulders seeming to suffer under a terrible weight.

As he reached the bottom of the stairs I wanted so badly to call him back. But there were tears in my throat. I had missed him so much for those five long days in Toronto, and now I have told him to not have any further contact with me—for how long?

I am leaving to go back to Japan in 34 days. Thirty-four days! How can we be fighting now, separated now, when our time together is so precious?



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