



MAY # 1—Losing Song at Queen Elizabeth Park

Visuals: photographs from the top of Little Mountain, the biosphere dome, bronze figures, and Henry Moore sculpture

Today my classmates and I went to Queen Elizabeth Park and we lost Song!

First we met at my place, as the others were eager to compare a city homestay close to the school with theirs on the North Shore, where they live in a house with a yard, garage, two parents, siblings, and dogs and cats.

While we waited for our entire group to arrive, Mary offered us some cranberry juice with ginger ale and I made popcorn with the electric popcorn maker. Everyone seemed as surprised as I was at first in seeing this noisy appliance. Soon we sat there at the dining table munching and sipping.

Nicole mentioned she and the two other homestay students in the house were not allowed to eat dinner with the family.

“We eat separately and only have oily pasta. No vegetables.”

Mary seemed mortified. “You must tell the school’s homestay coordinator about this.”

Nicole said she would rather move into an apartment with other Mexican students than to complain. Sumi and Song said they wouldn’t be able to say anything critical either.

Mary said, “But think of the others who will come after you. They too will suffer the same disappointing situation as well as being taken advantage of by receiving inadequate food. Also, living with students from your own county won’t improve your English.”

In the end Nicole agreed to try to talk to the homestay coordinator.

Finally everyone had arrived and we were ready to head out. To get to Queen Elizabeth Park we went by public

transport and then walked up a sloping, curved road. There were colourful spring flowers and shrubs on each side. The air was beautifully fragrant.

Once on the top of "Little Mountain," we could see over the city to the North Shore mountains. This now-beautiful site used to be an open mine. We stood looking down over a waterfall. A stream flowed under a small bridge. Among the flowers and shrubs, some wedding groups were being photographed. We wandered down along garden paths. Then we climbed back to the top and had fun posing with a bronze sculpture of tourists that appear to be so real.



Again Daniel attempted to get special attention from me, which I was shunning. After my contact with Sandy last night, I was even less tolerant of Daniel's attempt to put his arm around my shoulder, etc.

The others noticed that I was rejecting his advances. Obviously this annoyed him, perhaps because Sumi briefly held Bae's hand (it's true!). That was until Sumi found things to laugh about, perhaps wanting to avoid confusing Bae about assuming any romantic attachment.

Recently she admitted that her parents would be opposed to her having a non-Japanese boyfriend. (My father would too!)

We strolled around the fountains and walked toward the biosphere containing a botanical jungle. From the entrance we saw fragrant flowering trees and heard tropical birds shrieking from branches. We could feel the warm humid air as we stood trying to decide whether to pay and go in.

Noboru again acted as if there was no decision to be made: we were at the dome, so we should tour it.

We paid and filed in, crossing a small bridge and following the narrow, twisting path. Small birds flitted around

overhead. Several of us were photographing these as well as decorative benches and exotic sculptures.



After a few minutes I realized that Daniel was not with our group. Nor was Song. Instantly I panicked.

Song would have enjoyed photographing inside the Dome. So where was she? Had Daniel taken Song off as a way of getting back at me?

Se-Eun shared my alarm. She appreciates Song's artistic talent and gentle ways and seems to feel she needs to protect Song as she had at the club.

Without saying anything to the others, Se-Eun backtracked to look for Song. When she returned, she told me that she could not see them on the mountain.

Somehow I felt responsible for their disappearance and hoped that Song wouldn't be misled or hurt by Daniel.

It was a while before Song told me what had happened between them.





MAY # 2—Conversation over Lunch at School

Visuals: handmade paper, photo of bin diver

At lunch yesterday, Barry, Claudia, Se-Eun, and I stayed in the classroom to eat rather than going into the usually noisy lounge. In this conversation, Barry asked about Claudia's plan to set up her own English-speaking private school when she returns to Taiwan.

"I'll start it as soon as my father's businesses have been sold. Having been teaching in a private school for quite a few years and more recently also being director of the school, I would now like to see if I could manage my own English-speaking one. I think there is a need for such a school in Taiwan."

"Then you've set yourself a fascinating challenge."

Reflecting the focus away from herself, Claudia said, "Barry, do you know that Se-Eun has been a set designer as well as a teacher? She will be teaching English in a unique way when she returns home."

"I'd love to hear your plans, Se-Eun."

"Well, my boyfriend and I hope to convert our school's theatre group into an English-speaking company to tour schools in Korea."

"What a wonderful idea," Barry said. "Is that financially feasible?"

"Well, our school board has agreed to support the company as a way to help teach English."

"Fabulous!"

"And the productions will be about social issues— drugs, sex, teen pregnancy, bullying, not fitting in, etc. —all based on student input."

"What a great idea!"

"Yes, we are really excited about the possibilities."

"Se-Eun will be the company's designer as well as working with the students in developing scripts."

“Good for you. What a powerful teaching vehicle that could be. I’d love to be involved in something like that,” Barry said enthusiastically.

When I arrived home later than usual, Mary was standing amidst a most incredible mess in the kitchen.

“Don’t be alarmed,” Mary said laughing at the disarray. “We will still be able to eat dinner about 8:00.”

There were dripping papermaking screens standing on edge on the floor; bottles of coloured stuff (that’s what it is actually called!) on the counter; a large, old pot of simmering paper pulp on the stove; sheets of stacked handmade paper on the open oven door; newspapers and dried flowers on the dining table; and damp cloths on every other available surface.

Mary had previously told me a little about what is involved in making her handmade paper pieces. She said she is willing to teach me the process if I am interested and if I ever have time. (But where would I ever have an appropriate space to do this at home?)

Before 8:30 we finally cleared off some surfaces and, remarkably, we served onto our plates baked potatoes and yams, a baked tomato-cheese-zucchini log, and baked chicken breast (Mary has a large toaster oven!), and we sat down to eat.

We each talked about our day. Mary described a morning art class she had been teaching at an alternate high school where, in the middle of the class, a police officer came in and led away one of the students.

“And he had been such a helpful young man!” she said regretfully. “Carrying water when the others just sat there expecting everything to be set up for them.”

She mentioned that in returning to the apartment she had seen Larry, Leah, and Sandy loading the van with their instruments and equipment.

“When?” I gulped (to myself only I hoped).

“About half an hour before you returned.”

“Half an hour....”

I missed Sandy by half an hour! How could I?

I was furious for having chosen today to go shopping for a pair of casual slacks. I hate shopping. Especially in comparison with the chance to see Sandy!

Mary commented, “I told Sandy I was surprised that you weren’t home yet.”

Does this mean he came to our door to enquire?

Otherwise, how would Mary have known I wasn’t home yet? I wish I could have asked Mary? I dared to wonder, could Sandy have been hoping to see me?

I was even more distressed when Mary added that the band had been in the process of leaving on a road trip and will be away for about a month. My stomach lurched.

A month! A month of walking down the stairs with no chance of meeting Sandy? A month of not being able to sit in on a rehearsal. A month of no hope that Sandy might ever try to contact me.

And who knows what might happen to him by the time he returns? I tried to hide my disappointment. My frustration.

I wondered: Had Sandy tried to tell me about this tour when he mentioned his ex-girlfriend and the difficulties of being away for long periods as a band member? Maybe I hadn't understood.

In just one sentence Mary had converted my sense of hopeful expectation into a state of total dejection.

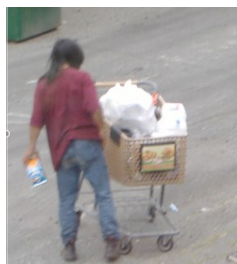
To conceal my feelings from Mary, I tried to talk with interest about Claudia's plans for opening her own school in Taiwan and Se-Eun's intention to assemble a touring English-speaking drama troupe in Korea. But I think Mary may have noticed the effort it took for me to seem enthusiastic.

Although she did remark, "They really are creative—and adventuresome, your friends!"

Then, just as I started eating baked pear with nuts and melted chocolate (done in the microwave), I was struck with something depressing in a different way. Out of the dining room window I saw a small man with a limp struggle to open the heavy lid of a large garbage container (a "dumpster") and climb into it. Climb into it!

I must have revealed my dismay. Mary admitted the plight of homeless people in Vancouver is an embarrassment to her and those with any kind of a social conscience. She said a pro-business government has closed down the facilities and services that used to help such people with health problems and no family support.

I am shocked. With Canada being such a rich country, I assumed there would be enough financial support to care for underprivileged people so they wouldn't need to be climbing through garbage containers!





MAY # 3—Mother’s Day Dinner

Visuals: photographs of the Mansion and the eyeless Japanese doll

When does friendship cross the line to be seen as dating?

Yesterday one of Mary’s former Japanese homestay students, Mieko, visited. I can’t refer to her as Mary’s homestay daughter because she is in fact Mary’s age. She brought Mary some traditional Japanese edible gifts as well as a magenta eyeless doll.

Mieko convinced me to accompany her as she treated Mary to Mother’s Day dinner. So we went to the restaurant in the wonderful old stone mansion on Davie Street. Mary had warned us that the food isn’t as good as the gracious old building suggests. But we found that sharing several dishes was tasty, so we enjoyed our meal.

On our way out of the restaurant, within sight of a unique, decorative fireplace, I was surprised (shocked?) to see Se-Eun and Barry waiting to be seated. I didn’t know whether I should acknowledge them or not, however, they looked comfortable, not at all embarrassed, at being seen together, and said hi to me. But I did not stop to get into conversation.

Of course I was thinking about how teachers are not supposed to “date” students. But it seems a shame for Se-Eun and Barry not to be able to get to know each when they have so much in common. And it’s not as if Se-Eun is young and naive. Also, she has a boyfriend.

But how would school policy view this?





MAY # 4—Surviving Kayaking in Deep Cove

Visuals: brochure of kayak rentals, photos of Jug Island and Twin Islands; rental cabin, and kayakers

Well, ten of us classmates, led by Sabine and I, did go kayaking at Deep Cove, and I survived the experience—but just barely! Much fresh air and exercise! Wonderful being in the sunshine out on the ocean.

“Hey cool! So this is downtown Deep Cove....” Noboru remarked as we got off the bus near the main wharf and kayak rental shop.

“Well, my homestay mother laughed when I called it ‘downtown Deep Cove’ the first time I came here. She thinks of it more as a village.”

“It’s so beautiful,” confirmed Sumi.

“It reminds me of Switzerland with the mountains coming right down to the water,” Sabine said.

“Except this is ocean, not a lake. Right?” Nicole asked.

“Yes. Salt water with tides,” Fernando responded. “See the water line?” he added, pointing to the exposed shoreline for the benefit of some of the others.

“Which island will be kayaking to?” Marina asked, as we leaned against the railing looking out over the water.

“Mary suggested we go to Twin Islands, just around the corner. She said there’s a bit of beach there where we can eat our packed lunches.”

“And where did you say we should eat dinner, Erika?” Noboru asked, checking his multi-time-zone watch and looking back up the main street.

“At the closest restaurant here, the one with the yellow umbrellas. It’s owned by Mary’s nephew.”

“Looks good,” Daniel said as everyone turned and looked at the “bistro” with patio tables with a view of the ocean.

“I’ll go and make a reservation then,” Noboru said. “Is 5:30 a good time for us?”

“Sure, we should be tired enough by then!” I laughed.

Everyone took a few pictures. I noticed that Bae had been photographing Sumi more than the view of the boats, water, and ocean. Then Bae asked Song if she would take a picture of Sumi and him together.

Noboru headed over to the restaurant; the rest of us started down toward the kayak shop. On the shore a large group of Asian students (another language school?) was preparing to go out. We feared that there might not be enough kayaks available for us, but this was not a problem. Staff brought out more kayaks from the racks inside the shop. They set them at the water’s edge as we put on life jackets and received instruction on how to paddle.

People paired up for each kayak: Sabine and Fernando, Marina and Nicole, and Bae and Sumi. They pushed off as Noboru sprinted down the path. Noboru then held one of the remaining kayaks stable as Song got in the front and Daniel (in banker’s shoes and dress pants) got in the back. Again I worried about Song. Had she willingly gone off alone with Daniel last weekend at Queen Elizabeth Park? Strange that I hadn’t heard anything about that, and that I had forgotten to ask.



I got into the front of our last kayak; Noboru sat down behind me. I wasn’t sure how I felt about going with him. I hoped we would all stay together. But Marina, our only expert kayaker, and Sumi, with the incredibly strong wrists and arms from gymnastics, for whom the stroke came naturally, quickly paddled their kayaks ahead of the others.

The first island in sight is Jug Island. The brochure from the rental shop says this island is three kilometres across the bay. Twin Island, the one we'd agreed on, is the third island—almost six kilometres away!

I found paddling quite difficult. Luckily Noboru is surprisingly athletic (despite his unathletic habits). He maintained a steady stroke after just a few moments. I wondered when blisters would appear on my palms (very soon!). I looked longingly at the first island and wished that were our final destination. I wondered about asking Noboru to stop there to rest, but I didn't want to get too far behind the others. So, in silence, I paddled on. I had mixed feelings, therefore, when Noboru decided to stop at Raccoon Island, the second island, "to look around."

Having been warned about tides, we pulled the kayak well up on beach so it wouldn't float away. We left our backpacks in the kayak and climbed up a rock shelf covered with barnacles. A trail through low bush, overhung with tall evergreen trees, led to a large, flat rock—a beautiful lookout with a 180-degree view. I was thinking this was quite a romantic spot just as Noboru, standing behind me, put his hand on my shoulder. This unexpected and unwanted gesture made me move aside, even while feeling awkward about doing so. Despite previously dropping hints of disapproval to Noboru, he seemed surprised that I didn't welcome his attention.

"I thought when you rejected Daniel at Queen Elizabeth Park, you were keeping yourself available for me," he dared to say.

Imagine! The arrogance of assuming this! But how could I respond? I didn't want to be unkind to Noboru. And I was totally dependent on him to get back to dry land. Apparently he couldn't believe I would decline his advances without being interested in some other guy.

So I ended up telling him about Sandy. Sandy! I can't believe I mentioned Sandy! Sandy doesn't even know I am interested in him. Or even that I hope for more contact with him when he gets back from touring. And is seeing Sandy then even likely?

Noboru said he hoped I would change my mind, and he seemed optimistic, as if expecting this. I accepted his help as we wordlessly climbed down off the lookout rock and hiked back along the path. Together we dragged the kayak back into the water and I got in as Noboru suggested.

It was difficult for Noboru to push off from the shore due to incoming waves from a passing yacht. The bottom of his rolled up, pressed, khaki pants were getting increasingly wet. For a moment even, the kayak looked like it would be swamped

as one large wave came splashing over the bow onto Noboru's backpack. Disregarding this, Noboru shoved off and hopped in.

Back to paddling. The emerging blisters on my palms were painful, but I tried to keep this from being obvious to Noboru. Thank goodness for his strength.



I was so glad to join the others on the small beach on Twin Island. All were in good spirits. Bae, long legs sprawled out on the sand, was sitting leaning against a log next to Sumi. His arm was around her shoulder. She didn't seem to notice this as she sat there deleting photographs from her digital camera. Besides seeming absorbed, she was looking cool and sophisticated, so polished, in a large-brimmed, black sun hat (how did that stay on?), sunglasses, black fitted pants, and matching jersey top. She reminded me of a Japanese Audrey Hepburn, as in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, a video Mary has.

As Fernando had brought wieners and buns that needed to be heated, Nicole and Fernando and Marina and Sabine (always active) collected sticks and driftwood and started a small fire. Soon it was crackling in our midst. I thought this might be illegal, but a charred circle of rocks proved a fire had been there before.

Suddenly a feeling of alarm went through me.

"Where are Daniel and Song?"

"Oh, don't worry about them," Nicole said.

"They waved to us as they paddled around behind the island," Fernando added.

Sabine and Nicole set out a generous amount of food to share—it seemed more than enough for everyone. And Noboru contributed sparkling juices for all. That's why his backpack was so heavy! Still we each contributed to the spread on our makeshift tablecloth on the sand. I noticed that Noboru ate with his usual gusto... hot dogs, potato salad, pasta salad, etc., and

then he finished off the chips, salsa, sour cream, and cookies when everyone else had had enough.

Sabine walked around the corner of the beach to search for more driftwood for the fire. I followed her, as I wanted to ask about changing kayaking partners. I explained why.

"I told you Noboru is interested in you...."

"I wish he wouldn't bother! Could you get Fernando and Nicole to share a kayak, so you and I could kayak back together?"

"But you and I need some male strength to pull most of the weight, or we might never get off this island."

"I suppose you're right," I reluctantly agreed.

I returned to the fire convinced I would have to endure the return trip with Noboru.

We must have been getting tired because we sat mesmerized by the glowing embers even though the day was still warm.

"Perfect for roasting marshmallows," Noboru finally said. He jumped up to retrieve his backpack.

"Ah, shh...t!" he exclaimed, as he undid the front section of his backpack that was partially constructed with netting. "My cell phone is soaked."

"Why do you carry it with you to a place like this?" Bae commented.

Noboru, in concentration didn't respond. He was quiet a few minutes as he examined the phone and pressed a few buttons.

"Dead. It's absolutely dead."

Kindly, Sumi said, "Noboru, come and let me have a look."

Sumi works for a communications firm, but I don't think she has any hands-on contact with cell phones, as she is an executive assistant to the CEO. Still was she was sympathetic.

"Noboru, please. Show me."

It seemed that he was hardly hearing her, but without looking away from the phone, he walked over and sat down and leaned against the log beside Sumi even though Bae's arm remained around her shoulder.

Seeing that the phone really was very wet, Sumi said, "Oh dear, how did this happen?"

"A large wave splashed into the kayak as we pushed off from Raccoon Island."

"Too bad it wasn't in the waterproof section of your backpack. When you get home you could try putting it in a closed container with some rice to help it dry out."

"Really?"

“But don’t touch any of the buttons until then. It may work after it dries out.”

“No. Water destroyed one of my other ones. It’s had it.”

“That’s too bad.”

I felt sorry for Noboru too, but I was glad that Sumi was willing to take on this caring role.

Finally Noboru set aside his cell phone and took out the package of marshmallows.

Daniel said, “Oh, good stuff. My homestay brother says that, toasted, these are the best part of every Canadian beach party.”

“Yeah, they become a sweet, gooey white mass,” Marina commented.

“So are we going to toast them?” Sabine asked.

“Yes, let’s. We’ll need some more sticks to do that,” Marina said, jumping up. “Let’s go get some.”

In a couple of minutes Sabine, Marina, and Ferdinand had enough sticks for us all to use. So we each speared a marshmallow and tried to roast it slowly so it didn’t burn or fall off the stick. That was all of us except for Noboru, who put his marshmallows right into the flames so that they blackened immediately. (All the better for eating more than his share!)

Noboru and I didn’t interact much on beach—was this my doing or his? I had been preoccupied enough by his disappointments (my rejection of him and the demise of his cell phone) that I had forgotten again about Daniel and Song. So I was amazed when they came out of a trail from the bush behind us, hand in hand as Daniel helped Song over a pile of logs.

Both seemed totally pleased with themselves—despite looking so ill matched. Song, with her bright eyes, friendly smile, and long black hair, looked like a healthy, young peasant in her dark, longish cotton jumper over a white t-shirt and socks with sandals. Daniel, blond, older, and much taller, still looked like a banker in his office pants and shirt and dress shoes. Who would put these two together as a couple?

We offered them some of our remaining food, but they said they had already had eaten. I was eager to know their story but had to wait until evening to receive an account.

The rest of us, having overeaten, continued to relax around the fire until we knew we should start back.

“Where is your kayak?” Marina finally asked Daniel and Song.

“Oh, about two minutes back along the path,” said Daniel. “I suppose we should go and get it so we can all leave together.”

“We’ll wait here for you.”

“Okay, we’ll come around then,” Daniel said.

Meanwhile, using empty bottles to carry salt water up from the water's edge, Noboru doused the fire as if in anger. It sputtered and steamed as the water ran over the blackened rocks and partially burnt wood.

We gathered our things and repacked our backpacks. I worried about having to cope with Noboru, but he continued to be fairly quiet so didn't talk much on our return trip. Also we were able to keep within sight of the rest of the group, including Daniel and Song. Daniel seemed a relatively able kayaker (again, male strength, unfair!).



I was relieved to get safely back to shore and be on our way up the path toward the restaurant. All the tables under the umbrellas on the patio were taken, but inside the restaurant, a table for 10 was set for us. We had a view looking down toward the swimming beach.

Daniel pulled Song's chair out for her and then they huddled together over the menu deciding what to order. They shared food off the same plate. I thought of their seven-year age difference and I worried about Daniel's sincerity. But apparently he is not trying to get back at me. In fact he seems to have forgotten my existence, which I am glad of! They looked so pleased to have claimed each other.

Sabine had managed the seating such that I was sitting between her and Fernando with Sumi and Bae across from us, so I wasn't forced to talk with Noboru. When he alluded to dreading having to tell his dad about another defunct cell phone, Bae commented, "I can relate to that."

Daniel left the table but soon he returned to his place next to Song. Standing behind her, he lifted up her long hair and kissed the side of her neck. Her eyes lit up with pleasure as she smiled at this gesture.

I noticed Nicole talking to a toddler who was wandering around the restaurant with a colouring book and a large crayon.

Nicole's apparent love of children heartens me, as I have tired of seeing her attempts at school to flirt with Barry.

After eating a large appetizer and a full portion of main course, Noboru turned the conversation to skydiving. He was trying to get all of us to agree to go skydiving in Richmond. He said he would bring some brochures to school.

"It only costs...."

Only, I thought. There he goes again making assumptions about his father's money as if we all similarly have an infinite supply. Financially Noboru is on totally different planet than most of us. Yet Sabine surprised me when she said she would be interested in jumping. She is not well off. But she is willing to try any activity. I was less surprised when Sumi said she would be willing to go. Bae, however, declared that he definitely would not be jumping.

"Having narrowly survived my Korean military service, I won't voluntarily take on any additional life-threatening acts."

Daniel and Song, talking quietly to themselves as if they were on separate table, kept out of this conversation. I too tried not to participate in Noboru's promotional pitch. I just said that skydiving wasn't how I wanted to spend my money.

Toward end of the meal we talked about more realistic plans to go to a club and to a school barbecue during the coming week. Some of the group had dessert (including Noboru, of course) or lingered over tea, coffee, or wine (also Noboru).

The food had been so delicious everyone was satisfied, yet we knew we should be heading back to the city. By the time we walked across the road to where bus was parked, I realized my arms and wrists were aching and the blisters on my palms were definitely puffy.



p.s.

I just got off the phone with Song. Wow! She said she hopes I don't mind her taking over Daniel. After seeing me with Sandy at the gig, she assumes I am interested in Sandy (am I that transparent?) and not in Daniel.

She explained that when she had arrived at Vancouver airport, Daniel was the first international student she met and they were delivered to their homestays in the same van. Song said that she and Daniel didn't talk much then, but she memorized his address when he was dropped off.

I asked her about her initial attraction to him. She said when he arrived at the airport after an eight-hour flight, he was wearing a three-piece suit and still had his tie done up tightly. She said it struck her that he needed someone to love him and help him become more relaxed. She hoped that could be her.

She also admitted that while Daniel looked somewhat ridiculous in trying to impress me, he really is a generous, considerate, and attentive person.

She confirmed what Sabine had speculated about Daniel when she had stayed with me after our trip to Whistler—that despite his good looks, Daniel is unsure of himself.

"Because he has worked his way up through the Swiss-bank apprenticeship system from the age of 17, he missed the experience of being in college with young people," Song said.

"So he has had no date life?" I commented in remembering what Sabine had said.

"Exactly. Now as a wealth manager in the bank, he has a lot of responsibility."

"Wow, good for him."

"So, he has arrived, at age 27, insecure and inexperienced in his personal life. His is dream, in coming to Canada, has been to have some fun and have girlfriend."

I asked her how they made contact last week. Sounding somewhat younger all of a sudden, she giggled that she had purposely drawn him away from the group at Queen Elizabeth Park. She explained that they had walked down the hill together and gone into a coffee shop. While they were waiting for someone to come to their table to take their order, Song simply said to Daniel, "I want you to be my boyfriend."

Apparently he was surprised and responded, "Are you attracted to me?" And she admitted that she is and that she has been from first time they'd met at the airport. So thoughtfully, kindly, he had said, "I'll consider it."

Song said that this past week, they quietly left school to eat lunch together and had been spending time together after school. Apparently Daniel "considered" her request positively and it seems he is now interested in her too.

I am amazed at this. I had thought of Song as the baby in our group—vulnerable and probably naive. I am impressed that she could be so straightforward.

I respect Song enormously now for being able to go after what she wants and get it. I wish I could do the same!





May # 5—Going to a Club

Visuals: photos of the Commodore and Granville Street buildings at night

Nightclub time.... Sabine and I planned to have supper with Mary before going to a nightclub with our classmates. Just as we were settling into eating our salad, the phone rang. Mary and I both groaned, but the surprise was Mary saying, "Sabine, it's for you."

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said to us, knowing it likely would be Hans. Sabine told him we were in the midst of dinner, but he continued to talk.

She said, "We've already discussed this. And I am going."

After he spoke again, she said, "Do you realize that two people sitting at the table with me are hearing every word of this conversation?" she smiled at us and grimaced indicating her disapproval of the caller.

She listened a moment and then said, "Yes, I know what you've said. I'm hanging up now."

She listened again and then said, "But what might seem unacceptable in one context is perfectly acceptable in another context, and that's the case here."

We heard the voice on the phone get louder and more insistent.

Sabine responded, "It seems your concept of who I am and what is acceptable for me are different than my ideas about myself. If you remember, that's exactly why we broke up. I am hanging up now. Please do not to phone back and disrupt dinner again. Your opinion is not going to change my actions."

After she hung up, she grimaced again. "I'm really sorry. I tried not to give him this phone number. I really did. But it's as if, a continent away, it's still almost impossible to say no to him

about anything. As you see, two months after breaking up, he's still trying to control my life!"

"So he's saying you shouldn't be going to the nightclub?"

"Exactly. He thinks that is inappropriate behaviour for someone in international banking, me in particular."

"So who is he thinking cares about what you are doing here in Vancouver tonight?" I asked.

"I have no idea."

Mary added, "Do you know, students I had from another school use to refer to two clubs as Block E and Block F because they went to them so often they thought of them just an extension of their school day."

"Oh, marvelous! I wish I'd called it Block F and never mentioned it was a club. Then again I wish I wasn't having any contact with him at all. "

"Did you ever tell him about going to the club to watch Larry and Leah's band?" I asked.

"Yes, that was totally immoral. Corrupted us all. Right? So now to go to yet another club in less than a month, well, that makes me some kind of tainted lady, doesn't it?"

"Have you told him about skydiving plans for Sunday?"

"Are you kidding? He'd be here on the next flight if he thought I had any intention of jumping out of a plane!"

We all laughed and Mary said, "I'm rather glad Erika has decided only to watch, not to jump."

"My homestay mother was concerned too until I reassured her that I have told my parents. My mom doesn't like to see me restricted so early in life. She is glad I'm doing things here that I don't do in Switzerland. She can also see the control Hans has had on my life."

"Could you stop all contact if you didn't work together?"

"Actually work isn't the only problem. He's infiltrated my whole family. He skis with my brother. And not just locally—but in Austria where they've roomed together. Except for my mom, all my friends and relatives think Hans has wonderful husband potential—handsome, intelligent, sophisticated, and with biological value as the father of my future children. They think I'm crazy, at age 26, not to be married to him already."

Mary commented, "That is, perhaps the hardest task in life...to find an appropriate father for your children."

"And maybe I worry about this."

"And pay a price for caring about this," Mary commented.

"You see what Hans is like as an ex-boyfriend. Can you imagine what he would be as a husband? So controlling. So jealous. Impossible to live with!"

"Maybe he thinks you are still a couple."

"That's true. He's in a state of total denial."

Sabine glanced at the clock.

"Erika, look at the time. We need to go to meet our group."

We both got up from the table.

"Mary, thanks so much for the delicious dinner and for letting me stay tonight."

"You're welcome to stay anytime, Sabine. Even without prior arrangements."

Sabine added, "Now we'll be off to that 'den of iniquity.'"

There was a lineup to get into the club. During this time Se-Eun noticed Song and Daniel's closeness. Had Se-Eun been so preoccupied by Barry not to have noticed previously? Once we got inside, Song and Daniel headed for the dance floor. I tried to reassure Se-Eun not to be concerned about them.

"Song wants to create a wonderful memory. She doesn't have an illusion of Daniel being a permanent part of her life. She has said, 'Love is always good, even if it cannot be forever'."

I don't know what Se-Eun made of this personally.

Later in the evening I saw Bae, our awkward one, advising Song while sitting at a table that they had on their own at that moment.

Perhaps being from the same country as Song, Bae feels he should serve as Song's big brother. Despite their talking in Korean interspersed with English, I could tell that Bae was warning Song not to become sexually involved with Daniel, for fear that no man would want her when she returns home.

Song confronted Bae by asserting, in English, "And yet if you had a chance to get together with Sumi, you would."

Bae revealed his impish smile at the thought of this, and in English responded, "But Sumi isn't Korean. Maybe women aren't expected to have such high ideals in Japan today."

Is this true, I wondered? Could Japan have lower standards regarding the chastity of unmarried women than Korea has?

This comment was interrupted by the waiter who was asking if they would like another drink. They both chose a non-alcoholic beverage.

"Maybe, at this stage of her life, an involvement would be okay for Sumi," Bae continued after the server walked away.

"As in her being with you!" Song challenged him.

"Well, that would always be up to Sumi," Bae responded somewhat coolly.

I silently wondered: Do I, as a Japanese woman, still believe that staying chaste for my future husband is all-important? I don't think less of my sister for her liaison with Andrew, even though they don't have pending plans to marry.

Would Yoko and Andrew have proceeded in the same way if their getting to know each other had begun in Japan or Canada?

Does my approval of their situation have anything to do with their bond beginning in London? Would knowing this started in a different context really have made so much difference to me about them?

But most of all, how would this be different for me if I were in a similar situation emotionally in Japan compared to being in Canada?



Photograph of Grandville Street building above courtesy of Christian Knaus, Austria



May # 6—Kitsilano Beach Barbecue

Visuals: photos of Kits Beach Park, beach volleyball, view toward the city

Well, the beach party at Kitsilano, under perfect skies, provided more drama and insight than I expected....

The area has trees, a huge outdoor swimming pool, and a wrap-around beach with a view west to all of English Bay (with its six beaches of which Kits is only one) and north to the West End and the mountains.

In arriving, most students went off to play tennis or beach volleyball. Nicole and Sabine decided to swim in the ocean. Claudia, Se-Eun, and I set out the food for our group while Barry put hamburgers and hotdogs on the grill. Claudia seemed to be trying help Se-Eun out of an apparent depression. I was surprised that Se-Eun wasn't trying to hide her unhappiness from Barry.

When the table was set and food organized, Barry suggested we join the others so we didn't miss all the fun. Se-Eun said she didn't feel up to this, so after her reassurance, Claudia and I headed for the beach. Noboru and team had just beaten their opponents in a volleyball game, when some locals took over the net.

Spotting us, Noboru called to Claudia and I to be ready for a contest with him and a few others. When we took our places against Noboru, he dominated to the point of almost playing the game single-handedly and he won, even though our side tried our best to stand up to him.



As Claudia and I went off to the bathhouse, she explained that Se-Eun had just received a letter from her boyfriend breaking up with her. Apparently he has become infatuated with a young drama teacher/actress who has been helping with the theatre company that he and Se-Eun have been developing together.

"I'm sorry to hear this because that guy was central Se-Eun's future plans."

"Exactly," Claudia responded.

We stopped at the tennis courts long enough to see Daniel and Song playing doubles. They trounced their partners mainly because Daniel was capable enough to play both parts of their court. Song only attempted to hit balls that headed straight for her racket; Daniel took care of the rest. And this was despite his being dressed in business pants and banker shoes as usual. Claudia and I went onto the next court and tried to get a few rallies going, but we lacked the energy to try to get into a game.

When we returned to our table, Barry and Se-Eun were talking quietly. A minute later Nicole arrived in her bikini with wet hair. Apparently she and Sabine had been swimming in the still-cold ocean. Nicole made a fuss about holding up a too-skimpy, wrap-around towel with one hand while and leaning over to dry her hair with the other. I assume this was intended for Barry's benefit, but he was preoccupied with Se-Eun's dejection.

Nicole went off to change into shorts and a tank top. She had her damp hair tied back when she returned with a younger student from another class who seemed to be alone. Nicole had invited her to join our table. Soon all the other students returned. Daniel set a towel down on the bench for Song to sit on. The eating began.

After a few minutes the other girl asked Nicole what kind of work she does, something I confess I hadn't ever thought about.

Nicole said she is a practical nurse in a hospital.

"How did you get to do that?"

"Well, after completing high school, I didn't want to do any more studying."

"Ah. Same as me. I just graduated from high school."

"Luckily a family friend in a local hospital encouraged me to apply for a job there, as there was an urgent need for more practical nurses," Nicole explained.

"So you got the job without any training?"

"Yes, I did, although after I had been there a while I started taking courses and got my practical nursing diploma."

"But you didn't want to study...."

"Well, I did study because I realized I like being in a hospital. I want to help people who are sick or in need of some kind of care. But now, I find the actual work boring. Sometimes I feel like a cleaner rather than someone there to help patients."

"Do you hope to do something else when you return to Mexico?"

"I'm not sure. Coming here to study English has been my dream for so long I haven't thought of anything beyond getting here."

This conversation faded when, from the far end of the table, Marina commented, "Hey, Noboru, are you getting enough to eat?"

I smiled to myself as I too had noticed that Noboru had finished off several hamburgers and hot dogs, a mass of potato salad, as well as chips and dip. With ice cream and sweets standing by, he was still helping himself to main course items that looked like they might go to waste. It was all very tasty, but I did wonder about the amount of fat in the various traditional Canadian barbecue foods. Noboru, however, didn't seem to be concerned about fats.

Students gathered around the table next to ours while candles on a birthday cake were being lit for someone in another class. Most of us nevertheless joined in singing happy birthday. Is "Happy Birthday" an international song?

Nicole and the younger student, being first to finish eating, set off for a walk together. I thought this was kind of Nicole, and remembered other times when she has been particularly considerate, something that makes up for her inappropriate attentions to Barrie. (She must have noticed that Barry's attention was focused on Se-Eun.)

Noboru and Sumi got up too and, within sight of us all, started playing tennis! This amazed me considering the amount of food Noboru had just consumed. Obviously he is one of those people who can eat anything without putting on weight and who is naturally athletic and seemingly in need of constant physical stimulation. They played hard and Noboru only narrowly beat Sumi, who is a noticeably good player.

The rest of our group continued to sit there and digest food while talking amongst ourselves. When Noboru and Sumi returned to the table, Noboru again brought up the idea of

going skydiving in Richmond tomorrow. He passed around a couple of brochures to try to talk more people into coming. He said, "It costs \$240.00, so it's not that expensive."

"That is a matter of opinion," I responded.

"But that includes all the gear, instruction, etc.," he countered appearing somewhat irritated that he had been unsuccessful in convincing me to jump.

Finally I said I would accompany the group to watch but not to participate. Sabine, Sumi, Daniel, and Marina agreed they would jump with Noboru. Claudia declined totally as she was to spend time with a friend coming into town for the weekend. Fernando, in seeing that Sabine was determined to do the jump, said he would accompany Song and me in watching. Bae said he would accompany us as well, since he had been unable, so far, to talk Sumi out of jumping.

Most of us were content to sit at the tables without going back to the more energy-intense, pre-supper activities. But that didn't include Daniel. He insisted he needed to play some more tennis and asked Sumi to play. I was amazed when she agreed to a couple of rounds. Perhaps she wanted to avoid Bae's continuing attempt to convince her not to skydive. She and Daniel went off to a court within sight but not within hearing.

Bae took the opportunity to solicit Song's help.

"Song, can't you convince Sumi not to jump?"

"She's an adult, Bae. She has to make up her own mind. But she's athletic. She should be okay."

When Bae saw he would get nowhere on that subject, he talked to Song regarding his frustration of not getting a serious response from Sumi.

"You and Daniel seem so together after such a short time," he commented. "Why can't Sumi and I be like that?" he asked plaintively without taking his eyes off Sumi as she rallied out on the court, serving aggressively and refusing to concede the game to Daniel.

Song responded, "You both have to want the same thing at the same time."

What with the other conversations going on around me, I only heard Bae and Song's conversation intermittently. I did hear Song say, "Timing is central. Sumi just wants to explore friendship now and not have a boyfriend. She can have that at home when she is ready. So don't take it personally that she doesn't want you as a boyfriend, Bae."

Soon the warm sun started to go down. With the help of the more responsible students, the teachers soon had everything packed into the van and cars. Most students were on their way, but Sabine encouraged Noboru to go to look at the pool,

scheduled to open the next day, and to find out the hours and costs.

Feeling that Se-Eun and Barry might want to continue talking at the table, Claudia and I got up and walked toward Kits Point. We enjoyed seeing the variety of houses, some being at least 75 years old (ancient for Vancouver!). Others are very new and innovative. We walked as far as the Vancouver Museum and Planetarium in Vanier Park where we toured the lawns and gardens, which are surrounded by water on three sides. People were flying kites in the updrafts of cool evening air coming in off the ocean.

In order to take some photos looking back toward the West End across the stretch of water, Claudia and I wandered down a slope to a gravelly, less-travelled part of the beach where wild grasses grow amongst the driftwood and logs. As I came down the path and around a cluster of shrubs, I spotted Barry and Se-Eun. They were sitting on a log, Barry with his arm around Se-Eun's shoulders. She may have been weeping. I was able to motion to Claudia to stop and turn around before Barry and Se-Eun saw us.





May # 7—Skydiving in Richmond

Visuals: view of airport area from plane

As planned, jumpers Sabine, Sumi, Marina, Norboru, and Daniel, and watchers Fernando, Bae, Song, and I met at the school and together travelled to the airport area in Richmond. Planes offering jumps are parked on an open field of a private airstrip. Those jumping signed release forms, paid, and then were directed to one corner of an airplane hanger.

As we were the only ones there, we watchers were able to join the jumpers in viewing a demonstration video explaining how to jump. The instructor answered questions after the video.

Those jumping got into assigned suits with parachutes. Once they were back outside, several of us took pictures of the jump group in their gear. Bae was still quietly trying to get Sumi to change her mind and not to jump, but failed to convince her.

“Good luck!”

“Good luck!”

Then the instructor and pilot led the jumpers toward a small plane sitting in the field. The plane looked as if there wouldn't be room for all five jumpers to sit inside, let alone stand at the plane's open door to push off.

As watchers, we sat on a bench outside the hanger. Bae was totally preoccupied by Sumi's safety. He had gone pale and quiet. He intently watched the plane take off and then reach altitude. We heard the drone of the engine and strained our eyes as the plane circled around overhead.

Then the first person emerged from the door of the plane. “Noboru,” several said at once. Not surprising. Then someone else. Maybe Sabine. Fernando took some pictures.

“There she is! There she is,” Bae sprung up, sheltering his eyes while watching Sumi's every move. Song reached up and dragged on Bae's hand to get him to sit down again. Others emerged from the plane also. One, two...six including the instructor. They were all out.

The plane still droned overhead.

“They should have opened their parachutes by now....” Bae agonized. It’s true, time seemed interminable.

And then pop. Pop. Pop. Like silent popping popcorn, their parachutes opened. Going to land where? All headed in the right direction? Wind making them drift? Finally Noboru landed and ran along the ground with his parachute full blown behind him. He gained control and came to a stop.

“Sabine’s down okay,” Fernando said as Sabine stumbled. He took another picture aimed in her direction.

As Sumi approached the ground, Bae stood up again. It seemed as if he was about to run out to her. I grabbed at his jacket.

Song snatched his hand saying, “We can’t go out there, Bae.”

I thought he was going to be sick. He looked terrible. But Sumi landed beautifully, two feet at once, with perfect balance. There were tears in Bae’s eyes.

“Marina’s down,” reported Fernando.

“And that’s Daniel. Daniel’s okay too,” Song said somewhat relieved.

They were all safely on the ground. We stood up, cheered, and waved. The jumpers gathered up their parachutes behind them and walked back toward us.

Bae broke away and met Sumi with a silent, prolonged hug as if he had never expected to see her alive again. Sumi seemed okay with this. They walked toward us, Bae’s arm still around Sumi’s shoulders.

When the jumpers returned to us, they all talked at once. About being scared to step out of the plane. About the incredible view. About the sense of freedom and peace up there, the quiet. They were obviously on a high. They posed for pictures. I took a picture of Bae and Sumi alone together. I thought Bae would appreciate that after all he’d been through.

Everyone continued to all talk even as we walked back to a restaurant to have lunch. Bae sat next to Sumi, touching her hand during the entire meal. Daniel and Noboru seemed to expect to be admired. Song willingly provided that for Daniel. I felt somewhat irked that Noboru seemed to look to me for that. Still, the conversation remained animated. It only subsided as we waited (seemingly forever!) for a bus to take us back into Vancouver.

Because the bus was full, the group split up to get seats. Noboru followed me toward the back and we sat in one of the sideways seats. He soon indicated that I should be more impressed by his jump.

He said, “You were obviously too scared to jump.”

"That's not why I didn't go. I might have considered jumping if it had been free. But I am not about to spend more than two hundred dollars for forty seconds of freefall no matter how exciting that could be."

"Is lack of money such a problem for you?"

"No. I have enough...because I use it wisely. Not like you. Spending constantly without any apparent concern about where it is coming from and how things might be in future."

"But I intend to be rich."

"Many people intend to be rich but don't quite make it. And people trying to look rich aren't the ones accumulating capital. That's done by people conserving money."

Noboru was quiet for a while, perhaps stewing over fact that his (father's) money doesn't impress me.

"How did your parents become rich?" I asked.

"My mother's family was well off, but my father's was poor. However, he was always ambitious and industrious. He still works day and night. He wants us kids to have things that he never had when he was young."

"What kind of work does he do?"

"He is a partner in a large electronics firm. He started out working there as a teenager for an hourly wage when it was an electric appliance factory."

"Then he has worked hard. Can he relax now?"

"Oh, no. He will never feel secure. He will probably always feel that he could do better by working longer and harder, and he will always fear he could lose his position or that the company could fail."

"So he works and you spend?"

"I work enough."

"You do? But not such long hours as your dad, I bet."

"True. I don't work such long hours."

"And with the university education that he provided for you, you didn't have to start out as a poorly paid worker in the factory."

"I work as a computer programmer for his company. I enjoy computers. And I intend to be happier than he is."

"Do you know happiness doesn't necessarily depend upon money?"

"I do realize that more since I have been in Vancouver. My host family lives in a modest house. But they do things together. Simple things. And they laugh a lot."

"That's good then."

"My mother rarely sees my father. I think she is lonely, and when they are together he seems tense. I think she would prefer having less money but more time with him."

“Well, if being in Vancouver has taught you that, then being here has been worthwhile.”

Noboru didn't respond to this. He was quiet for a few minutes; then he offered his seat to an elderly passenger, and moved away from me. After a few minutes of being alone, I was almost asleep. Then I realized Bae and Sumi were sitting within hearing distance, but out of sight, as a couple was standing between us.

Sumi asked, “Why were you so worried about me, Bae?”

After a bit of prodding, Bae finally began to speak of his 18-month, compulsory, military training in Korea. About how his dad is a career pilot in the marines—apparently a position that involves jumping out of planes—something he has expected of Bae.

“Did *you* want to do this, Bae?”

“No. But for my father's sake I intended to try my best during my compulsory service. As a way of thanking him for supporting me through university.”

“So what happened?”

There was a pause as Sumi patiently waited for his reply.

“Within the first few weeks, I was required to jump out of a plane. I hadn't thought about the possibility of being scared. But when I stood in the doorway of the plane looking down, well, I was terrified. I froze. I just couldn't do it.”

“So what happened?”

Bae was quiet.

“I don't want to embarrass you, Bae, but I'd like understand.”

He was quiet another moment and then simply said, “My commanding officer pushed me out.”

“Oh, no.... But you knew what to do?”

“Well, in theory. But the problem was that, being off balance, I struck my forehead and eye against the doorway in leaving the plane.”

“You hurt your eye?”

“Yeah.”

“But you landed okay?”

“I landed badly and with a bruised forehead and bleeding eye.”

“Oh, no!”

“I was shaken up, but no bones were broken.”

“Was your eye hurt seriously?”

“Enough that I will never be a pilot.”

“But did you finish your military training?”

“After minor eye surgery, I did. But I spent the remaining months cleaning planes.”

“Oh, I guess that's not what your father had in mind.”

“No. He was devastated. He thinks I have totally disgraced myself. And him. He is embarrassed that his peers know about my failure.”

“Oh, now I understand.”

“That is why he insisted I come to Canada.”

“As punishment?”

“No, not as punishment. Just to get me away from him. The reminder of what I had done. My humiliating past.”

“Past is past,” Sumi stated.

“But he’s had me feeling that I could never escape from that. He’s had me believe this failure would colour my life forever.”

“Which you can see isn’t true.”

“Yeah. I’m beginning to understand that. I’m grateful to all of you for seeing me without reference to that failure.”

“Good thing I’ve never met your dad, Bae. I’m not sure he’d like to know what I am thinking of him.”

“Forget him. I’m grateful to all of you for your friendship.”

There was a long pause before he added, “Especially to you, Sumi.”

I don’t know how Sumi was feeling, but I was nearly moved to tears in overhearing this.

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