



JANUARY # 1— Polar Bear Swim and Dinner at Sandy’s House

Visuals: photographs and video of swimmers on beach and from Barry’s place, pink light on the mountains

As Sandy and I walked down to the shore from Leah and Larry’s parking space, we were glad that we were in warm clothing and weren’t about to strip down, take off our shoes, and rush into the ocean. I felt sympathy for those standing in bathing suit and sandals wrapped in towels, shivering but apparently determined.

Some of the swimmers were wearing silly costumes — plastic water wings, ridiculous hats, pirate outfits with eye patch, ballerinas in tutus, etc. An ambulance was standing by ready to treat those about to suffer from hypothermia.

After a few minutes, we walked over to Barry’s apartment, buzzed, and went up the elevator to join my classmates. It felt longer than 14 hours since we had seen everyone. All seemed to be in good spirits despite lack of sleep. Some of the guys were admitting to having hangovers.

Apparently everyone had stayed at Bae’s place until 4:00 a.m., trying to eat off the alcohol they had consumed before going out in the cold to catch cabs to go home. I was glad I hadn’t needed to do that. How much nicer it was to have been cuddling with Sandy in front of the fireplace!

What a pleasant surprise to find Claudia there with the others. I was glad too that she was able to see Sandy so attentive to me, even though she and I didn’t have a chance to talk much alone. After some introductions and reintroductions, Barry offered us warm apple cider— particularly welcome after being out in the cool air on the beach.

Some of the guys had their jackets on and were coming and going from the balcony to watch the activities below. Did they still need the cool air to clear their heads? Most of the girls

stayed indoors and were watching from the low window that stretches the full length of the living room.

Barry's Christmas tree made the room seem warm and pleasant, yet I thought of the Japanese superstition about having a Christmas tree up after New Year's. Mary had told me that Canadians do not share that superstition and that she follows the British tradition that celebrates the 12 days of Christmas, so the season isn't officially over until January 6. In fact, she admits, her Christmas tree does not come down at least until the Sunday after that.

Mary had also explained to me the difference between this and the American tradition that starts with American Thanksgiving, which in the U.S. is the last weekend in November, and ends on Christmas Day. All the Christmas decorations promptly disappear as Americans go back to work the day after Christmas Day. No Boxing Day. Mary's attitude has me agreeing, "How awful!"

Being in Barry's apartment for the first time since the class party at the end of my first week in Vancouver made me a bit nostalgic. I thought about Sabine and wondered how she is doing at home in Switzerland. And I remembered the behaviour of Nicole who, in her short, tight skirt and plunging-neckline sweater, was trying to get Barry's attention.

Earlier in the week I had wondered if Nicole would take advantage of Se-Eun and Barry's breakup. But standing at the window with Fernando, Nicole seemed a totally different person, not someone who would throw herself at Barry again.

Of course I couldn't look at that balcony without thinking about Daniel. About how he had backed me into the corner of the railing and demanded my notice. Yet I thought of how he and Song had later brought out the best in each other.

On the beach below, cowbells rang out as a signal that impatient swimmers could now take the plunge. There was much shouting and laughing as they ran into the ocean. Some hit the water, ducked, and ran back to the sand. Others were committed to swimming the distance to the marker buoy at least 100 metres off shore.

Intermittent cheers from the crowd signaled that viewers were encouraging their favourite swimmer to go faster. There is apparently significant prize money for the person who reaches the marker first.

There is also an award for the person who stays longest in the frigid water. So some who were treading water were making a lot of noise—shouting, laughing, and calling to others on the shore. Their supporters were yelling their encouragement to urge them stay in just a bit longer for a chance to win.



Standing on the balcony in my jacket, I just wished that the swimmers would get out of the water and get warm.

I saw Barry's mom looking out her bedroom window watching what was going on down below. Again she looked more sickly than elderly and I felt sorry for her. I remembered that we regretted her coming between Barry and Se-Eun. When she saw me looking at her, she smiled and said hello. Her face was so transformed by that smile. It made me want to know her story. What life had offered her and taken away.

When Sandy and I finally left the party, walked back to the apartment, and approached the front door, I mentioned the incident after Barry's last party. That was when I got to the apartment with Daniel, carrying the Chinese food and meeting Sandy.

"I remember that," he said.

"You do?"

"Yes. Clearly."

"I was afraid you would assume Daniel was my boyfriend."

"And I did."

"You did!"

"I did. As I got into my car, the two of you seemed to pause on the steps as if waiting for me to drive away so you could kiss."

"I had feared Daniel might try to kiss me then, but that was not why we paused there."

"So Daniel did have designs on you?"

"Yes, at that point, but luckily not for long. Song quickly revealed her interest in him, so they soon became a couple."

"So why did you pause then? It occurred to me later that you could have simply gone inside and kissed if that was what you both wanted."

"Later!" I laughed at him. "You wondered about that later!"

"I did."

"I would have felt so flattered then to know you gave this even a moment's thought."

"Well, I did. I told you I was interested in you from the start."

"Well, Daniel was just walking me back to the apartment."

"But the Chinese food...."

"Barry had given several of us some leftovers to take home."

"So then why *did* you hesitate on the stairs?"

"Will you believe me?"

"Try me."

"We stopped to watch a skunk shuffle along the sidewalk across the street."

"A skunk! Really?"

Sandy laughed.

"That is such a bizarre excuse that you couldn't possibly be making that up!"

"So you believe me?"

"Of course, I do. I think we know each other well enough now that you could admit to Daniel kissing you if he had."

"That seems such a long time ago now."

"It does."

"Almost nine months."

Sandy and I were not in a hurry to compete with traffic crossing Lion's Gate Bridge, so we went into the apartment and had tea with Mary. The three of us sat down at the dining room table in front of a plate of snacks remaining from Christmas celebrations. Taking up Mary's tradition, I lit a candle, even though it was daylight.

We talked about the New Years parties we had attended the night before.

"And how did your sushi and tempura go over?"

"Oh, I think everyone enjoyed them."

"It was such a lively party, I was sorry to take Erika away from her friends," Sandy commented to Mary.

"But your party was good too and so different."

"In what way?" Mary asked.

"Sandy's party was in a large West Vancouver house overlooking the water, and the activities were spread over four floors, not just a small area of a modest bungalow."

"Oh, that would make a difference," Mary commented.

Looking at me, Sandy said, "Despite the more constricted space of your party, your friends were totally enjoying dancing."

"But yours were dancing too..."

"Yes, but didn't you think that some of them looked like they *thought* they were supposed to be enjoying dancing?"

"Well, that doesn't matter. I enjoyed dancing with you."

Sandy smiled and squeezed my hand.

When it was almost time to leave to go to Sandy's house, I went into my room to get out of my bulky sweater. Sandy followed me and leaned against the door jam watching me pull that off over my head and then putting on a lighter sweater over my blouse. I headed for the bathroom when I decided to change into more dressy slacks.

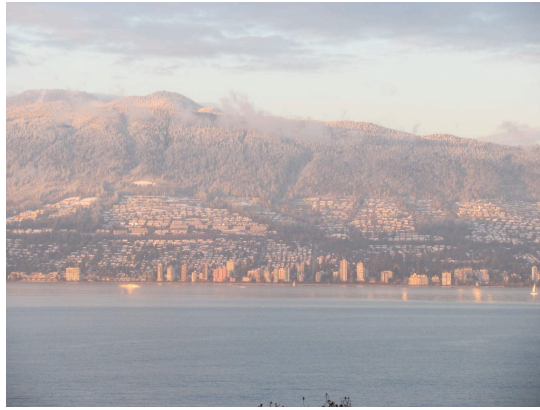
Sandy protested, "Hey, don't I get watch that too."

I smiled.

"No. Not yet."

After saying goodbye to Mary, Sandy helped me on with my coat.

We drove towards the British Properties in the most wonderful golden pink sunset.



When we arrived at Sandy's parents' house, his family, cousins, neighbours, and former neighbours were already seated in the living room and dining room enjoying the buffet dinner. It was a much larger group than I had expected. If I had known, I might have dressed up more.

Again, platters of food were everywhere. Certainly Robyn didn't need my contribution of the shrimp quiche that I made with Mary yesterday. But Robyn appreciated my effort and complimented me on how well it turned out. I also gave her my gift-wrapped Japanese New Year's pound cake. I hope she likes it. For me, it has such happy associations of past festive holidays.

After a few minutes, Sandy introduced me to the parents of the high school student Sandy had been tutoring in math and, a moment later, the girl herself emerged. She had been downstairs with the younger kids of some of the neighbours. I was pleased that Sandy introduced me to her as his girlfriend. I

don't suppose she could guess at the worry she had caused me. Or the divisiveness between Sandy and me.

Being in bright magenta tights, multi-layered tops, and a short skirt, she looked much younger than she had in the UBC library. So in retrospect I feel even guiltier in questioning Sandy's integrity over her, his faithfulness to me.

Nevertheless, it is obvious how much this girl idolizes Sandy. She chose a chair facing in Sandy's direction and gazed at him without participating in the conversation, although she laughed at what she thought were his humorous comments. I recognized her yearning.

But this young woman didn't hold my attention after Simon and Sue Lee arrived with two of their adult children, most importantly their daughter, Victoria. In coming through the door, she immediately spotted Sandy and the two of them approached each other and embraced unreservedly, laughing even while she was still in her coat.

"Wow, Sandy...."

"Vicky, I had no idea you were going to be here. How marvellous to see you!" Sandy said enthusiastically. "I didn't even know you are in town."

"Douglas and I had a last minute change to our plans for a relaxing, stay-at-home Christmas when he was asked to perform in Vienna to replace an ailing cellist for a week. So, feeling abandoned, I decided to take advantage of getting out of Paris for a few days over the holidays."

"I'm so happy you did. Let me introduce you to my girlfriend, Erika."

I stood up for the introduction. As Sandy helped Victoria off with her coat, he asked rhetorically, "So how do we start to explain our past to Erika?"

"Well, I guess you'd say we grew up as cousins, if not even brother and sister, but not just, despite my being more than five years older," Victoria said.

"It's the 'not just' that's the hard part to define," Sandy agreed. "Erika, you remember I've mentioned that Dad and Simon's close friendship meant our two families did many activities together...going camping, hiking, spending summer days picnicking, skiing together on the local mountains, etc."

"Yes, those sound like such happy times."

"They most definitely were, but we also had music together, Sandy and I."

"That's right. Victoria is a professional, classical violinist, who was successful from a very early age. She was the reason I wanted to play classical piano. As a kid I think I was always a little in love with Vicky."

Why was I not feeling threatened by this admission of closeness? I guess I really am feeling much more secure about Sandy and me as a couple.

“And that was mutual, even though I was so much older, at a time when five years made a significant difference in our ages. We had a kind of romantic attachment without being sexual, if you can remember what that is like.”

“Anyway my admiration, my wanting to be around Vicky, motivated me to try to catch up with her in music—which was impossible of course!” Sandy added, laughing. “But I worked a lot harder at learning piano than I would have, had I not been aspiring to perform with Vicky.”

“And we did,” she confirmed.

“You performed together?”

“Yes, as kids. In amateur children’s competitions that our parents enrolled us in,” Sandy answered.

“And we did quite well,” Victoria said. “Even won some titles.”

“Quite a few actually. But let’s be honest, Vicky. I was never more than just your competent accompanist. You’re the one who won the metals for us.”

“I think the judges thought we looked enchanting together. You as the darling blond boy and me with my long, black, straight hair. We looked younger than we were, because, well we were both small for our age.”

Sandy added, “So, Erika, picture Victoria at 12 with me at seven, or Victoria at 14 with me at nine, or Victoria at 17 with me at 12. But looking a lot younger.”

“That’s right.”

“Also, the ability to win those particular competitions is partly dependent upon having parents who are willing to tote their kids to the out-of-town competitions,” Sandy explained.

“So we had the advantage of being able to travel and stay in hotels with just one mother accompanying both of us,” Vicky said.

“And with the money saved in having just one chaperone parent,” Sandy added, “we could afford to go to more of these events than we otherwise could have.”

“While our siblings, mainly mine, remained at home with the other stay-at-home mother, we travelled to such exciting places as Nanaimo, Abbotsford, Hope, Penticton, Kelowna, Vernon, Grand Forks, Edmonton, and Calgary,” Vicky said smiling.

“Hey, you forgot Brandon, Manitoba!” Sandy said laughing. “That one was our farthest afield.”

“And this was so much fun for all of us, even for the other kids together in one house. So it worked well.”

“Then what put an end to this?” I asked.

Sandy said, "Ah, yes. Sadly, Vicky grew up. At eighteen, she left home to attend a prestigious American music academy."

"Yes, I had just graduated from high school."

"Anyway, I was devastated."

"But, Sandy, don't think I didn't miss you too."

"How old were you then, Sandy?" I asked.

"Thirteen. Just starting junior high, which was a whole new experience for me also. I am realizing as we speak that this time did coincide with my diminishing drive to excel in classical piano."

"Do you think there was some cause and effect there?" Vicky asked incredulously.

"Probably. Anyway the school I arrived at needed a drummer, and the band teacher was willing to give me a lot of individual instruction, so I took up that role in preference to continuing piano alone. Music has always been something I've wanted to share with at least one other person."

With a laugh, Sandy added, "Maybe I even needed the drums to pound out some of my frustration of missing you."

"Wow. Could this be true?" Vicky smiled sympathetically. "And there I was living in a single dorm room in a strange college, unknown city, and I was feeling so lonely with no musical partner, no family, no friends, feeling totally isolated. Maybe that's why I started playing nostalgic, romantic sonatas," she laughed.

"Yes, they've made your reputation, haven't they?" Sandy commented. "So maybe we influenced each other more than we've assumed."

"It's true, we might have."

Smiling at me, Vicky added, "Luckily meeting my future husband Douglas at the academy, within six months of my arrival, helped put an end to my moping around. We began playing concerts together almost immediately as well as developing a mature, romantic relationship."

"By which she means different than hers and mine had been."

To confirm this, Vicky explained, "Yes, Erika, with Douglas being four years older than me, he asked me to marry him within months of our meeting and we did marry in less than a year. In retrospect, this seems very fast, and I was young. But we have been extremely happy ever since, living in Paris and performing together all over Europe."

Sandy said, "Erika plays classical flute, so I have been back at the piano practising a little in the hope that we can play together."

"Motivating each other," I added.

"I was so glad to hear this when my dad told me."

"You knew this? That I am back to playing classical?" Sandy asked, somewhat surprised.

"I think your parents are so pleased, Sandy, that they told Mom and Dad about this. And weren't my parents even here once when the two of you were practising together?"

The conversation changed as Sandy's mom approached us and said, "So have the two of you been able to catch up?"

Sandy said, "A little. But mostly we've been trying to explain our background to Erika."

"And how we may have influenced each other in music," Vicky added.

"You were both very talented for your age and such a cute pair," Sandy's mom confirmed.

"As appealing as Erika and Sandy are now," Victoria stated.

"Yes, indeed," Sandy's mom confirmed.

In looking questioningly at Sandy, with a smile Robyn asked, "May I put away Victoria's coat?"

This made the three of us aware that Sandy had been standing there, during this entire conversation, clutching Vicky's coat.

We all laughed.

I had been hoping for some slow dancing with Sandy, but this was a different party than his parents' previous one. Guests were just talking and eating and seeming to enjoy each other's company. I was glad at least that Sandy stayed at my side the entire party, either with his arm around my waist or holding my hand.

I liked this especially in Vicky's presence. She seemed to appreciate seeing us together. Could she be viewing Sandy and me as a grownup version of the twosome that she and Sandy had been? After all, she and I are both Asian, with that long, black, straight hair of her childhood. Even now Vicky and I are about the same height and weight.

When the party was breaking up, Sandy's high school math student, Cindy, and her parents asked Sandy about fitting in a tutoring lesson in the next two weeks, and Sandy agreed.

"Wednesday afternoons on campus are generally the best for me, but I need a few days this week to determine what my early assignments will be like. Can you phone me after Friday so we can set up a time and I can write it in my new daytimer?"

Cindy seemed happy in just standing beside Sandy. She agreed to phone him.

When an older couple heard that I live in the West End, they insisted on driving me home.

"It would be wasteful for Sandy to drive you to the West End when we have to go through it on our way to Kitsilano."

“Really, I don’t mind at all,” Sandy said firmly.

Couldn’t the wife at least see that saving gas wasn’t the only consideration here?

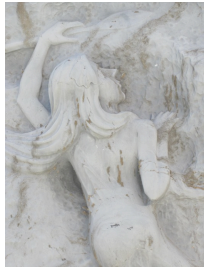
Despite Sandy’s protestations, we succumbed to their offer. As the older couple drove me back into the city, I regretted having met these rational, environmentally responsible, well-meaning people!

I would have preferred to drive home with Sandy to talk some more about his childhood with Victoria. Their relationship tells me so much about Sandy—how he changed from a young classical pianist to a teenage drummer, later turned rock guitarist and keyboard player.

It also occurred to me that if Victoria left when Sandy was thirteen, this was about when Lynn came into his life. Marrying Grant about then, Lynn started to live with Sandy’s family as they moved into their house in the British Properties. So Sandy has always had a sister-like female in his life, and one of them has been Asian.

Through the night I thought more about Sandy and Victoria’s warm, bonded childhood. Did Sandy’s memory of Vicky as a girl prompt him, at our first meeting, to be attracted to me as an adult? Maybe this is comparable to my immediate attachment to Noel in viewing him as an earlier form of Sandy.

Thinking more about the party, I was also glad to have been introduced to the math student so I could see her as one of the children of former neighbours rather than as a threat to Sandy and me as a couple.



My thanks to John F for enabling me to routinely photograph the polar bear swims from his unobstructed view on the 17th floor of his condo overlooking English Bay



JANUARY # 2—Going to a Club

Visuals: photographs of club area on Granville Street

Our group had enjoyed the hockey game that we had seen, but most of the girls decided not to go to another one. So when the guys headed off hockey arena, we decided to go to a club as a “girls” night out.

Claudia said she would come with us, and Adrian and Pierre came along with us too. I’m surprised that Bae didn’t insist on being our chaperone, since Song was with us.

When we first arrived we sat sipping drinks in relative quiet before the place began to fill up. Pierre told us about a friend of his who is able to meet females of his choosing in such environments. He explained that the guy’s technique is to enter the club and stand in one spot and look around until he sees a girl who interests him. Then he walks over to her, starts a conversation and, as soon as feasible, he touches her arm. If she doesn’t repel his touch, then he proceeds to the next step in getting to know her. However, if she avoids his touch, he knows it isn’t worth his time trying to advance any further.

“Sounds like a good strategy,” Nicole commented, “but we aren’t here to meet men.”

Did Nicole realize how out of character this would have sounded if she had said this before becoming attached to Fernando?

Despite just wanting to talk and hear the music, we were approached by some unknown guys who asked us to dance. One guy who asked me was actually quite good looking, but I really didn’t want to dance with him. I only agreed because there was fast music playing at the time. Yet once in the middle of the floor, the music became slow and the guy indicated we should continue.

Well, we did, but I tried to stay distant. He was taller than Sandy so dancing with him was awkward. My forehead

was at his collarbone level. Of course this had me wondering again about what makes for physical attraction or repulsion.

And why did I feel that contact with this guy was so unwanted yet made me feel disloyal to Sandy? I certainly wished Sandy had been with me.

After a few more unwelcome dances and because the dance area had become so noisy, we decided to leave and go to a coffee shop where we could talk more easily than in the club.

As soon as we got settled in some comfortable chairs in the corner of a nearby café, several of us admitted to being glad at having left that loud, crowded club scene.

Nicole confessed that she was surprised that she too was relieved to leave. She said, "In my early days in Vancouver I would have welcomed the chance to dance with unattached Canadian guys. In fact I've just received a letter from a girlfriend in Monterey who has reminded me that in coming to Canada I was hoping to meet a Canadian guy and never return to Mexico."

"Really! Did you consciously think about that?"

"Well, I guess I did, as I had absolutely no plans beyond arriving here. It was as if in getting here was going to solve all my problems."

"Which were?" Juliana asked.

"Being bored with my job, seeming to be in constant conflict with my mom, and trying to deal with my almost totally absent father."

"And has having Fernando as a boyfriend helped with these difficulties?" Song asked.

"Yes. Wanting to work alongside Fernando has me intending to take medical courses to make my work more interesting."

"So that should solve the boring-work dilemma," Adrian commented.

"What about the conflict with your mom? What has that been about?" Pierre asked.

"My mom has always faulted me for having had job opportunities, which she never had, but no career ambition."

"Oh, so knowing your goal of assisting Fernando with his practice should stop her from putting pressure on you to aspire to something more than your current job," Juliana concluded.

"I think that will be true, as I'll be studying to qualify as a registered nurse, not just remain a practical nurse."

"And what about your absent father?" Claudia asked.

"Well, thankfully that dilemma seems to be working itself out without effort on my part."

"How?"

“For the past few months my mom and dad have been in the process of getting back together. He’s moving home again despite the two of them being separated for the past three years and living hundreds of miles apart.”

“All this seems very hopeful,” Sumi commented.

“Yes, I think it is—despite my girlfriend being disappointed that I am not going to stay here and set her up with a Canadian boyfriend.”

“Really! She has expected you to do this?” Juliana asked incredulously.

“She’s hoped I would be able to do this, as she and her single mother are underemployed and the two of them have been living in relative poverty.”

“Her mother is in on her scheme?” Sumi asked.

“Her mother would definitely like her to have such an opportunity. The chance to come to Canada to have a better standard of living and perhaps even then be able to sponsor her, the mother, to come to Canada too.”

“Wow. Those unrealistic plans would place such a lot of pressure on your friend. Coming here expecting in just a few months to find a Canadian guy to marry her, and then sponsor her and her mother to come to Canada as landed immigrants....” Adrian stated.

“I know. I know.”

“And how good is her English?” Pierre asked.

“Not that good yet.”

“The less advanced her English is, the less likely Canadians of her age will spend any time with her or give her much attention,” Adrian stated.

“It is ironic that of all of us, Erika, probably had the least to gain from having a Canadian boyfriend,” Claudia commented.

“How do you mean this?” Sumi asked with interest.

For an instant I feared that Claudia, who knows all my plans, might say too much. But I was momentarily forgetting her impeccable tact.

“Well, she has a job to go home to whenever she likes, she has a loving, supportive, financially-secure family, and she has been accepted into a prestigious Japanese university to ease her into the future that she aspires to.”

“Definitely privileged,” Juliana stated.

“But not only.” Claudia continued, “Most importantly Erika is accustomed to working very hard, as well as realistically and directly, toward her goals.”

“Oh, Claudia, this is the most generous assessment anyone’s ever given me.”

I was not sure why the others would accept this estimation of me. After all, they did not realize the extra work

I'd done in math and physics the previous year and in preparing for and taking the IELTS exam. Nor were they aware of the work required in assembling my submission to UBC's department of architecture.

So I commented, "And the rest of you are just too polite to object to this overstated appraisal, even though at least one part of your judgment, Claudia, is absolutely false."

"And what's that?"

"Your comment about my family suggests that my whole family must be loving and supportive. I certainly wouldn't say that about my dad. He's definitely NOT supportive."

"Oh, right. Would critical and controlling be more apt for him?" she smiled.

"Yes, critical for sure, and he would be totally controlling, or at least try to be, if he were home more."

I added, "I recognize what Nicole said about her father being largely absent. Certainly my dad is emotionally absent, even when he isn't away travelling for his work."

"But you agree that your mom and your sisters are loving and supportive," Claudia confirmed.

"Absolutely. Yes, they are definitely there for me."

"That's worth so much," Sumi commented.

In smaller groups, the others talked quietly amongst themselves about their own situation in these terms.

I really appreciated Claudia's acknowledgment of me as "working hard and directly toward my goals."

Would Sandy ever realize how much I had worried after hearing his casual description of the characteristics and weaknesses of a Pisces? Knowing the attributes of a Pisces—as being a dreamer lacking in the capacity to make her dreams happen—has haunted me but at the same time motivated me (thank you, Sandy!) to work more consciously and constructively toward my goal, my dream.





JANUARY # 3—Attending Chinese New Year's Parade

Visuals: photographs of the Chinese New Year's parade, Dr. Yat Sat Sen Garden, gallery interior, Chinese New Year's door decoration

Will I *always* have to be vigilant about my contact with Noboru around Sandy?

I had described to Sandy where my classmates and I planned to stand while watching the Chinese New Year's parade in Chinatown. He said he would try to meet us there. Bae, Song, Fernando, Nicole, Noboru, Sumi, and Marina had met for breakfast at a restaurant in North Van before getting the bus to town to meet Sebastian and me near the school.

We all walked together from there to Chinatown. Gold and red banners were hanging from windows and on the sides of buildings. Arriving later than we intended, we pushed our way through the crowds to get as close as possible. I soon doubted that I would ever see Sandy at the parade. It was raining enough that some people had their umbrellas up, restricting the view. The crowd continued to move because some of the spectators were searching for a better place to watch the parade.

We found a space close to the edge of the sidewalk, but were soon pushed back further into the throng. Sometimes the only way to see the children's bands and dance troupes was to put my arms up in the air and photograph them and then look at my camera screen. Occasionally some of the viewers in front of us would shuffle away, so we had an unobstructed view, but soon other spectators around us just pushed closer.

Sebastian, being so tall, was the only one of us with a consistently unobstructed view. Sometimes the rest of us could only see the highest banners and tallest dragons, but there was much cheering, music, and clapping. The bands went by so close.



What commotion. The atmosphere was charged! But I was soon wishing that I hadn't rushed breakfast. Heading off to buy a snack now was certainly out of the question; I would never be able to get through to my group again. But I was feeling light-headed, almost faint.

At a lull in the movement of the parade, I told Noboru that I was hungry. He teased me by asking me what it was worth to me to share some of his foot-long submarine sandwich, which he hauled out from under a damp micro umbrella at the bottom of his backpack. Somewhat flattened, the sliced beef, salami, turkey, tomatoes, cucumbers, shredded lettuce, and mashed tuna and egg were sticking out of the sides of the sub. Also, it was dripping with dressing.

He took a bite.

"Umm, delicious," he teased. "So what's your offer?"

"Come on, Noboru, just share it with me," I begged.

He smiled and said, "Okay, as long as you will be forever grateful for my generosity."

"I will."

I reached for the sub with my free hand (camera in the other), but Noboru, laughing, grabbed my wrist and insisted on holding the sub for me as I took a bite. Sloppy as it was, well, I got mayonnaise all over my chin.

"What a messy eater you are!" he mocked.

I slid off my backpack to hold it with one arm as I searched through its compartments for something to clean my face. No serviette or tissues emerged. Before I could get my backpack back on to free up one hand, Noboru, laughing, made a big deal about unfolding a serviette, partially soaked with dressing, and "wiping" my mouth, making it even worse.

"Ops," he commented.

"I can do that. I can do that!" I insisted, but he held the wad of serviettes in the air out of my reach, so we had a bit of a struggle.

“What are you two up to?” Sumi asked, pretending to be appalled as she looked back at us.

Calming down somewhat, Noboru told me, “Okay, okay. The next tomato slice is for me. You can have the one after that.”

I needed to put my daypack on to free up one hand. Yet I also wanted to avoid getting it and my camera sticky, as some of the sauce was now on my hands as well as dripping on my chin. I remained “handless,” making it impossible to gain control over the sandwich or be any neater in taking the next bites—especially since Noboru seemed to be enjoying making the process as messy as possible for me.

He insisted on keeping the serviettes, as wet as they were, to himself. I was glad when he finally finished the last bite and crumpled up the saturated serviettes and soaked wrapping.

After searching through her bag, Song turned around and presented me a couple of damp travel wipes and a small package of tissues.

“Feel free to use them all,” she said.

“Thanks. I’ll replace them at school.”

“No problem.”

I managed to clean myself up, and I was grateful to finally have something in my stomach.

At a pause in the parade, when I was playing back some photos I had taken, Noboru said he wanted to have a look. He inched closer until he was standing behind me with one hand on my left shoulder. Leaning over my right shoulder, he peered at the small screen on my camera, his ear almost touching mine.

He provided a running commentary on each of my photos trying to sound like a critic or expert photographer, whereas I don’t think he is actually any better than I am.

“This might have been good if you’d used a tripod. Why didn’t you trying panning here? Ah, so now you are willing to settle for just cute. To be half way interesting, you’re going to have to severely crop this one.”



I took my eyes off the screen and looked across to the other side of the street that was momentarily visible.

I saw Sandy! Our eyes locked.

I was immediately self-conscious of Noboru's hand on my shoulder. I tried to step forward to break contact but there was no place to go. Also I would have felt awkward saying something to Noboru when nothing was happening between us.

But how did we look to Sandy?

Sure enough, with another pause in the parade, Sandy was struggling his way through the crowd toward us. I felt that old coldness advancing again. His. And guilt. Mine.

What had Sandy seen?—Noboru looking as if he had his arm around my shoulder or the apparent intimacy of me sharing the messy sandwich? But be fair to me, I was thinking—I had badly needed something to eat.

When Sandy reached us, I knew I had blundered yet again. I was the one initiating our hello kiss. The dampness of his hair indicated that he had been standing in the rain as long as we had.

"No umbrella even today?"

"No, I..."

"Glad you made it, Sandy," Song and Marina chimed.

Nicole said, "Erika was afraid you'd never find us."

Sandy only formally acknowledged Noboru, ignoring their recent comfort.

I smiled and squeezed Sandy's hand. No response.

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"A while. I spotted Sebastian and Bae..."

"Ah, our beacons," Marina joked.

"Then I saw you and the rest of the group. But I couldn't get across the street until there was a break in the procession and the crowd control officers turned their backs."

"Well, I'm glad you are here. Aren't all the colours wonderful! And the little dancers are so adorable. In fact all the dance troops in their elaborate costumes are very striking."

"Yes, and some of the bands are very talented."



Eventually Sandy relaxed somewhat and clapped and cheered along with the rest of us. But, I noticed, he was not speaking with Noboru and he was being reserved (unforgiving?) with me.

The crowd around us shifted, so we had trouble seeing again. The guys decided to try to hold up lightweight Song so she could have a better view. They managed this only for a few moments as they were in fits of laughter. I was glad Sandy saw this silliness, not that my friends' behaviour excused mine.

As the last band and dance troop paraded by, Sandy said, "It's going to be a few minutes before the crowd disperses and the buses are running normally again. Are any of you interested in going into the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen classical garden? Erika, you said you haven't seen that yet...."

"I haven't seen it and I would love to see it now."

"Yes, I've wanted to see that too," Sebastian added.

The others all agreed, so we headed toward the arched gate of the cultural centre.

Pausing there, Sandy said, "There are two options, to just go into the free part of the garden or to pay the fee to take a tour and see the interior of the buildings as well."

Again Noboru answered as if for all of us, "Let's see it all."

"Okay, the ticket booth to that entrance is over here."

We paid and went in. The tour of the buildings was to start in ten minutes.



We followed Sandy into the garden. I admit I wished I were going in alone with Sandy, leaving all that commotion behind us. Despite the noise outside on the street, the atmosphere inside those closed garden walls was silent and peaceful.

The reflective pool, with ducks and other birds taking off, landing, and floating around on its surface, and the sculptures made from river-formed rocks along with the carefully

positioned trees and plants all combined to create such a tranquil setting. The garden's planners obviously aimed to encourage feelings of serenity and moments of quiet meditation. But I was unable to leave my conflicted emotions behind us, and it looked as if Sandy, my beloved Cancer, was not about to forgive me immediately or instantly set aside his jealousy.



When the official tour was about to start, we gathered in the classical temple to listen to the guide. She was an older Chinese woman in traditional dress. She explained that the temple was authentic in that it had been built only with tools and materials that been available in 15th century China. She explained the symbolism of the images in the art and architectural details found in the Scholar's Study, the Hall of One Hundred Rivers, and the China Maple Hall.



I loved the designs in stone in the floor, the patterns of the tiled rooflines, and the decorative elements of the gates and windows, the bridge, and the pagoda. The trees in fascinating shapes and colours along the pool provided a painted portrait of nature in every direction.

After about an hour, the rest of the group headed out to the street to find buses to go back to the North Shore. Sandy and I stayed to take a few more photographs of both the gardens and the inside of the buildings.

To create a reason for Sandy to stand leaning in to me, I shared some of my photos on my camera screen. I was trying to duplicate what Sandy had seen of me standing close to Noboru in the same way.

"Your images look so good. I hope I can see them enlarged on your computer," he said.

"Of course, but I bet yours are even better with your traditional camera since you have so much more control over your settings."

"The interior shots could be better since I can adjust the timing. That's why I've kept this ancient camera. I use it for photographing inside buildings under construction where there's rarely adequate lighting. Also I enjoy developing my own pictures."

"You develop pictures?"

"Yes, we have a darkroom at the studio."

"Oh, you are so lucky."

"Yes, it's just that I can't see my results or share my pictures immediately."

We walked past a tea ceremony that was just starting. Perhaps Sandy was afraid I would want to stop and watch that, because he abruptly said, "Look, I really need to go."

"That's fine," I said.

We walked past the gift shop that I otherwise would have visited.

Once outside we walked a long way to where Sandy had parked—probably the equivalent of half way back to the apartment, except that it was in the opposite direction. I didn't comment on this. In fact we walked in silence to his car.

Photographing in the garden had given us an excuse to be together, but without our cameras as a distraction, I again felt the strain between us. Sandy unlocked the car door for me. We got in. He started the motor and pulled away.

Despite being in his "cuddly" jacket and looking as appealing as ever with his damp hair, Sandy seemed to have forgotten all about our wonderful togetherness of New Year's Eve and New Year's night. That time suddenly felt a lot longer than just a couple of weeks ago.

So, how long will it take us to get back to where we were emotionally then? That closeness. That directness. That confidence in us as a couple. How long will it take Sandy to stop worrying *again* about Noboru?

Of course I am regretting that Sandy had seen the two of us at the parade sharing that sloppy sandwich in that seemingly intimate way. But I needed that food. How could I have handled that situation better? Could I have prevailed upon Sumi to get Noboru to behave in a more serious manner?

And how could I get Sandy to feel less stress about Noboru? If there had been a piano close by, would he have agreed to relax by sitting down with me to play something?

When Sandy parked the car in front of the apartment and could have kissed me, he instead reached over to the back seat of the car and searched through a pile of books and papers. Was he avoiding personal contact with me?

“Are you missing something?” I asked.

“Yes, it looks as if I’ve forgotten a library book back in my studio space in the department. I need it for my essay tonight.”

“Oh, no. What can you do about that?”

“Perhaps the West Van Library might have a copy.”

“Okay....”

“I should go.” Looking at his watch, he added, “If I can get there before it closes.”

“Sure. Thanks for coming to the parade. Drive carefully.”

I didn’t know what else to do, so I just smiled reluctantly and got out of the car. But as I was about to close the car door, I surprised myself by saying, “I’m going to be practising the Beethoven piece and I hope you will be too.”

“Which one—the Sonata Pathetique or Moonlight Sonata?”

“Moonlight Sonata.”

Sandy seemed to suppress a smile.

In a firm voice, I added, “And I hope sometime soon you are going to feel more secure about us as a couple.”

I closed the door. As I walked up the steps, I felt so frustrated and wished I had somehow talked openly to Sandy about the return of his jealousy toward Noboru. Should I have somehow given Sandy more reassurance? Maybe so. But shouldn’t he have tried harder to not jump to conclusions?

I am somewhat angry that I still have to be concerned about every exchange Sandy sees between Noboru and me. I hate worrying about this—yet again!



Photographs of young dancers in the parade courtesy of Sinyi Lee, Taiwan

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