



## ***MARCH # 1—Separation after “Don’t Call”***

*Visuals: photographs of English Bay Beach and Alexandria Bandstand in dreary rain*

Not surprisingly, I did not sleep much the night I returned. I was devastated. Angry. Wounded by what Sandy had confessed. I avoided talking to Mary by going to bed directly saying I was so tired, despite wanting to tell her so much about my trip. Thankfully she has been sensitive enough to not ask any leading questions. I still don’t want to admit that there are problems between Sandy and me. I’ve even delayed recording them for this diary. I’ve needed some time to try to become rational. Still, I can’t stop worrying. I’ve even had trouble concentrating in class.

Did I really tell Sandy not to contact me until he can guarantee that he will never again be manipulated by Serena? Now that sounds like an impossible demand. Our remaining time is so short. Even though I am still hurting by what he’s done, what has happened, I hate being apart.

I’ve agonized about whether I have been too hard on Sandy. Am I expecting him to prove an absolute resolution in an impossibly short time? What if he doesn’t contact me until there are only a few days left before I go back to Japan?

Why did I tell him not have any contact with me until all is resolved? I should have just told him I won’t see him until all is resolved. At what point will I breakdown and be willing to meet with him despite having no positive proof that Madam X is out of his life? And how will he ever be able to prove that she is gone for sure? I know I am rambling. My mind seems frayed.

Something that Noboru said to me, just before I left for Toronto, has come back to haunt me. I don't remember how this conversation started, but we were alone in the lounge at school, when he said, "Maybe if you ever experienced not being able to have someone you want, Erika.... Maybe if you really faced the possibility that you can't have Sandy.... Well, that would make you a more understanding person."

Is this separation, this test, designed to make me into a more understanding person?

I was surprised when Noboru added, "You've never acted as if you will have to give up Sandy. I don't know what the two of you have planned, but it seems to me that saying goodbye isn't part of it."

When I didn't say anything, Noboru repeated this saying, "I don't think you've ever faced the fact that the two of you are going to have to end your relationship, have you, Erika?"

Against my rational self, I was on the verge of admitting our plans when Noboru added, "And at the Valentine's Day concert ... when Sandy's old girl friend showed up...."

I cringed.

"You knew that?"

"Seemed pretty obvious what was going on."

"To the others too?"

"Well, perhaps not. I didn't talk to anyone about this."

"Nobody said anything to me."

"Maybe getting her out of Sandy's life won't be that easy. Maybe you'll find that you can't just turn her off like a tap. I don't want to be cruel, Erika, but it was good to see you look frightened for once. To see you experience not being able to have someone you love."

"Noboru, I'm sorry. You know I have never intended to cause you any pain."

"I appreciate that," he commented quietly. "But you can't always voluntarily put an end to old feelings."

Later, his comments got me into thinking. If I really can't have Sandy, how long would it ever take for me to get over him? Would I ever be able to ever get over him? Probably not.





## ***MARCH # 2—Escape to Deep Cove***

*Visuals: photographs Deep Cove's two heads sculpture and a dreary view toward the ocean from Mt. Seymour Parkway*

What day is it? How long has it been since Sandy walked down the stairs without saying goodbye? What if he is trying to ensure any relationship with Serena is over but that he just can't prove that yet? How long am I willing to go without seeing him, without talking to him? When will it be feasible for me to break down and call him? Soon? Ever?

I've been at a total loss as to what to do. I haven't wanted my classmates to see me in this state, so I've been avoiding them before and after class by arriving just as class is about to start, "needing" to do some errands at lunch, and having to leave immediately after school for a variety of reasons. Yesterday I even decided to follow Mary out to Deep Cove. She had invited me to have supper with her and her family there, but initially I had declined. Changing my mind, as a form of escape I headed directly for the North Van bus as my class was dispersing.



Once on the bus I was glad that I could just vegetate without having to do anything or think about anything. I was so weary. Emotionally exhausted.

After the bus reached the North Shore and two teenage boys got on the bus in the seat front of me, I began overhearing parts of their conversation. They seemed to be about 17 years old and apparently hadn't seen much of each other for a while. One explained that he had quit school about four months ago because he couldn't face finishing grade 11, and he was now an assistant in construction work. The other guy said that in September he would be going into Grade 12 as his final year.

After hearing this initial catch-up, I must have blanked out for a few minutes because I didn't notice how their conversation made such a leap, but they began describing the circumstances around their first sexual experience.

The one who had quit school unassumingly stated, "For me my first time was with my babysitter."

I was shocked in overhearing this, but the other guy just commented, "Oh, yeah?" without revealing any surprise or disapproval.

"You know how it is. Sitting cozy on a sofa together. Watching a movie and sharing a bowl of popcorn. One thing just leads to another."

There was no sense of boasting in this comment. So I never doubted the truth of this. Should I have? I just wondered—what age could the boy have been? What age had the babysitter been? How would the parents have dealt with this if they had known that a person, whom they assumed they could trust, had taken their son's innocence?

The guy who would be going into grade 12 responded, "For me it was with my first girl friend."

"That could be nice but the advantage of doing it with babysitters is that they're so much older. They know so much more because they've had all that experience."

Babysitters! I was struck by the fact that he said this in the plural. Had this actually happened with more than one babysitter?! The other guy still showed no negative judgment. It reminded me of something I'd learned in social anthropology about a custom in a "primitive" society where an older woman was designated to sexually initiate boys at their coming of age.

So why am I reacting, as I am, in hearing about these boys' initial involvements? Have I become so narrow minded?

If I ever get over the threat of Serena, could I become grateful to her for what Sandy has learned through her sexual experience?

At this moment I am certainly not feeling generous toward her.

When I got to Mary's parents' house, there were several vehicles in the yard. A couple, Kevin and Stephanie, who are friends of the family, and her brother, Howard, were also staying for supper. All of them welcomed me despite my surprise arrival after turning down the invitation. They were all working around in the kitchen and carrying things to the dining room table. Mary calls this *participation*, where everyone gets involved, and Mary's mother seemed pleased to have the help.

Mary's father, however, sat on the sofa appreciating the activity around him somewhat like an emperor—yes, but a kind one, appreciating his staff. I started thinking of age privileges that I've never questioned in Japan. In Vancouver age deference seems to be much diminished.

Once we were all seated around the dining room table, helping ourselves to the various delicious bowls and platters, I was surprised at the speed with which the conversation turned to environmental issues again. Are all Canadians as concerned about this as Mary's family and friends are? Well, in this case, the group was reprimanding Stephanie for continuing to drive a SUV now that her family is grown up, no longer living at home, and no longer needing to be taxied to soccer games, piano lessons, and tutoring.

"And would you continue to drive it if you knew that doing so would create enough weather change for the wind to blow the roof off your house next year?" Howard asked.

"The problem is we can never see a direct link like that between our actions and a particular effect," Kevin answered on behalf of his wife.

"Also we see others taking up more than their share of the earth's resources, so we think 'Why should I be the only one cutting back, being more conservative in what I use?'" Stephanie responded.

Mary's mother supported Stephanie by saying, "You know that after doing all the dishes from an entire meal in one sink full of water last week, as we always used to do, I saw someone washing Safeway windows using an unbelievable amount of water."

"We do take water for granted here as if we assume we will always have an unlimited supply," Mary's father added.

"But this window washer was not turning the hose off as he walked from one window to another or as he adjusted the position of his ladder. The hose just lay on the ground, gushing water out onto the sidewalk."

"And it is heartrending to know that somewhere in Africa a community dreams of getting one central tap of clean water without regard for far they will have to walk to it."

“I know, I know. But after seeing what was going on with those windows, I kind of threw my hands in the air, thinking what’s the point of my sacrificing if someone else is doing something like that!”

“Thanks for your support, but as for my mini-van, well I know I should give it up and be like Mary and never drive on a bus route, but surrendering all that comfort, even when it the cost of the gas seems so exorbitant....”

“Well, obviously the cost isn’t high enough, if indeed we are still driving when it’s not necessary,” Howard added.

“Here, here,” Mary smiled.

After supper, Mary took me to the basement studio workshop in the house where she does her art. She showed me some of the many small pieces of historical art that are to make up her large wall installation. Many of them are in their own individual frames and include objects integrated with painted or printed images and handmade paper.

I had no idea there would be so many of pieces. We flipped through the stacks leaning against the walls without being able to see them to advantage.

I look forward to seeing them exhibited in a way that I can see them all at once.



*Detail of historical artwork by the author*



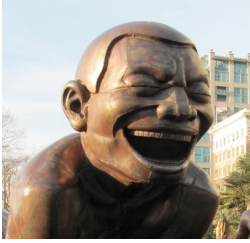
### ***MARCH # 3—Contact Sandy?***

I hate this! That Sandy and I are divided—I have so little time remaining before I return to Japan.

Should I tell him he can work out the end to his relationship with Serena after I am away and that he can then e-mail me about how it is all resolved? I want so badly to be with him now every possible moment until I leave Vancouver. But would weakening now compromise our relationship in the long run?

I feel so abandoned, even though I was the one who told him not to contact me. And all this is so awkward with my classmates, as I avoid revealing that Sandy and I aren't seeing each other.

Even with Mary I haven't been completely frank. As intuitive as she is, she probably knows that not all is going well between us. I regret this lack of openness with Mary because she is so supportive of Sandy and me as a couple. And right now, I need someone to be on my side.



## ***MARCH # 4—Sandy Phones***

Friday night: I've suffered four very long days. (Only four days? It seems like forever.)

But wait....

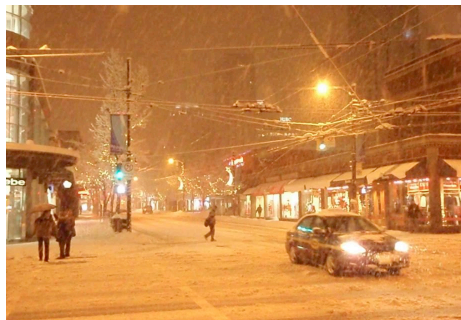
Finally!

Sandy has just phoned me!

Even though it was a very short call, he has said that he would like to pick me up tomorrow morning (Saturday), and he suggested that we might go for a walk and have something to eat. He recommended that I dress warmly. This surprises me because it has been beautiful in the past few days with so many spring flowers now in bloom.

I wonder about the fact that Sandy didn't indicate that all has been resolved. But surely he took me seriously when I said I didn't want to talk to him until he was sure he would never again be manipulated by Serena. Did his phoning to meet me now mean he could be certain of that? Almost too hopeful to believe. How could he, how will we, ever be sure of that?

In my excitement of knowing that I would be seeing Sandy in the morning, I was not sleeping well, so it is curious that I didn't notice that it was snowing through the night, which it was.



*Photograph of Robson Street at Burrard in snow courtesy of Jerome Collins, Vancouver, Canada*



## ***MARCH # 5—Picnic in the Snow***

*Visuals: photographs of flowers in snow, Second Beach pavilion, wooden bridge near Lost Lagoon*

What a surprise when I awoke to the unexpected, late-in-the-season snowfall. Everything was so clean and bright when I looked out of the windows. I worried about the crocuses and daffodils under that blanket of snow and hoped that somehow the snow was comforting, protecting the flowers.

Sandy phoned to say the condition of the roads might slow him down and that he had to do an errand first. Again he suggested that I dress warmly so that we could be comfortable outdoors a couple of hours and he added, “And you might want to bring your camera.”

I was pleased that Sandy sounded so positive after my angry confrontation at the apartment. I was ready when he buzzed the intercom. I pushed the button to open the front door for him, but then I ran down the stairs to meet him. I longed to put my arms around his neck and hug him as hard as I could—and he looked so good climbing the stairs! But I hesitated on the mezzanine when he seemed awkward, stopping one stair below, apparently not knowing if it was acceptable to approach me or not. So I also forced myself to stop where I was, as I did not know how things stood.

I managed to simply say, “I’m glad you’ve arrived safely. How are the roads?”

“Not as treacherous as I expected or as bad as they were late last night.”

“Were you out in the snow then?”

“Yes, driving home from UBC.”

“Why so late?”

“I got very involved in making an architectural model in the studio. Oblivious of the snow coming down, I just kept working until it was done. But I have some snow pictures I took of downtown then. “

“I’d like to see them some time.”

“Sure. The snow will likely be gone by tomorrow.”

“Really?”

“It usually melts pretty fast.”

We started down the stairs.

“Meanwhile, not many people are on the roads. They have the sense to stay home if they don’t need to travel today.”

“But not you.”

He glanced at me and smiled.

“Well, seeing you has a certain drawing power.”

“I’m glad.”

In going toward the outside door, he asked, “Are you’ve sure you’ve got everything—scarf, gloves, hat?”

“Yes, in my daypack, with my camera.”

I wasn’t aware of what Sandy had in mind as we approached his car in the back parking space. We got in and headed toward English Bay. When we stopped at a traffic light, Sandy noticed that I was looking at him. He smiled at me and then we drove past the beach and into Stanley Park.



We parked in the lot between the Second Beach pool and the mini golf course. Despite the snow, I was wondering what Sandy had planned, as usually he and I would have walked from the apartment. As we got out of the car, I could no longer stand not knowing the situation.

“Sandy, you seem pretty pleased with yourself.”

“I hope you will be satisfied with what’s happened, Er.”

“Please tell me.”

“Well, shall we walk then?”

“Yes.”



We headed along the creek toward the little stone bridge and through the trail toward Lost Lagoon. During this time Sandy kept talking about what we were seeing in the snow. This was a deliberate attempt keep the conversation away from his relationship with Serena. We headed around the east side of Lost Lagoon, through the underpass, and north on the seawall around Coal Harbour.



After walking past the Rowing Club, we reached a bench looking across the harbour back at the city. Momentary sunshine made it look radiant again.

“Now, not one more diversion!” I said as we sat down.

He acknowledged the suspense he’d been creating.

“So you are ready to know what has happened?”

“Sandy, you know I am ready!”

He smiled.

“Well, that night, after you gave me that terrifying ultimatum, I went home and wrote a letter to Serena. In that I simply stated that I would not be returning her phone calls or have further contact with her of any kind.”

He looked at me, but I decided to give him a chance to explain fully without commenting.

“Of course I offered my condolences with regard to the death of her mother and wished her well in reestablishing her life, but I tried to make it as clear as possible that she could not count on me for any further help and that nothing between us is negotiable. I stated very firmly that I simply do not wish to ever see her again. I added that my commitment is now elsewhere.”

Sandy paused as a cyclist walking his bike in the snow came unusually close to us to avoid stepping in a slushy puddle. It was difficult to listen to Sandy without responding but I wanted to hear everything that he had to say without distorting his declaration.

“Early the next morning I dropped the letter through the mail slot of the door of her house-sitting place. I knew that she would not be awake by then so no discussion would transpire. I left without seeing her and proceeded to go to class. Apparently she phoned our house several times during the day. Mom told

her what I had instructed her to say: 'You know from his letter that he has no intention of knowingly answering your phone calls or having any further contact with you, so please do not call here again.' Apparently by the end of the day, my mom having said this more than once, Serena believed it's true that I won't be having anything further to do with her."

Sandy paused. Was he expecting me to respond at this?

"Meanwhile, Serena and her sister, Paula, had been in contact with each other. With no one to hold her in Vancouver or Edmonton, Serena agreed to move back to the UK when Paula offered to pay for her flight. Serena and her sister need to resolve their mother's estate and have Serena settle into their mother's house just outside London. This means that Serena is no longer the needy person that she was just a few days earlier. Her mother has left some money—not a lot but enough to look after Serena's immediate needs, given that she now has housing."

"How did you find all this out?"

"Paula was kind enough to phone me once Serena told her that I have unconditionally broken up with her. Paula appreciates what I've done for Serena in the past, so she felt I deserve to know that Serena will not be draining me further. She wanted to confirm that Serena finally realizes that there is nothing left between us, nor will there be in the future. Paula called me at 6:30 this morning as soon as Serena phoned her from the departure gate of a London-bound flight in the Vancouver airport. Serena had stopped their phone call as she headed into the plane."

"What a relief! So she really seems to have given up on you."

"Yes, she should no longer be a threat to us, Erika."

"Sandy, I must say I like that you've been so decisive."

"I hoped you'd be satisfied. There's only one draw back."

"What?"

"Don't worry, Er. It's just that Serena has abandoned the cat. Paula realized that Serena left without making any alternative arrangements. So I'll drop in to feed my classmate's cat and water her plants for the next couple of days."

"I am willing to come with you."

"Actually I've just been there. That was my errand. But tomorrow I'd certainly appreciate your company."

"Okay."

Sandy squeezed me around my shoulders, but as we stood up I was determined to have a very long hug. Actually that turned into a very warm kiss. I didn't care what others saw as they walked by with their dog on leash or jogged by in

unsuitable footwear. Before moving on, Sandy and I stood appreciating the now shining glass skyline.

Finally I said, "Where do you think we should go for lunch?"

Sandy rather sheepishly admitted that he had prepared a picnic to have at Second Beach.

"A picnic?"

"Yes. That's what I planned before the snowfall. Then I questioned such an idea but thought, why not? Any objections to a picnic in the snow?"

"Could be adventurous."

"Then we should start right away. There may not be a lot of time for photography after all."

"That's okay."



Still, as we walked back to the car, we photographed or pretended to photograph the emerging flowers as well as the clean, sculptural snow shapes still visible in the cooler, protected areas.

"Ah, that's my shot."

"Well then, that one's mine," we said good-naturedly jostling each other with our shoulders. There were lots of camera-worthy shots, but our main focus was on each other.

Reaching the car, Sandy took a "cooler" out of the trunk and we headed a couple of hundred metres down the hill toward the small pavilion, with picnic tables, within sight of Second Beach and its pool. This time of the year the pool is taken over by seagulls, ducks, and crows.

Not surprisingly, no one else was picnicking in the pavilion. The cooler held Sandy's asparagus cheese frittata that he had taken out of the oven just before leaving home. It was wrapped in towels with a hot pack to retain the heat. I wiped the table's surface with paper towels, put on the tablecloth Sandy had brought, and set two places as Sandy lit his small backpacking stove.

"This little stove brings back memories of summer hikes and winter cross-country ski trips in the mountains. I hope we can add lots of happy memories to it in our future."

"I hope so too."

It was so bonding sitting there alone within the circle of warmth created by the little stove. I felt so relieved to have Sandy back.

His frittata, fresh-from-the-oven baking powder biscuits, and apple carrot salad were so satisfying. He poured warm apple cider out of a thermos while we finished up the main course.

Occasionally a person in snow gear, some on cross-country skis, went by down below on the seawall toward the pool. The glare off the snow around the open pavilion illuminated the ceiling.



After a moment's silence I said what I had been most concerned about during our separation—our limited time.

"Sandy, I'm only here for 29 more days."

"No! Twenty-nine?"

"Yes. I'm wondering if we can spend the rest of the weekends together?"

"Starting now?"

"Yes."

"Nice idea. I could arrange that."

"Mary will be staying Friday nights to Sunday nights at her parents' house until the end of March because she makes most of her art there."

"What kind of art is she making?"

"A constructed, historical wall mural for the lobby of a new development in Coal Harbour."

"Oh, yes. You mentioned something about that previously. I hope I will be able to see that."

"There is to be an 'opening' just before I leave. I'd like to attend that with you if you can."

"I'd love to."

"Good. Anyway, Mary said that I am welcome to invite a friend to spend the weekends with me until then. I think she is assuming that I might like that to be you."

"I am flattered that she trusts me."

"You know she does."

"Does she know we haven't been communicating these past few days?"

"I've tried to keep that from her, but I'm sure she knows that something has not been right."

"So you'll tell her now...."

"When I let her know that we want to spend weekends together, she'll realize that if there has been something dividing us, it no longer is."

Sandy turned on the MP3 player, stood up, and offered me his hand as if to dance. He put one of the ear-buds in his ear and the other one in mine.

He opened his ski jacket and drew me inside wrapping it around me too so that, there by the picnic table, we moved as one body to the slow music. It felt so good to be close again in our own little world.

When the water on the little stove reached a boil, we stepped apart. Sandy put the teabags in our cups and poured the hot water on them.

He opened his jacket again for me saying, "Until it steeps." We resumed slow dancing.

When we sat down again and cupped our bare hands around the warm mugs of tea, we savoured squares of dark chocolate.

Finally Sandy said, "So Mary wants someone to spend the time with you?"

"Yes, she is feeling guilty at the idea of 'abandoning me.'"

"And you think we will be able to spend entire weekends together with no change between us?"

"Still just closeness," I said, despite craving Sandy so much.

"And you think we can manage that?"

"Sandy, you know it makes sense to continue now, after waiting this long, even if it's difficult. Besides, you can sleep on the second bed in my room if necessary."

"If necessary," he said, smiling at me.

I said, "Also, I want us to learn to cook together."

"Okay...."

"I'd like you to teach me to make the strawberry crepes."

"The crepes? They have a bad association for me."

"Why?"

"Because they remind me of our fight when Noboru broke his leg."

"Well, then we will have to change that association into something romantic instead."

"All right."

"Could we make them tonight?"

"I guess we could if we stop at a store to get some strawberries and any other ingredients that we might need."

"So you are willing to stay tonight?"

"I'd like to. But you know I have studying to do too."

"Of course. And I have homework and writing."

"Writing..." he said absent-mindedly as he moved our cutlery and plates into a plastic bag and then, with the remaining food, into the cooler.

"Yes, the writing that originally was going to be my visual journal. Actually it's now a combination of dictated tapes, writing, and photos."

"Why did you decide not to include illustrations?"

"Well, Sandy, I have been rather busy."

"Actually, I have noticed."

"Drawing was my focus last year. Writing, in English, makes sense now because Mary is willing to edit some of what I do, so it's been a great learning opportunity."

"Can I read it sometime?"

I laughed, "No, probably not."

"Why not?"

"Well, I do write about you."

"You do?"

"Of course."

"And you don't mind Mary reading that?"

"Most of the written part I don't mind and, when there is text I want to keep private, I obscure it so Mary can't see it. Otherwise I dictate it in Japanese. I'll transcribe the tapes when I get back to Japan."

"Obscuring it..."

"Yes, Mary suggested that I do that to ensure that I am not censoring my own commentary."

"Good idea."

"I guess the information in my journal is like what you and your mom share. Mary knows what I am going through beyond just what she and I talk about. Maybe that is why she trusts you. She feels she knows you better than she actually does."

"But you didn't tell her you were not willing to see me?"

I cringed at even the mention of this now.

"I felt I needed to keep this to myself. Maybe I haven't shared this with her as a kind of punishment to myself."

"Punishment?"

"Well, sharing does lighten the load. Maybe I felt I didn't deserve that."

"Why?"

"At times I did feel that I had been too hard on you in demanding that you prove that you won't have any further contact with Serena."

"Mom is happy that you have helped me cut my tie with her. For one thing Mom knew I 'lent' money to Serena when she moved back to Edmonton as well as a couple of times since then."

"Lent?"

"Gave her money when she asked for it, despite knowing I will never get it back."

"Mom feared that I might be manipulated in that way indefinitely."

"I am glad she approves of what I've done. But she must consider me very bossy."

"Why do you think that? You just insist on being in charge of your own life rather than sitting around waiting to see how others might affect you."

"That's definitely not normal for women in Japanese culture, you know. That's my mom's influence."

"How's that?"

"Well, as I told you, it was fairly unusual for my mom as a young Japanese woman to go to England to study in the 1970s. To do a bachelor's degree at the London School of Economics. She only got to do that because her twin brother died a couple of years earlier. I told you about that...."

"I vaguely remember something about this, about the devastation of a twin who died."

"Yes. Their parents had expected her twin to study in England with her older brother."

"The one who is now her business partner?"

"Yes. Their parents decided that when her twin died, Mom could go in his place."

"To the London School of Economics?"

"Yes. They expected her just to be learning about business. They didn't know the university was a political hotbed at the time."

"Was it? Despite sounding like such a traditional, single-minded school."

"The university's motto is 'to understand the causes of all things.'"

"Oh, so that must involve rethinking a lot of assumptions."

"Exactly. It definitely wasn't conservative. My mom had known my father all during high school, before she went off to England. Their parents assumed they would marry. But once there, my mom had exposure to some radical feminist ideas that

had her questioning marrying at all, let alone marrying my father."

"Interesting."

"Being so far away made her feel distant from him. Reading John Stuart Mill, Simone de Beauvoir, and Mary Wollstencraft did the same. She's had me read these also."

"So I'll have to be very careful!"

"Sandy, you know this is already built into the way you think."

"My Mom's influence too."

"Exactly. And the media attention that dramatized bra-burning young women.... Well, Mom started thinking in ways that weren't traditional for the Japanese."

"This all makes sense now—why she is so supportive of you not just doing what Japanese society expects."

"Yes. That's the reason Mom wanted my older sister to go to the same university as she had."

"But what about your dad? They did in fact marry."

"Yes, they did. Mom could only manage one untraditional stand. She wasn't able to defy family pressure to wed at the expected age. Especially since my father was still wanting, waiting, to marry her."

"That explains a lot. Could we continue this conversation on our way?"

"Sure."

Sandy and I stood up and packed the rest of the leftover lunch food and the equipment into the cooler, which we then carried up to the car. After putting all this in the trunk, we got in and Sandy started the motor. He turned on some quiet music.

"Should we go to my house now and get my books and overnight things?"

"Okay."

Another car in the parking lot spun its wheels before finally managing to pull away. Without difficulty, Sandy drove out of the parking lot and past the lawn bowling club where the large open space of white created an illuminated surface. When we were under the trees that contain the large heron nests, an arc of snow fell from a branch overhead and landed glistening against the windshield. Sandy pulled to the side of the road to wait for the wipers to whisk it away.

"Mary has said that she has vegetables, bread, and dairy products on hand. But if we want something special, we'll need to get it for ourselves."

"Like the strawberries."

"Yes."

"Then at the house you could copy out Mom's crepe recipe while I gather my things."

“Sure.”

“And we’ll buy the strawberries on the way back.”

The windshield wiper still flipped snow back and forth without clearing the windshield completely. Sandy opened the car door, reached across, and pushed the remaining piece of snow away. Sandy put his seat belt back on.

He said, “Now, let’s hear the rest of the story.”

“About my mom?”

“Yes.”

It seems Sandy really wants to understand the origins of my attitudes. He pulled back onto the road and proceeded to drive out of the park. In the rear view mirror, I had one more glimpse of the ocean before heading to Denman Street.

“It’s not that my mother doesn’t love my father in her own way.... Of course she cares about him. They’ve had enough of a commitment to have three kids and stay together.”

“But she hopes that you will be able to choose your own path?”

“Exactly. And not bend to the kind of pressure that had her marry without going into that with joy, longing, and happy expectations. Having been soul mate to her twin, she is aware of the lack of closeness and shared interests with my dad.”

“She’s had quite a journey.”

“Yes, considering the social situation that has worked against her in Japan.”

“So this is why she is supportive of something other than traditional Japanese marriage for her daughters.”

The few cars on the Stanley Park Causeway were moving slowly. We increased speed in driving the hills of the British Properties, as Sandy said we needed to keep up our momentum. There was very little traffic there. I was glad that Sandy chose to park his car on the road above the house and walk down the stairs at the side of driveway. They were slippery enough.

But something was disturbing me as we approached the front door. I was quiet as I tried to figure this out. Then I recognized the negative feelings, feelings related to Serena. I hesitated on the slate floor inside the entrance. Looking toward the hall, I could tell that Sandy’s bedroom door was open. I didn’t want to have to walk past and look in. How long will I feel that I want to avoid his bedroom? To avoid the memory. At that moment I loathed Serena for causing these feelings. Before that incident, I yearned to spend time there with Sandy.

Sandy’s mother again was so kind to me. She insists that I call her Robyn. This is less awkward for me now, especially after calling our teachers by their first names for so long. Robyn

found the crepe recipe and gave me some paper to write it on while Sandy went off to pack up his essentials for overnight.

I sat in the nook copying the recipe while Robyn put away some groceries. She admitted she had appreciated my role in the final split between Sandy and Serena. She confirmed what Sandy had said about her fearing that Serena otherwise might have been “feeding off Sandy indefinitely.”

“Thank you for saying this, but I confess I just reacted emotionally, not rationally. I felt that what Sandy described about their interaction was other than what he and I expect of each other. So I am glad everything seems to have worked out. Probably even to Serena’s advantage. Now she at least knows where she stands.”

As soon as said this I felt a little self-conscious—surprised that I had revealed this to Sandy’s mom. I guess I needed to talk to someone because the resolution is such a relief to me. When Sandy came into the kitchen, he put down his daypack and sat beside me. He looked at what I had written.

“Nice printing,” he joked. “So have you finished?”

“Yes.”

“Will we need anything besides the strawberries?”

“No, Mary should have everything else.”

Robyn said, “If you are willing to use frozen strawberries, you can take some from the freezer and save getting in and out of a snowy parking lot.”

“Okay. Actually that’s what I used last time,” Sandy said.

His mom took the package out of the freezer and put it into a plastic bag.

“And what about a crepe pan?” Robyn asked.

“Does Mary have one?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never seen one.”

“Well, then, let’s borrow this one. It certainly makes cooking crepes easier.”

“Thanks very much,” I said, as I took the bag from Sandy’s mom and headed toward the door.

As soon as we got back to the apartment, Sandy and I launched into serious cooking—the crepes, along with rice and stir-fry vegetables. Sandy started washing and chopping vegetables and encouraged me to do the crepes. It was strange with Mary not being there, so I was glad Sandy was with me.

I left the strawberries in a bowl on the counter so that they could start to defrost. When I had made the batter and melted the butter in the crepe pan, Sandy stood by saying this was the difficult part—to get the batter poured out thinly enough. I tried but the puddle in the middle of the pan was rather thick. Sandy took the pan and swiveled it around trying

to get the batter to spread all the way to the edges. But despite this, the batter wouldn't move. We needed more water. When I tried to add some, I added too much, so we started laughing.

Sandy stated, "Mom says, 'Crepes are like children, you get to throw the first one out. Or....'" He laughed, "Was it 'Children are like crepes, you get to throw the first one out?'"

"Aren't you lucky then that you're not her first-born!"

"That goes for you too."

"Oh, yes. You're right."

We laughed more as we scraped the sticky batter from the pan. Then I washed the pan and tried to smooth some more flour into the watery batter while avoiding making lumps.

"Are you sure you made those last ones all by yourself, or did your mom help you?"

"I told you, I made them completely alone. Mom wasn't even home then."

Well, after another failed attempt, the watery flour seemed to thicken up on its own, so when I poured another ladle of batter into the pan and swirled it, it worked.

"Hey. Now you have the hang of it," Sandy said encouragingly.

I put each crepe on a cookie tray to stay warm in the oven.

"That should be enough now," I said as I finished the batter. Meanwhile the rice, having come to a boil, was sitting in its pot, and the stir-fry was simmering in its sweet and sour sauce. That gave us a moment to pause. Sandy leaned against the kitchen counter. I stood between his legs and put my arms around his chest. He kissed my temple.

I tried to think if I had ever cooked with a guy in Japan. Except perhaps in a group party situation as an undergrad, I couldn't even remember being in a kitchen with a guy except for my cousin Akira. It felt so good to be this comfortable with Sandy. I wanted to melt into him.

We lingered over dinner, savouring our efforts. Despite full stomachs, we knew we should start studying. Sandy has a term paper due early in the week. We settled into working at the dining room table. I probably did more homework and writing than I usually would have, but I wanted to show Sandy that this is something we can do together—to show him that I can study alongside him and not be a distraction. (He later admitted that I can't help interfering with his concentration, but he said that was his fault, not mine.)

We worked and then had a snack before going into my room to sleep. That too was not without some difficulty, but at least Sandy didn't have to sleep in the other bed.



## ***MARCH # 6—The Remainder of Our First Weekend Together***

*Visuals: photographs of Kits Beach and Vanier Park*

In the morning I woke up to the smell of eggs and bacon cooking. Sandy had managed to find his way around Mary's small galley kitchen to find whatever was necessary to make breakfast for us. Seeing his books spread on the dining room table, I could tell that Sandy had been up for a while.

Having been lying next to him through the night, I felt even closer to him.

"Good morning, Favorite Person."

Warm hug.

"Shall I set your books aside so we can eat at the table?"

"Sure."

In piling his texts and moving his papers, I noticed Sandy's printing on his essay outline.

"Professional-looking lettering," I commented.

"Oh, yeah...my rough notes?" he smiled.

"Do you always make a complete outline before you start writing an essay?"

"Not always, even though I know I should. Sometimes I just jump in and see where my writing goes."

"The go-with-the-flow approach...."

"But now I want to be a little more efficient, so that I have more time to spend with you."

"Really! I have influenced the way you write essays?"

"Erika, you have influenced my approach to life in total."

"Such a responsibility!"

"Not really," he said as he brought the platters of eggs and toast to the table. "It's not as if I am trying to impress you, but wanting you in my life is helping me find the best way of doing what I want to do and of being who I want to be."

I loved hearing this, as I now have the same outlook. I touched his hand as we sat down across from each other.

After finishing breakfast we agreed that we would study until the afternoon when we would go to Kitsilano to feed the cat and walk on the Kits Beach seawall to get some exercise.

I decided I would sit in the living room in order give Sandy the whole space on the dining room table. I got all my stuff arranged around me on the sofa with my books spread out on my lap. I could hear the slight sound of Sandy typing on his laptop. A competent typist. I felt content to have Sandy working close by.

When I heard Sandy go to the sink for a drink of water, I realized I needed my dictionary.

"Sandy, would it be possible for you to bring my electronic dictionary to me? I'm kind of settled here."

"Where is it?"

"In my bag on the chair."

"In your bag?" he said, putting his head in the living room door.

"Yes. You sound like that is too much to ask and yet you are already standing up."

"In your bag...."

He brought the entire bag to me carrying it by the strap as if he were carrying a dead cat by the tail.

"Is it such a big deal to get something out of my bag?" I smiled at him. "What do you think is in there?"

"I have absolutely no idea."

"Something that will bite your hand off at the wrist?" I teased. "How can you be comfortable with some intimacies (I was thinking of last night) and yet going into my purse seems beyond you?"

I set aside a book and some paper and patted the cushion of the sofa next to me.

"Have a seat."

He sat down beside me. He had set the bag in my lap so I returned it to his.

"Why don't you have a look? Go ahead. Open it."

"Well...."

He tentatively put his hand in, looking up questioningly at me.

"So what's in there?" I asked him, feeling like I was dealing with a little kid.

"Ah.... A hair brush," he said, looking down into the bag apparently somewhat relieved.

He brought out the brush and put it in my lap.

"Pretty scary. And what else?"

"Ah.... One micro umbrella."

"A good idea in Vancouver."

He gave that to me too.

"Yes, and...."

"One spiral notebook."

"Everyone can use one of those. Right? And...."

"One small bag."

"Makeup bag containing...."

He opened the zipper with some difficulty.

"Some lip balm, a lipstick, small comb, and some...."

"Blush with brush. And?"

"And one wallet and change purse."

"Somewhat necessary."

"And a set of bus tickets."

"Always useful."

"And an electronic dictionary."

"Ah, good. That's what I want. Now was that so bad?"

"No, I guess it wasn't."

I tousled his already ruffled hair even though he pretended to protest.

In the afternoon, after feeding the Persian cat of Sandy's classmate, we went for our walk from Kits pool to Kits Beach and around the point to Vanier Park by the museum. Sandy explained that this is usually a good spot for kite flying. There were some (weekend?) fathers with children trying to fly kites together, but there was not enough wind at the time to make this successful. Still, there was lots of clean air to invigorate our lungs.



Sandy and I returned to the West End. After we settled inside the apartment and had a snack, we decided to play some music together. This didn't include the piece we have been preparing to play with the piano because Sandy was on his guitar. Still, there is something bonding about playing any kind of music together. Especially romantic music.



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