



NOVEMBER # 1—Yoko’s Warning

To: erico.yamashiro@mobilityelite.co.jp
From: yoko.yamashiro@chiclooks.co.jp
Date: Tues., November 02 22:15 PST
Subject: Catching Up....

Dear Erika,

About my silence.... As Mom has been telling you, Andrew and my divergent business approaches have caused some problems for us that became apparent in launching our New Year’s clothing line. These differences seem resolved now, but I did fear that related stress and worry were taking a toll on our relationship. However, in coming through this trial, we are now feeling closer than ever.

I’m writing now because I have just listened to your final diary entry for September and I find it rather disturbing. Your October tape has arrived too, but I haven’t had time to listen to that one yet.

I am concerned about the fight that you and Sandy had (after going to the art galleries with your friends) and the way you settled it. I am troubled because it shows you are the one doing all the giving. Think about that: Sandy gets jealous of Noboru so you tell Sandy you want to do your architectural studies in Vancouver as a way to prove your commitment to him. That’s fine, except that doesn’t take any effort on Sandy’s part. Naturally he’s pleased that you want to attend the University of British Columbia as that keeps all his options open, doesn’t it?

In short, I worry that your obvious physical attraction to Sandy may be clouding your vision. Also, what happened to the idea of getting to know more than one guy during your time in Vancouver?

I have your best interests at heart....

Love,

Yoko

p.s.

I agree not to reveal your plan to Mom and Dad until after you have talked with them yourself.



NOVEMBER # 2—Visiting the Museum of Anthropology/Sandy’s Betrayal?

Visuals: photographs of flagpole, view over rose garden, interior and exterior views of the Museum of Anthropology including Bill Reid sculpture

Still getting over Noboru’s forced kiss Friday night and now I have to worry about Sandy too? I feel numb.

Mary and I visited UBC’s Museum of Anthropology this afternoon. Getting settled on the bus, Mary admitted she needed to finish reading the last chapter of the book that had been recalled, so we didn’t talk.

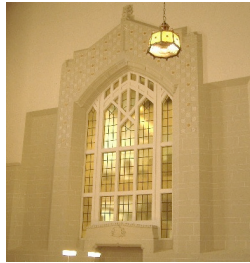
The two of us were seated on side-facing seats so I couldn’t help noticing when, across from us, a rather cute guy (about 20 years old?) smiled at an attractive blonde student (about the same age) and sat down next to her. She didn’t return his smile. In fact, she looked irritated by his notice. She inched away from him in the seat, crossed her legs, put her large bag on her knees, and folded her arms across her chest.

Aware of her negative reaction to his arrival, the guy was blushing slightly (this reminded me of Sandy) and he looked totally self-conscious. He immediately opened his large textbook and set to work underlining phrases with a yellow highlighting pen seemingly with a great urgency. Despite the book almost covering his lap, he attempted to close a three-inch slit in his jeans just above his knee.

It was apparent that the two of them were totally uncomfortable and just wished that they could get away from each other. Yet I kept thinking why can’t they just talk? They might have a lot in common and maybe even like each other. Thinking about meeting Sandy, I became even more grateful to Leah and Larry for creating our initial contact, so we didn’t go through a strained and awkward first encounter like this.

As soon as the bus came to a stop at the UBC loop, the two of them got quickly off the bus and headed in opposite directions.

Mary and I walked to the main library. With about 20 libraries on campus, the university is large. Its lands include the 18-hole golf course we drove through and, apparently, a nude beach just below the cliff where the anthropology museum stands.



As well as returning the library book, Mary wanted to find something relating to the historical wall mural that she is working on. Entering the library, Mary pointed me to the architecture section. She said we should meet just inside the main entrance to the stacks in 20 minutes. There were so many fascinating architectural books. Some featuring European historical architectural details— sketches of columns, window treatments, and church steeples—particularly appealed to me.

I wanted to sit down to look at a couple of these books, so I walked through the narrow rows of shelves toward the line of small desks along the windows. Hardly anyone was around. When I reached the end of the row of shelves, I was hit like a punch in my stomach.

Sandy was sitting there with a young woman!

They were sharing a small carrel (in two chairs side by side) and she was leaning over an open textbook, her long blond hair touching Sandy's arm. She was looking up at him through her blackened eyelashes. For an instant I was paralyzed, enraged even, but they didn't see me.

I took a step backwards between the shelves to make sure I was out of their line of vision. Could this be the former girlfriend that he promised me he wouldn't spend any time with? Or is this yet another pretty, young woman falling all over him? Is this what Claudia had warned me about in saying Sandy's exposure to other women at UBC could diminish his interest in me and lessen his time for me? He's said he can't see me this week as he is "studying for mid-term exams and writing papers." Sure.

I had to consider what to do. Anyone else would have gone over and spoken—right? Let him know that I'd seen them and let him respond to that. I wanted so badly to walk over to

their carrel. But I was shaking. I just couldn't do it. *What is wrong with me?*

I took the two architectural books out to a more open area by some photocopying machines. I was hoping Mary would return immediately. I sat down at a table with the books but I wasn't reading them. Anger got in the way. I was trying to convince myself to go back in and confront Sandy. But I was reduced to my indecisive Pisces state—upset and worried instead.

Mary came back asking, "Find something interesting?"

"Yes."

"I'll sign them out for you so you can take them home."

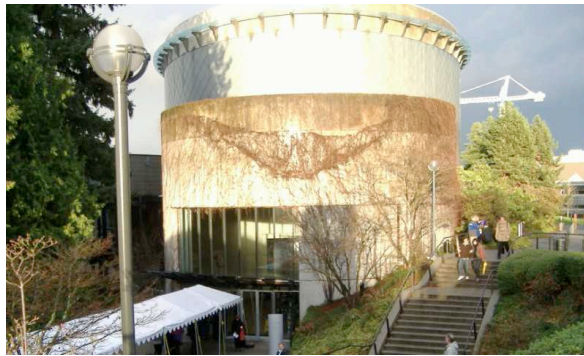
"Oh, thank you."

I felt emotionally drained, but Mary was pleased with what she had found; she didn't seem to notice my sudden despair.

We went out the library's main doors and down the stone steps and past the clock tower, as we set out for the museum. From a viewpoint by some flagpoles, we saw a structure like a water tower that is a theatre, called the Chan Centre.

"Musical performances and graduation ceremonies are held there," Mary commented.

With the shifting clouds, the late afternoon sun momentarily illuminated the structure in a striking way.



In looking straight ahead, we could see out to the Howe Sound waters and mountains. We started down a long flight of stairs through a rose garden. A few faded roses were still in bloom even though this is early November. We crossed a road with cars on it, whereas most other roads on the campus are free of traffic.

The evening light was fading in the woods when we walked along a path to one side of the museum to see some totem poles. Walking through the trees would have frightened me if I'd been alone. Mary said she'd been there several times but admitted to always being there in full daylight.

Around the side, we came to a more open area that felt almost deserted. One man, however, was photographing a grayish-white owl that was just sitting on the corner of the roof of a carving hut. The owl's face looked like that of a hardened old man. The owl didn't seem to mind us just standing there staring, then he was also staring at us.



Mary explained that the anthropology museum is high above the beach, but one cannot see the edge of the cliff now because of the trees that were planted there to protect the embankment from erosion. The trees also obscure any view of the ocean, mountains, and nude beach from there. Yes, a nude beach at the university—I doubt my friends would believe that!

The cool air on our faces and the warm glow of the lights inside the glass front of the building, just made me want to go inside. By the time we returned to the entrance of the museum, it was almost dark.

Inside Mary and I walked down the wide, sloping, ramp of the Great Hall toward the glass walls holding up high ceilings. Carved human and animal forms with wooden, hooked beaks, intense eyes, and outstretched arms merged from the dim light. I was glad that I was not by myself with those haunting spirits in the middle of the night.



We entered an open hallway displaying large, dramatic masks from all over the world. Some of these hung on walls; some are in glass cases. Other fascinating objects are on shelves and in drawers of what Mary called visible storage. People are permitted to open the drawers.

Mary seemed totally absorbed by what she was seeing, whereas I was blinded by what I was feeling. I could not shake my distress from having found Sandy with that girl.

We saw a huge wooden carving by Bill Reid, a famous contemporary B.C. Haida artist. A raven sits on top of a large clamshell with people climbing out of it. It is called "Raven and the First People" and apparently depicts the beginning of the world.



There was a special exhibition of the work of another contemporary Haida artist, Robert Davidson. This included some beautiful prints, carvings, and paintings on panels and on drums. Many of his pieces showed simplified designs of animal's eyes, tails, and fins depicted as elegant shapes with only a few colours. I was glad to view firsthand some examples of B.C.'s First Nations art style that I have seen in Western art history books.

We also looked at an exhibition gallery filled with some pottery pieces from all over the world including Asia. The pieces were remarkable, but even then my attention was diminished by my anxiety over Sandy.

Back on the bus, Mary asked me about my impressions of the museum and specifically the First Nations art in the Great Hall. I said that the dramatic art objects suggest the former glory of a very rich culture.

"Exactly. Former," she responded emphatically. "That's precisely what I hope people notice, but I am not always sure that they do. Or at least I fear that viewers don't think about what happened to end to that culture."

"What did put an end to it?"

"Well, I don't even like talking about this national embarrassment."

“Why is that?”

“Well, the culture’s demise resulted from one of Canada’s worst government decisions ever. That was to assimilate native peoples into colonial culture. To force them to take on white man’s ways, thus getting rid of Native languages, art, and traditional ways of native life.”

“And how did the government go about doing this?”

“In BC, one action was to prohibit, from 1884, the continuation of the Native potlatch which was a traditional Native ceremonial feast or festival of giving and celebration. Many of the art pieces that we saw today in the Great Hall were made specifically for use in the potlatch. Other exhibited pieces in the museum may have been made after Canadian laws prohibited making art objects for potlatches. They could be articles that colonial officers found and confiscated when Natives secretly continued to produce such works.

“When creating them was against Canadian law?”

“Yes, exactly—when First Nations people faced the possibility of being put in prison for making such art.”

“Put in prison?”

“Yes. And when Canadian lawmakers feared they couldn’t convince adult aboriginals to give up their culture to become more ‘civilized,’ the officials took charge of their children.”

“How?”

“Well, they got the churches to help them operate separate residential schools that took the children away from their families. These schools prohibited the children from speaking their language or practising their own culture. The children lived in these schools full time and often were purposely placed too far away from home to return to their communities even for the summer.”

“But what if the parents did not agree to have their children go to these schools?”

“The children were forcibly taken, and the parents could be put in jail if they tried to stop the authorities from rounding them up.”

“How awful!”

“Yes, especially because when the children got to the schools, they were often abused, undernourished, harshly punished, and generally treated in a way that made them lose their dignity, self-respect, and self-confidence.”

“How long were the children in these schools?”

“Some were taken away from their parents as early as age four. And they generally remained at the school until they were graduation age—17 or 18—even if they had not been exposed to the full education that white children were provided with during those same years.”

“When did this stop?”

“The ban on the potlatch ended in the early 1950s and most, but not all, residential schools were being disbanded by the end of the 1960s. The last one was not closed until the 1990s.”

“A few of the pieces we saw today are current....”

“Yes, a few students, despite having no contact with parental or artist role models from their own communities, made contact with earlier First Nations art and culture.”

“So they became artists working in styles based on traditional forms?”

“Yes, they developed their skills by studying exemplary pieces and, later, by studying with a few remaining talented elders.”

“That’s a miracle—that they discovered their interest and found some sources to study and learn from.”

“Yes, especially since as most of the best pieces were taken out of their communities, gathered instead by collectors and museum organizers.”

“Who may have thought they were doing the right thing....”

“Some did. But others were just greedy in recognizing the power of such art and wanting to own it. So the contemporary work reveals the perseverance and resourcefulness of First Nations people and their ability to “come back.” But at the same time the exhibits painfully remind us, non-Aboriginals, of our historical shame.”

Mary’s guilt revealed in her comments, her feeling of remorse and responsibility for the acts of her forebears, somehow pulled me down too, adding to my general depression of the afternoon.

Back on the bus, the rain was pouring down so heavily that we could not see out the windows. Luckily Mary and I at least had seats in the crowded bus. As an escape, I closed my eyes to the smell of wet clothes, dripping umbrellas, and people standing close packed holding on to overhead straps as they tried to keep their balance.

But I couldn’t stop thinking of Sandy’s deception—of seeing him in the library with that girl—not studying or writing papers as he had led me to believe.

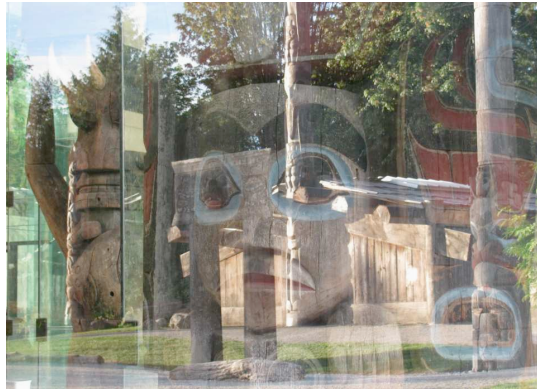
I am now in my room taping this journal entry in a state of deadened emotions. It’s as if all I can do now is to refuse to allow myself to feel any emotions because I no longer have any faith in them.

“Trust me,” Sandy had said. And I had believed him.

Should I be thinking more about Yoko’s warning—that Sandy hasn’t done anything on my behalf to keep me here for him?

Regardless of my doubts, I had promised myself I would phone Sandy. Give him a chance to explain. Indeed I have tried to call him: that is, I have started to dial his number several times and then hung up. Why can't I talk to him? Am I afraid to know what is going on?

I do know that Claudia was right in telling me that returning to university would increase Sandy's chances of meeting other available women. And could Juliana be partly right in saying our relationship was probably just a summer romance? But no! Despite everything, I still refuse to believe this!



Photographs of sculpture of figures in boat and of large Raven with clam courtesy of Matthew Gemin, France; others by the author



NOVEMBER # 3—City Hall Presentation and Disturbing Phone Call

Visuals: photographs of City Hall and sculpture on site

At school I managed to avoid personal contact with Noboru again, but this is increasingly difficult, as I don't want the others in the group to know what has happened between us. I guess sooner or later we will have to have some kind of discussion.

Mary invited me to a meeting of the Vancouver City Council when she and some of her neighbours were making presentations. They were challenging some proposed changes in zoning by-laws to allow for an increase in the height of a proposed building near the apartment. I was pleased at this opportunity to view the workings of a city government in Canada. I would never have thought to visit a council meeting on my own. I was thinking Sandy would be interested in hearing about this, as architects sometimes need to attempt to change existing laws in order to build something that does not conform to regulations.



At any rate, I was inspired by the courage of Mary and her neighbours addressing the Mayor and city councilors. I was feeling if they had the courage to do this, surely I should be able to talk to Sandy. I thought I could manage this tonight, at least if I did not mention seeing him in the library with that young woman. I was hoping that he might say something that would make sense of that incident without my having to ask about it.

As I dialed, I was anxious, but... well, at least I was dialing.

The phone was ringing. It rang longer than I expected so I was beginning to feel relieved that Sandy wasn't going to answer. So I was thrown off guard when a young woman finally said hello. She curtly stated Sandy couldn't come to the phone right now, so I should dial again and leave a message. When I redialed, my fingers were shaking. I left a message, a very short message.

I was surprised when Sandy called back in less than five minutes. I expected him to say something about who had just answered the phone, such as, "My cousin is over so I mustn't talk long."

But nothing! No acknowledgment at all that a young woman had answered the phone or was at his house.

I found myself rambling on about the city hall presentation, which he inquired about and commented on in all the right ways. But despite giving Sandy lots of opportunities to bring up the subject of who was there with him, he provided no explanation. When I finally asked, he clearly stated he was home alone and hoping to finish an essay tonight. How could he now lie to me! Of course that proves he has something to hide. I'm devastated, but I managed to get off the phone without revealing how upset I am.

First Noboru and now, more painfully, Sandy—Sandy, who has seemed so decent and honest. Will I become as jaded as Juliana? I am reminded that Pisces people (as I am) are inclined to think the best of others. Is this what I have been doing in believing in Sandy's integrity? What about his image of us standing together in the future? Am I naïve to think that can ever happen? Who can I trust?





NOVEMBER # 4—Hiking on Bowen Island

Visuals: photographs of Horseshoe Bay and Bowen Trails and Lake; detail of a heart from a print by Mary

The school's activity board advertised a hike around the lake on Bowen Island as being the week's main activity. There was the usual a signup sheet and provision for people to pay. Noboru, Marina, and I paid our money and as did the European guys in our class, including Sebastian.

We expected the rest of our group to get around to paying too, but for several reasons most of them decided not to participate. I considered cancelling as a way to stay away from Noboru but then decided that I don't want to start limiting my activities just to avoid him.

As soon as we boarded the Bowen Island ferry, the others headed for the lounge. I stood at a side window looking out at the dreary, somewhat depressing weather as the ferry left the mooring. Seeing me alone, Noboru came over and said, "Look, Erika. I'm going home in a couple of weeks. Can't we clear things up between us?"

"Is this sooner than you planned?"

"No, my return ticket has been scheduled since my arrival."

"I didn't realize it was so soon, or I had forgotten."

"Don't you agree it would be a shame to abandon our friendship on the basis of that one incident, as regretful as it was?"

All the bad feelings welled up in me again. I looked down and noticed the flat floral pattern on the carpet. The sound of a reluctant huff emerged from my lungs.

"I've asked for your forgiveness. I think you should be willing to consider it."

"Noboru... "

For some unknown reason, tears began to well up in my eyes.

“You know I haven’t meant to upset you.”

I couldn’t respond immediately, but I finally said, “You are my first male friend to betray me.”

“Well, I’m sorry. Truly. I’ve always hoped we might continue our friendship once we get home to Japan.”

This discussion came to an abrupt end as Marina and others came around the corner. Our school’s activity leader had provided some maps of Bowen Island showing the many hiking routes. Our group wanted to discuss whether we should all try to stay together.

Noboru said there was no need for us all to hike together, providing as each of us stayed with at least one buddy and returned to the ferry dock by 4:30 pm.

Seeing the respect they showed Noboru in offering this advice made me soften toward him. Also I was beginning to realize that I couldn’t sustain two sets of hurt feelings, those toward Noboru and those toward Sandy.

When we arrived in Snug Harbour, all passengers got off the ferry. To stay warm, most of our group proceeded as fast as possible up the hill away from the public wharf.

Perhaps not surprisingly Marina and Sebastian and Pierre and Adrian paired up. Well, enough excuses. Noboru and I fell behind the rest of the group and ended up doing the entire hike on Bowen together.



Despite the increasingly cold weather, the trail seemed shorter than it had when it was unknown to me in the heat of the summer. Walking further inland, away from the ocean, the mist began to become almost as thick as light rain. And just as we got to the picnic tables at the end of the lake, it turned to light snow.

Unseasonable for this time of year, the snow was not settling on the ground, but it was filling the air so it was not possible to see very far. Some students sharing the picnic tables with us were from South America and had never seen snow falling. They stood with their faces up to the sky with their mouths open, laughing. Even Noboru and I at first enjoyed

tasting the flakes as they fell on our tongues. Seeing the silliness of those around us helped me to lighten my mood.

We sat down and opened our backpacks to get out our now-cool sandwiches. Someone from another class had a very small camp stove to make tea. We waited for the water to boil and make a cup for each of us. Noboru noticed that I was shivering and was without a hat. He removed his colourful toque and placed it on my head. How could I stay mad at him?

After finishing the tea and rinsing the cup in the lake, Noboru and I set out on the trail talking intently. Perhaps this was because we realized this might be our last contact alone before he returns to Japan. Except for the Halloween party incident, and despite all my complaining about Noboru, he has been a very good friend.

We were surprised, about an hour later, when we found ourselves back at the picnic tables where we started. We had circled the lake entirely, whereas we thought we had been walking in a straight line. Also we had lost track of the others. Our talk had obviously claimed our undivided attention.

I told Noboru some things that I now regret. Haunted by the image of Sandy with that young woman in the library and reliving her dismissive manner on the phone, I ended up admitting that all is not going well between Sandy and me.

Why did I reveal there is some problem? I guess I needed to express my hurt. Yet the minute I did, I regretted it—just as I did when I had admitted my interest in Sandy to Noboru on Raccoon Island during our kayaking trip in May.

Without this admission, maybe Noboru would not have made the personal statement that he did. He started by telling me that when he returns to Japan he will try to spend time with Sumi, whom he "totally admires." But touchingly he admitted, "However little you think that you and I have in common, Erika, I may always consider you the love of my life."

"Noboru, don't."

"Certainly I will always be there for you if you need something. I want you to know this."

He added, "My most irrational dream is that when you return to Japan, and Sandy is not in the picture, you will clear your mind, look again, and finally see me."

"I just hope you won't waste other opportunities by holding out for that, Noboru."

What else could I say? I grew quiet. How could I not be moved by Noboru's declaration? With Noboru being willing to be this vulnerable, I agonized about whether to tell him about my dream to attend UBC in September if I am accepted. I wondered how he would be feeling if he knew I was hoping for that.

Even if Sandy is tempted at this moment by that nubile (new vocabulary word) young thing, surely he will come to his senses and realize that we are meant to be together. That's what I was trying to reassure myself of as I walked silently at Noboru's side. Anyway, in approaching the ferry dock, I realized that despite some awkward silences, I had managed to avoid telling Noboru about any future plans.

While waiting for the ferry to arrive, Noboru and I stood blowing into our mittens to keep our fingers warm. We looked down at the clanging sailboats moored on the wharves below.

Acknowledging being close to the end of our time together in Vancouver, Noboru and I somehow agreed (I didn't ask him!) to go to supper at Trolls Restaurant in Horseshoe Bay. After boarding the Bowen ferry, we re-met Marina and Sebastian and, a few minutes later, Adrian and Pierre, and we all sat together during the short trip and talked about what we had seen of the Island.

Toward the end of the voyage, Noboru and I told them that we were going to dinner together in Horseshoe Bay. None of them suggested that they accompany us or revealed that anything could be wrong about us going off alone to have dinner together. They were just anxious to get home.

As the cars and vans unloaded at the ferry terminal, Noboru and I walked off the ship and along the block of shoreline to the restaurant.

Despite Trolls' warm and welcoming environment, I entered the restaurant feeling as if I were going into a cheap motel about to start an affair. I felt so guilty.

As the host guided us to a table, I realized I was still wearing Noboru's hat. I took it off and handed it back to him. Could I honestly say this was no different than going to dinner with any other friend? How would Sandy view this? I realized that despite my hurt over Sandy and the considerable anger I am feeling towards him, I have never once wanted to damage, or end, our relationship. I still have so much hope for us.

Noboru and I looked at the menu and decided what we wanted. We gave our orders to the server: seafood in creamed pasta entrées—comfort food for this weather. I feared Noboru might want to talk some more about us, so I was relieved when instead he started telling me all that he has learned from me over the past nine months.

"I realize, Erika, that happiness and material possessions are not necessarily related. I want to gain independence from my father and stop relying on his money to give me what you have called 'my toys'."

"Noboru...."

"Erika, please let me finish. In other words I intend to stop taking my father's financial support for granted."

"I hope you can manage that."

When our food arrived, we were quiet a few minutes while we concentrated on eating. Soon I realized that Noboru had ordered sparkling water only, no coffee or dessert, and no wine.

When I commented on this, he imitated some of my advice from the past saying, "I'm accumulating capital by not overspending and I'm protecting my body from trans-fatty acids."

Really, that started me laughing but at the same time almost had me in tears too in thinking about how much he has allowed me to influence him.

Gradually Noboru changed his tone by talking about friendship, romantic love, and family love.

He said, "Apparently the kind of feelings that I have for you will disappear in less than two years and will be replaced by a kind of family love."

"Who have you been talking to, Noboru, or what have you been reading?" I laughed, trying to keep our conversation light.

He ignored my interjection and continued saying, "I hope we will still have contact then, and maybe if there is a future for Sumi and me together...well, I hope it can include you too."

"Oh, Noboru...."

"Luckily Sumi has always known of my feelings for you so there is no deception here. Maybe you can even be part of our life."

I was touched by this concept.

He surprised me with the comment, "I appreciate what Sandy did in opening up this possibility between Sumi and me."

"Sandy did that?"

"At the film festival."

"The film festival...."

"When he asked Sumi and me if we would see each other after we get back to Japan."

"Oh, yes. I did notice that at the time, but I didn't know it would have such an impact on the two of you."

"As you know, I never presumed that Sumi would agree to see me in Japan."

"So the two of you have talked about this?"

"Yes, at length."

"I hope you *do* get together when you get back. I want you both to be happy."

"I appreciate that."

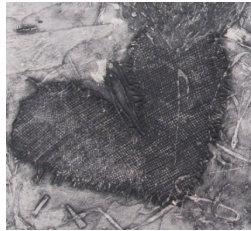
As I took my last sip of tea, I saw through the window another large ferry pulling into the dock. I knew that meant

another connecting bus would be leaving soon. It took a few minutes to get our server's attention, but when we did Noboru paid the bill for both of us without giving it a thought. I decided not to make an issue of this.

We walked back toward the bus stop within view of the wharves. Small sailboats clanged in the wind and rocked back and forth on the waves made by the incoming ferry. I was surprised to see that ferry passengers were already standing outside the terminal waiting for the Vancouver bus.

After all the openness between Noboru and me, I was somewhat relieved that we were not able to get seats together on the bus. I needed recovery time to help me get over my feeling of near intimacy with him.

I was relieved to get back to the West End, but as I climbed the stairs to the apartment, I felt extremely weary. Being on the bus by myself still had not been enough revival time for me to be willing to respond to two messages from Sandy. I was still feeling wounded, insulted even, by his attention to that young woman. Am I emotionally drained? What is happening to my heart?





NOVEMBER # 5—Going Away Party for Noboru

Visuals—photographs of Korean and Japanese food, door decoration for party

On short notice we decided to have Noboru's going away party at my place, due to closeness to the school. Noboru had promised us to make okonomiyaki, a dish his mother had taught him to make as a teenager. So while this was meant as a party for Noboru, he insisted he would do the cooking. Sumi was to be his assistant.

A couple of days before the dinner, by using all my nerve and by setting aside my hurt pride, I phoned Sandy to invite him. I didn't get him in person, but I had given all the details about the dinner to Sandy's dad. Still, Sandy hadn't phoned me back, so I assumed he wouldn't be coming. More proof of his avoiding me?

So when I greeted my classmates at the door, I was surprised to see Sandy standing there too. He looked tired and somewhat untidy (unshaven/uncombed hair). I think he started to step toward me to hug me, but Mary called me to the phone at that moment. It was Marina saying she was going to be late. Mary suggested everyone put their coat in my room. When I got off the phone, Sandy was with the others in the living room. In first seeing him I was sorry I had invited him, as it brought up my hurt over the girl in the library and took my focus off the party. I was polite to Sandy but not warm.

Later that night I found out that his dad hadn't passed on the information to Sandy personally; he had not seen the written message until an hour before the party was to begin. At that point Sandy had arrived home tired from UBC after a long

day. Even so he had left his house immediately and backtracked to the West End, despite being exhausted.

In the living room my classmates kept Sandy in the conversation by talking about places in Europe they had visited. I was glad to be setting the table as it kept me away from him. Mary could see that I was being cool to Sandy.

When she helped me fetch snack food from the dining room, she quietly said to me, "Erika, I don't know what is going on between you and Sandy, but it's obvious from his phone messages that he wants to talk with you. I think you should at least be kind enough to do that."

While the others were munching on snacks in the living room and Sumi and Noboru were in the kitchen making the okonomiyaki, Sandy intercepted me as I headed for the hall closet. He touched my arm as I bent over to get a light bulb.

Quietly he said, "Erika, you're avoiding me. I deserve to know why. Please come out into the hall and talk with me."

I didn't look at him. I just said, "I need to change the light bulb in the dining room. It's burned out."

"All right, let me help you."

We cleared away one end of the dining room table, which had already been set, and pushed back the tablecloth. Sandy took off his shoes, climbed on a chair, and stood on the table in his sock feet stretching to reach the light fixture in the nine-and-a-half-foot ceiling. He screwed in the replacement bulb, reattached the light cover that I had quickly rinsed, and he got down. I washed and dried that end of the table and then realigned the tablecloth and plates, etc.

Sandy touched my wrist and again quietly said, "Now, may I please talk with you...."

Reluctantly I agreed to follow him and I started to walk through the kitchen toward the hall when Noboru, with his back to me while stir-frying something on the stove, asked, "Erika, do you know where some platters might be?"

Sandy stopped at the kitchen door and leaned against the door jam apparently doing his best to be patient.

"Sure," I said, as I knelt down close to Noboru's thigh to get the platters from low shelves next to the stove.

"Here," I said, as I handed them up to Noboru one by one so he could continue to stir with the other hand. As I stood up, I added, "But we should rinse them as they are not used very often."

Mary came back into the room as I took the pile of platters and put them in the sink. Seeing rinsing them as another excuse to avoid talking with Sandy, she said, "Erika, let me do those."

With a feeling of dread, I followed Sandy into the main hallway and down to the mezzanine. Sandy sat on the love seat

(strange name for a two-seat sofa?) and I chose the rattan chair across from him. I felt a constriction in my throat. I realized Sandy looked more tired than I have ever seen him and that he had a "five o'clock shadow" (new idiom for me), if blond unshaved stubble can be considered a shadow.

He said, "Now, please, Erika, tell me what's happened."

"What's happened?"

"Yes, why haven't you been returning my phone calls?"

He looked intently at me, and when I didn't answer he reached across and touched my hand. My hand seemed frozen; I couldn't move it. Yet in looking at his earnest face, I was melting. I wondered for the first time: Could I possibly be wrong about the blonde in the library, the girl on the phone?

Still, I wasn't able to speak for my hurt.

Again he prompted me.

"Please tell me the worst of what you think I have done."

Put that way, I could answer, but I struggled to keep my voice calm.

"You have deceived me. Lied to me," I stated, looking down.

"Could you explain why you think this?"

I explained, in a broken voice, how I had seen him in the library with that young woman who seemed to be all over him. I also charged him with ignoring me for almost two weeks before he started phoning me again. And I told him about the phone call I made to his house when a young woman, probably the same one, answered the phone and yet Sandy had told me he was alone.

"Erika, all this is so easily explained. Why didn't you ask me about these incidences when they happened? I thought we agreed we would at least try to be open with each other as we go along."

I suffered at these words.

"I've been tutoring that young woman in math. She is the daughter of my parents' friends. I've known her since she was six. They used to live next door to us. Perhaps she is attracted to me, but I don't feel anything for her. She has just turned 18. Nothing has happened between us, Er. And nothing will."

For the first time I objected to Sandy calling me Er because it made me weaken toward him, when I really wanted to stay mad, because his simple words couldn't erase my hurt.

"Can't you see how similar this is to when I blamed you for Noboru wanting you as a girlfriend. You said that was a reflection on Noboru rather than on you. I see now that is true, because it may be the same for this young woman. But at least in your case you have a close friendship with Noboru. Something that I admit that I am envious of."

"Jealous of!"

“Yes, perhaps even jealous of. Forgive me for being human and for seeing your closeness to Noboru as a potential threat to us. But in my case, in tutoring this girl, I have no feeling at all. I am just trying to not disappoint her parents. They fear she may not graduate from high school if she doesn’t get this help.”

“She is in high school?”

“Yes. Grade 12.”

“So why are you meeting at UBC?”

“Her family now lives near the university.”

“But was that her on the phone?”

“Yes, that night she came to West Van with me because I needed to drop something off at the studio immediately on my way home. We did the tutoring at the house after that because Dad and Mom had agreed to take her back to the university a couple of hours later—on their way to attend a concert at the Chan Centre on campus.”

We reconstructed the circumstances around the phone call. Unbeknownst to Sandy, this young woman had answered the phone and had asked me to phone back and leave a message. Almost immediately after that, she had left the house with Sandy’s parents. And Sandy received and returned my message as soon as they all went out the door. So Sandy was indeed alone by the time that he said he was alone. As for ignoring me, he said if I had answered his original calls he would have explained about the extra time he needed in finishing some essays and a major project.

I still felt wounded but somewhat foolish, so I wasn’t able to respond.

“Why are we having so much trouble trusting each other, Er?”

Just when I was finally feeling the fault was all mine, Sandy admitted that he’d been disturbed in seeing the Halloween photographs.

“The Halloween photographs?” I asked. “What could possibly be in those photos that could concern you?”

Sandy described his reaction to seeing the couples in coordinated outfits and of Noboru as the rat, with his claws and sharp teeth biting my cheesy neck and arms. Apparently Sandy hadn’t noticed that Sumi, also dressed as cheese, had been receiving the same treatment from Noboru and that it had all been in good fun.

“So you and Noboru hadn’t planned your outfits together to present yourselves as a couple the way other couples obviously had?”

“No, I never discussed my costume with him. Bae found out from Song and he told Noboru so the two of them decided to come as cat and rat.”

"But why did you have Noboru's costume that night? Did he leave in a hurry by the back door as I arrived?"

"No, Sandy. No. Noboru hadn't come home with Song and me. He felt ... sick and left the party in a hurry, before the rest of us, forgetting his costume there. Song and I carried it back to the apartment so we could return it to him at school."

"He was sick and left in a hurry?"

Perhaps because of my words and the way I hesitated, Sandy commented, "Anything you want to say about that?"

I didn't know what Sandy was getting at.

Reluctantly I said, "He drank too much."

"And?"

"All right, but please don't get upset, Sandy. Promise me."

"What is it?"

"Noboru forced a kiss on me at the party. When we were alone on the deck at the Rowing Club."

"Forced a kiss?"

"Yes, without warning, he kissed me hard."

"Hard?"

"He pressed me, my head, against a rough wall. Totally disregarding my feelings. It was definitely not something I encouraged or wanted."

Sandy looked down and rubbed his forehead.

"So that explains the smell of the alcohol on you."

"Yes."

"And why you avoided kissing me."

"You noticed...."

"Of course."

Sandy continued to sit without moving, as if he was just very tired. I was glad that he had stayed calm. Resigned even.

"Sandy, I am sorry about the kiss. I hope you'll realize that, again, it was a reflection on Noboru, not on me."

"But you've forgiven him...."

"Not immediately, but yes, now. There is no point in holding a grudge."

"Instead you are hosting a party for him."

"The party is here because I have the home closest to the school. He and Sumi have bought and made all the food.

Organized everything."

"Still...."

"Noboru apologized the next day and assured me he'll never treat me like that again. And he's leaving...."

"He's going back to Japan?"

"Yes. This is his going away party."

"Oh, a going away party."

Did Sandy seem a little relieved in hearing this?

"Still, I guess we have a long way to go yet, Erika."

“How do you mean that?”

“In having confidence in each other.”

“Now I feel ashamed of being suspicious of you, Sandy. It’s just that it looked so....”

“I guess trust is not something we can just decide on, Er. It is something we are going to have to build up, nurture, over time.”

While acknowledging I might take a while getting over my hurt feelings, we agreed to put more effort into talking candidly with each other.

It did cross my mind that I hadn’t told Sandy about having dinner alone with Noboru on the way back from Bowen Island recently. But surely our pact didn’t mean telling of a past incident that might cause Sandy even more unnecessary concern.

Like me, Sandy apparently didn’t know what else to say. Finally he echoed my words of some time ago, saying, “Erika, I need a hug badly.”

Somewhat reluctantly still, I let Sandy draw me over to the sofa to hug me. And with his arm around me, yes, we kissed. Tentatively at first. But I realized immediately that I’d been missing his touch from the moment he had walked through the door with my classmates. I don’t ever again want to go without his touch.

Holding hands, Sandy and I walked back inside. Mary’s eyes seemed to light up in seeing us together. Noboru seemed to notice this too, perhaps as a result of my admitting, on Bowen Island, that not everything has been perfect between Sandy and me.

Just as all the other guests were filing into the dining room from the living room, Mary, Sandy, and I sat down together also. Sumi and Noboru took their place at the head of the table closest to the kitchen so as to be able to carry food and plates back and forth. Marina arrived from the cool outside air and slipped into place just as the main platters were put on the table.

After some serious eating, and a bit of wine drinking, Nicole encouraged each of us to tell our most outrageous story about Noboru. Marina joked about how Noboru’s bullying had got so many of the group into skydiving.

Trying to set aside our conflicted feelings, Sandy asked Noboru, “Did you convince Erika to jump?”

“No, way!” Noboru responded. “She just lectured and lectured me and generally made my life miserable about the whole idea.”

Everyone laughed.

I answered, "Remember all the chips and gravy, greasy pie with ice cream, Jolt cola drink, and chocolate sundaes you used to eat? Yuk! I don't know how you've survived this long."

"I've survived this long, Erika, because I got tired of your lectures and nagging, so I reformed my eating habits."

More laughter. I didn't have to respond to this. Having talked about this at Trolls Restaurant, I knew that these comments were for the entertainment of the group rather than revealing anything new to each other.

Juliana was kinder by referring to Noboru's leadership qualities when Song got lost on the ferry.

"That was just one of several times that Noboru was our hero," Song added.

"Hey, hey, what about me?" Bae reacted laughing.

Song courageously (for her) answered, "Wait your turn! This party is for Noboru, Bae, not for you!"

As Sumi and Juliana started to take dishes and left over food to the kitchen, Sumi stated, "Noboru was certainly our hero when he rescued Erika on the Grouse Grind when she was carrying all her birthday party preparations up the mountain for me."

"Even after I warned her about attempting to carry that impossible weight," Mary interjected.

"But notice that Erika prefers to comment on the food I used to eat rather than remembering my helping her," Noboru teased, smiling at me.

"That's not fair, Noboru. You know how much I appreciated your backtracking and finding me. Possibly saving my life."

"And how he saved you considerable pain after the bee sting," Juliana added, as she rinsed some plates.

"Yes, it's true. I'm grateful for that too."

"I'd like to know more about that some time," Sandy said.

"So I'm not really such a terrible friend," I stated.

"Well, just barely passable," Noboru said, pretending to pout.

After completing the delicious dinner, and even much of the clean up, thanks to Sumi and Juliana, we all went into the living room. As pre-arranged, Mary went off to a friend's house.

Noboru opened the gift we had given him—a tasteful comb and brush set for his new, longer hair. And Sumi had made him a large, funny card that we had all signed.

It was a sketch of Noboru with an enlarged head surrounded by the rest of us, in miniature, looking up admiringly at him. A real lock of Noboru's hair was glued in place.

At the time of noticing the unexplainable space in the front of his hair, Noboru had been perplexed as to how he had lost that chunk of hair. Definitely a mystery. Now Sumi admitted that she had cut it off when he had been asleep in the lounge at school.

"So, Sumi, it was you who stole this lock of my hair! I could have you charged with something."

"Like what?"

"Well, maybe indecent assault. Indecent something... actually that might be quite nice."

Everyone laughed.

"It won't be noticeable for long."

"It won't?"

"Well, won't you be getting your hair cut before you go back to work in your dad's office?" Marina asked.

"I don't know. I've been kind of enjoying it long. It's warmer, which is especially good when it's chilly out."

"I'm sure your father will say, 'Get a scarf.'" Juliana commented.

"At least you keep it clean and shiny," Song added. "I like it. It makes you look very relaxed."

"I'm not sure relaxed is how my dad wants me to be," Noboru laughed.

"And kind of artsy," Juliana added.

"I *know* artsy is *not* what my dad wants me to be."

Noticing the clock and remembering the North Shore bus departure times, most of the group went to gather up their things to go home. There were many expressions of gratefulness to Noboru and Sumi for making the wonderful dinner.

As all put on their coats and went to the door to leave, I hugged each of them, and yes, that included an especially warm hug for Noboru, even though I knew that Sandy was standing beside me, watching.

I expect that will be the last I will see of Noboru as a classmate, as he has an early flight tomorrow morning.

"Safe trip back," I said to him. He squeezed my hand. Then he took Sumi's elbow as they headed toward the stairs.

After I closed the door, Sandy and I went back to the dining room and then, after dealing with some miscellaneous the dishes, we made some more tea and took it into the living room. I lit some candles and joined Sandy on the sofa.

In talking about the dinner, Sandy commented, "You have an incredibly strong group of friends. It's hard to believe you have known each other less than one year."

"I know we are very lucky. Mary has said that the relationships between international students are somewhat like

those of people who meet during a war. Getting to know each other is sped up, because they know that they can not assume they have long to be together."

"That's very appropriate." Sandy added, "You certainly seem unified. I noticed how Juliana transformed the conversation from being a roast of Noboru...."

"A roast?"

"A criticism of a person."

"Oh."

"From being a roast of Noboru to an opportunity to express appreciation of Noboru."

"I hadn't noticed, but I am not surprised, because Juliana has always been supportive of Noboru."

I paused and then asked, "So can you also see how impossible it would be for me to avoid all contact with Noboru?"

"I'm doing my best to try to understand that, Erika," Sandy responded with a reluctant(?) smile.

"And can you see what damage it would do if anyone of us was to hold a grudge against another person in the group."

"Ditto," he said. (Was he trying to avoid making a promise beyond just trying to understand?)

I had wondered if Sandy had had to use his best attempt at tolerance when I hugged Noboru. But I didn't refer to this as I wanted to avoid reigniting the strain we'd felt earlier by having Sandy acknowledge this. I assume Sandy is glad to know that this going away party signals the end of my friendship as it has been, since he is returning to Japan.

I was glad to finally get off the subject of the party and turn our focus on being together. Within a few minutes Sandy and I both had our sock feet up on the sofa, touching. In having even an incomplete outlet for expending all that pent up emotional energy, I now understand somewhat the satisfaction of recovering from a fight with a would-be (will-be?) lover.





NOVEMBER # 6—Making Christmas Cards

Visuals: photograph of my Canada goose Christmas card

Juliana and Sumi joined me in making some Christmas cards on Mary's dining room table. I knew Sandy was too busy preparing for exams or I would have asked him too. Mary suggested we do this in late November, saying it will get very busy in December.

Each of us had done a simple drawing and photocopied it to use as the basis for our cards. Mary provided the three of us with many kinds of materials, including recycled paper. Each of us made about a dozen cards based on our one individual design. Because we were just using different colours of paper and paint on each, we were able to cut, fold, apply some colour, and glue while talking.

"Hey, I got an email from Noboru," Sumi said.

"Oh, good. Because I haven't heard from him."

"He's finding it difficult to settle down at work."

"I can imagine," Juliana commented.

"Yes, that must take a while."

"He is complaining that his dad has unrealistic expectations about how much work he can do and how many hours Noboru should work each day," Sumi added.

"Then there could be a lot of friction between them," Juliana added.

"Apparently. Noboru is already looking back at his time in Vancouver as the best period of his life."

"I'm not surprised," Juliana stated.

"And has Noboru cut his hair?" I asked.

"No. That's another point of conflict between him and his dad."

"Seems like he's trying to make a statement about being independent and different from his dad," Sumi commented.

"Yeah, isn't that is supposed to be healthy in supportive families?" I commented.

"But his father isn't into understanding family dynamics and psychology," Sumi added.

"Or is his dad simply expecting his only son to revert to being subservient?" I asked.

"Yes. To be a cog in his wheel of cheap labour. To make his business run smoothly," Juliana added.

I wondered how much she and Noboru had talked about this.

Juliana continued, "Sumi, I remember you saying that you didn't want a boyfriend in Canada, that you just wanted to have friends and have fun and study hard."

"Well, I said I didn't want a boyfriend here because I assumed that I would have to give him up on going home. I thought that would be a kind of a waste. But, well, sorry, Erika.... I have other hopes now."

"It's okay...."

"I'm so glad you and Erika are still friends, although I can't understand why. Given Noboru's being such an appealing guy, good looking, athletic, and intelligent, not to mention his rich father.... Well, I don't know why the two of you aren't at each other's throats in competing over him."

Sumi and I smiled knowing how Juliana views all human relationships.

"It's just that you might as well go after someone who's going to give you a good life.... in your own country," she emphasized, looking at me.

When we didn't respond she continued by saying, "Erika, if your plan in coming to Canada was to marry some Canadian guy and immigrate to Canada, well, maybe you are right on track, aren't you?"

She paused expecting some reaction from me. "Well?"

"I never had any such intention."

"And why should you, when you can be successful in Japan. You can have everything there that you could ever hope to have here. Think of a life with someone like Noboru. Have you seriously thought of that and what you are rejecting out of hand?"

She paused as if giving me time to say something and then she continued, "Why would you consider giving up your family? County? Language... when you can have it all at home without those problems?"

I laughed and said, "Have you actually talked to Noboru recently about any of this or are you just determined for some personal reason to see me committed to Noboru by the time I leave here?"

“Leave here! Leave here? So you at least admit you will be leaving here?”

Enjoying this somewhat, I offered, “My flight home is on April 4. You can see my ticket if you like.”

So when I just smiled and kept painting the detail on one of my cards, Juliana added, “I am not wanting to pry, Erika. But you know you have been driving Noboru crazy by not facing up to having to leave Sandy when you return to Japan.”

“Have I?” I laughed.

“Yah. He figures you must have some kind of a grand plan. An alternative to having to saying goodbye.”

“Oh, does he?” I laughed again looking at Sumi, humoured by how much effort Juliana was expending to get information out of me.

“Let’s go back to your original question,” Sumi commented, as if to get me out of any further interrogation by Juliana.

“I assumed that having a boyfriend here would mean having to choose between having fun with the group or spending time with the guy.”

“I haven’t found that to be a big problem,” I said. “But I don’t see Sandy as much as I would like to. He is so busy with his own studies. But I’m glad when I can include him in our activities.”

After a few minutes of us all concentrating on painting, Juliana told us that she had offered to buy Noboru’s laptop computer from him, but he apparently had decided to leave behind his main purchases (skis, ski boots, snowboard, DVD player, roller blades, microwave oven, and computer) for his homestay family. The three of us were pretty impressed that Noboru would be this kind.

When we completed our cards, we got a lot of satisfaction in lining them up almost covering the table. Mary, who had been in her bedroom sewing some curtains, came in and admired what we had made. She admitted that stage provided her main satisfaction in producing her own Christmas cards every year—seeing them all laid out on the table before facing the much less satisfying task of signing them and addressing the envelopes.

When Mary offered to make us some tea, Sumi and Juliana looked at the clock and abruptly decided they had no time and must instead head straight for their North Shore bus. They bundled up their cards and themselves and, after saying thanks to Mary they were on their way.

Once we closed the door behind them, Mary said, “So will you join me for tea, Erika?”

“Sure.”

When we sat down I realized that this was a good time to have the talk with Mary that I had put off since being suspicious of Sandy. And Mary seemed grateful that I was willing to be open with her on this subject.

"So the two of you have had problems communicating?" she inquired.

"Yes. That as well as having trouble trusting each other."

"Oh, trust. That's important."

"Yes it is. And ever since Sandy figured out that Noboru is 'in love with me,' Sandy has assumed that I will be unfaithful to him."

"I did wonder about Noboru's obvious affection for you."

"Well, I've tried to convince Sandy that he shouldn't hold Noboru's feelings against me. And I have tried to reassure him that I have no intention of becoming involved with Noboru and Noboru knows this."

"Does Sandy worry that you might succumb to Noboru's attraction to you?"

"Yes, that's it. But I've told Sandy how unfair that assumption is to me. And I've had to reassure him that just because Noboru and I come from the same city doesn't mean we are destined to be a couple."

"Of course not."

"But I have also had my suspicions of Sandy."

"Really? I can't imagine a more ethical person than Sandy."

"Well, I agree now, but that day you took me to UBC library, I saw Sandy sharing a carrel with a girl who appeared to be all over him."

"Really?"

"Well, it is fairer to say that she appeared to want to be all over him. Sandy has since been able to explain this incident, and another, but I suffered in having these suspicions because I thought he had lied to me."

"So seeing him in the library is why you became so quiet as we left there that day?"

"Not just quiet. Depressed."

"Understandably. But have you clarified these misunderstandings now?"

"Yes."

"Well, I hope so, because it would be a shame for the two of you to walk away from each other without knowing for sure that you gave the relationship a proper try."

"Well, thank you for saying so, because I agree."

"Without experiencing that, you will never know what could have happened if you had fully explored being a couple."

"Are you speaking from a similar experience?"

"Yes. From long ago."

"I'd like to hear about that, Mary."

"Well, there was someone whom I was drawn to in second-year university. We were in a studio course together, where there was a lot more socializing among students than in a regular lecture course. So we got to know each other fairly well as classmates."

Mary got up and refilled the cream picture at the fridge before she sat down again.

She continued, "I liked his calming spirit, or maybe I should say I was drawn to his quiet intensity. This was in a class where many of the other guys, by comparison, were status-conscious, conceited, and arrogant."

"Oh, I know what that can be like."

"Well, this unassuming guy and I only went out together on one official date and we shared a couple of informal activities that semester before he travelled out of province for a summer job."

"Ah, too bad."

"Yes, and I wished I could have seen more of him when university resumed in the fall, but he was sensitive enough to realize then that another guy was trying to claim me by then. And I think he assumed that I must like that other guy more than I could like him, so he backed off," Mary explained.

"Couldn't you have just phoned him to let him know that you wanted to know him better?"

"No, I couldn't. In those days it just wasn't done— a girl phoning a guy—even though there was a campus-wide student directory, called Bird Calls, which listed each student's telephone number and address. To have looked him up and phoned him would have made me look like a hussy."

"A hussy?"

"Oh, sorry. That is not a common word now, but it means to be a sassy, immoral woman."

"I am amazed that there was such a phone book—what an invasion of privacy that would seem today."

"Yes, customs have changed," Mary emphasized.

"How had this guy tried to let you know he was interested in you?"

"Beside asking me out on that one date?"

"Which was?..."

"To a movie."

"Okay."

"Well, in the spring he had asked me to hike down to Wreck Beach to have lunch with him. Down that steep trail with all those stairs."

"Oh, bold."

“Well, this was early in the season. There was no association of nudity then, but it did feel like a daring place for the two of us to go alone, because it was isolated and totally deserted at that time.”

“That could be romantic.”

“And it was, because while we were on our way up the sharply sloping trail, with the beach far below us, he stopped and picked a small huckleberry leaf from a bush. Then, standing close to me, he secured it to my fuzzy pullover sweater, saying, “We’re pinned.”

“Pinned?”

“Yes. Guys who were in a fraternity, who wanted to show a commitment to a girl, would give her his fraternity pin to wear in order to show that she was spoken for. ‘Pinned’ meant that they were going out exclusively with each other.”

“And was this guy was in a fraternity?”

“Yes. He was.”

“Oh, so...”

“I was totally moved by this simple gesture, its suggestiveness. Kind of like trying out what I might think of the real thing. And it felt so intimate, standing close together, on the trail like that—his fingers interweaving the pointed ends of the leaf into the fuzzy threads on the front of my sweater. “

“Wow.”

“And I wished it could be true, being pinned to him, but it was beyond me to indicate that I would love to have his actual pin. I was simply too shy. But I was so captivated by his gesture that I was planning to never take the leaf off my sweater. I suppose I was hoping this guy would later see me purposely still wearing the leaf, but by the end of the day it had fallen off. I was so disappointed.”

“And he wasn’t courageous enough to ask if he could give his real pin to you? Or somehow go one step further?”

“No, although he had left a note for me in the library....”

“About?”

“Oh, just the timing for our usual supper.”

“You usually ate supper together?”

“Yes, but just as a group.”

“Oh, nice.”

“Anyway, he wrote his note on a blank library sign-out card and in the space labelled “registration number,” he had filled in his telephone number. On the side the card had made a joke of doing this, but I didn’t get it because at the time I didn’t even recognize the seven digits as a phone number.”

“If you had, could you have phoned him then, knowing that he, in effect, had asked you to phone him?”

“Probably I couldn’t have mustered up the nerve to call him even then. At any rate, nothing came of that relationship.”

To him it probably seemed as if he had made his feelings clear and that I had chosen not to respond. And that my non-response was the equivalent of turning him down, proving I had no romantic interest in him."

"Ah, too bad."

"Yes. Who knows what that relationship could have been like if we had explored it."

"So you've wondered all these years."

"Yes. It's too bad we don't get to live out every appealing relationship that is offered to us."

"I assume you are not meaning at the same time," I commented smiling. I knew Mary was not the type to have been disloyal to one man while trying out another.

"Of course one at a time," she laughed. "Maybe the ideal situation would be to live in a time warp. Where you follow through on one relationship and then get to return to the exactly same point in your life to try the other one if the first one doesn't turn out."

"So that really is a fantasy then."

"I suppose it is, since you can never return to being exactly that same person who you were when you otherwise might have gotten to know each other intimately," Mary added.

"So I guess you're saying that instead we have to make good judgments as we go along, to try to choose well."

"Exactly."

"And you agree that Sandy looks like he is worth taking the time to see if he could be that right choice for me."

"I certainly do. Otherwise you may be wondering for the rest of your life."





NOVEMBER # 7—Carol Singing at the Library

Visuals: photographs of main branch of Vancouver Public Library, interior and exterior

Mary and a friend of hers were going to a carol singing session at the public library so I went along. I was thinking about Sandy's assumption that I sing, so I wanted some practice before he might hear me. Mary and I arrived a few minutes early so we stood in line outside the doors to the auditorium.

Soon Mary's friend, Elaine, arrived in a state of rushed exasperation carrying a great number of bulging shopping bags and feeling anxious that she would be late. Rolls of Christmas wrap were sticking out the top of one bag. Elaine said she had walked there from a department store rather than going back to her car to drop the bags off as she intended.

"I had to park so far away from the store that going back wasn't feasible," Elaine explained.

"You brought your car downtown?" Mary reacted somewhat incredulous. "Why would you do that when there's public transit? It's so much easier. The buses stop right outside the department stores. You don't have to troop off to some remote, dark parking lot or creepy underground garage."

"I know. I know, but I figured I'd have so much to carry. I have 18 people to buy presents for you know."

"And that's my next question. Why do you exchange gifts with so many people?"

"I guess because we have never arranged any other way. I still give each person in the family a gift—my kids' and my sister and brother and all their kids. Plus, of course, Mom and Gerald."

She added, "Not everyone can be like you, Mary, and just drop out of the gift-giving ritual."

"Why not? Somebody just has to start. Tell them in advance that you've decided not to participate any longer so they shouldn't buy you a gift. Your family would probably all be grateful if they could drop out. But someone has to say, 'Okay, enough is enough. Let's use our time and energy in other ways to enjoy the season.'"

"Just because you were able to do this...."

"So why can't you? In our family we have all been so much more relaxed over the holidays by being able to stay away from the stores. We no longer spend hours, not to mention money, in finding a gift that the recipient probably doesn't want anyway."

"I know, I'd love to just be able to stop, but...."

"And how long will it take to pay off your charge cards after Christmas?"

"I don't even want to think about that...."

The doors to the auditorium opened so this conversation ended as we all filed in, taking a seat, and helping Elaine to stow her packages under the seats of all three of us. Even that meant we could barely move our feet!

There were several music groups with various kinds of instruments on the stage and they proceeded to play music and lead the singing. The words to the carols were provided on a large screen so we could all attempt to sing along. I did my best, despite only some of the carols being familiar to me. Still I did feel that attempting to sing helped me to remember where my voice is. What it sounds like. But when will Sandy get to hear it?

Dare I admit that after the singing was over I was able to sit on Santa Claus's knee and have my picture taken? This was something that I have never done before. I would have felt embarrassed if Sandy had seen me doing this. But it was a fundraiser as well as kind of fun. The dollar you paid to sit on Santa's knee was going to a children's charity.

The discussion of exchanging gifts made me realize that Sandy and I should talk about whether or not we want to give each other a gift. Besides, wanting to ask him gave me an excuse to try to phone him.

Did I really need an excuse to phone him? Now I am sounding like Mary in her university days. But it's true Sandy and I haven't become accustomed to phoning each other routinely. He spends most of his time at university making use of his personally customized studio space there, with its drafting board, table, shelves, etc., like the ones that I saw when I first toured the architecture department with Mary.

As a result of having this workspace, Sandy often gets home late, so I don't want to disturb his parents by calling at an inappropriate time. Sandy has the same reason for not phoning me. I phoned and left a message the next afternoon from school at a time that no one was home. Sandy called me back that night.

Sandy seemed pleased that I had brought up this question, and we agreed that it is okay to give each other one gift providing it is something we make ourselves and does not cost more than five dollars in materials. I immediately came up with an idea.

Inspired by some of Mary's work, I have decided I want to try to make a portrait of Sandy by using paper pulp. When I told Mary about this, she thought it was an excellent idea. After all, she had previously offered to show me how to make images in this, her favourite material, so she readily agreed to give me some lessons now.





NOVEMBER # 8—Hockey Game Discovery

Visuals: photographs of GM place

Because hockey is such a Canadian activity, several of us wanted to go to a game. But we simply couldn't get organized enough to buy all our tickets together. Sumi and I bought ours after giving up on our indecisive friends. For the night of the game, Sumi and I arranged to walk over to GM Place together.

We knew there would be some others from our class attending, but we didn't know where they would be sitting. On entering the noisy arena and climbing up to the back rows (cheap section), we certainly weren't prepared to see Noboru and Claudia among the excited fans. Yes, Claudia and Noboru!

Seeing them struck me as an almost physical blow. But Sumi and I just pointed and laughed when they waved at us across the long expanse of spectators. It was useless to try to talk across that distance. We assumed we would see them at the intermission (if there was to be one) or on leaving.

As Sumi and I got settled in our seats, I said to her, "I certainly hope that Noboru has come back to see you, not me. Sandy and I are still trying to learn to trust each other."

"Well, I don't object to helping Noboru get his mind off you. Look at him.... His hair is over his collar now."

"I guess he really has been rebelling against his dad," I commented.

"When is he here till?" she asked rhetorically.

"If you don't know, no one does. You're the two who have been emailing."

"Maybe due to the conflict with his dad, he just decided to leave. Or maybe his dad told him to get out," she commented.

"Oh, I hope it hasn't come to that."

"Maybe he just wanted it to be a surprise for us all."

“Well, it’s a surprise all right.”

“You’d rather he wasn’t here?” she asked me, perhaps due to my tone.

“Well, I do worry about Sandy. I don’t want him to feel threatened by Noboru again.”

“I wonder how Claudia managed to coordinate these hockey tickets.”

“Who knows? But it is the kind of thing that Claudia can do across continents when others in the group seem incapable of accomplishing this even within the classroom.”

As Sumi and I waited for the game to start, we began to spot others from our class. Marina and Juliana were sitting with the three guys from the French School. Also we spotted Bae and Song, Fernando and Nicole. There was much waving between us without really being able to communicate.

Another huge surprise was that Barry, as a season’s ticket holder with a front row seat, was given a chance to try a long shot at the net. Officials promised him \$1,000 if he could get it in. We knew he was an excellent hockey player for an amateur. Well, the audience became absolutely silent as we waited for him to aim and shoot. When the puck hit the post of the net, but bounced off without going in, the audience roared their approval and disappointment. He was the hero of the moment for getting so close.

I thought that it was too bad that Se-Eun wasn’t here and wondered if she and Barry still had plans to teach together in Korea in January. Perhaps Claudia would know about what was happening between the two of them.

I also wanted to ask Claudia about her MBA program. I’m disappointed that she has chosen to attend the Richmond branch of that American college rather than going to UBC. Both had accepted her. Do her uncles really think that satellite school of some American college (which Mary has never heard of) is better recognized than UBC? Or had Claudia been swayed when the administrators had offered her a reduction in the first year’s fees from \$29,000 to \$23,000. But is that a bargain if it is going to be a worthless degree from an unrecognized college? Surely UBC would have been a better choice.

The other thing that made me suspicious of the US branch college was that they took students’ grad pictures the first week they arrived. When I saw the photo of Claudia in her regalia (robe and hat), I was thinking yes, some students, with the grad picture in hand as proof of graduation, might not bother to continue to take courses but just bolt, thus saving themselves and the college a lot of effort in taking/providing courses. All I know is that Claudia is working hard there. So that even if the school is a fly-by-night (yesterday’s idiom!)

operation, at least Claudia is using the time constructively in studying what she feels she needs to know.

At the intermission to the game, Sumi and I went over and talked with Noboru and Claudia. That of course meant big hugs between us all. I felt conspicuous and was just hoping that Sandy wasn't somehow seeing this. And I was also hoping that Noboru hugged Sumi more warmly than he hugged me.

As the end of the intermission, horns blared to urge people to get back to their seats. Sumi and Claudia decided that they would switch places so that Sumi could sit with Noboru and Claudia could sit with me. Nice. That's something I can explain to Sandy with confidence!

Well, of course when there was a chance to talk, Claudia acknowledged Se-Eun and Barry's plan for the two of them to teach in Korea. Of course Claudia was equally interested in talking about the potential of Sumi and Noboru.

"I just hope you know what you are doing, Erika, giving up Noboru. I hope you don't regret this if your plans with Sandy don't work out."

"I'm willing to risk this, Claudia. Sumi and Noboru have so much more in common than Noboru and I do."

"Even though Noboru may never truly get over you."

"I certainly hope he does."

"Have you and Sandy been able to keep your UBC plan a secret?"

"You are the only one who knows besides Sandy and his parents, my older sister, and Mary."

"What did your sister say?"

"She thinks it seems feasible since my parents supported her for four years while she studied in England. But she does wonder if I am singling out Sandy too early."

"Well, you can always change your mind later, if necessary, after you know him better."

"I can't imagine doing that. I am going to be devastated if I'm not accepted by UBC. My focus now is so *here* and so *Sandy*."

"And assuming that you will be returning to UBC, have you thought about what it's going to be like when you are back in Japan from April to September?"

"Well, that is just something I will have to live through. Of course I will be missing Sandy terribly. I am hoping we both have enough trust to get through that period and keep alive our dream of being at UBC together."

"And what about Noboru? What if he wants to see you in Japan then?"

"Oh, Claudia, you are always making me face the tough questions."

“Well, I hope you won’t accept anything less than the best version of yourself.”

“If Noboru and I should see each other during that time, I will ensure that nothing happens between us that I can’t honestly describe to Sandy without hurting him. My relationship with Sandy is my first priority.”

“Fair enough...as long as you know what is most important to you and you have chosen freely.”

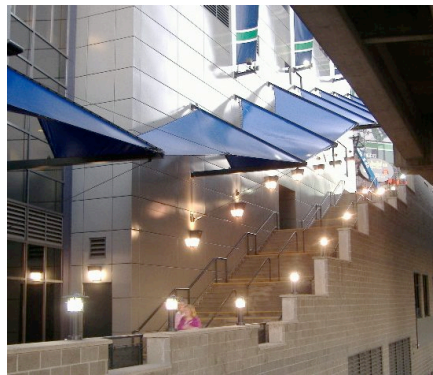
“What about you and your boyfriend?”

“Well, not much has changed. We still talk on the phone every day. I haven’t done as much traveling with him this fall as a result of my suddenly getting into my studies. But we intend to spend Christmas together, although even now we are not sure where that will be.”

“Somewhere exotic undoubtedly, even if you are making arrangements at the very last moment.”

A lot of sudden booing brought our attention back to hockey. The Vancouver team didn’t win. The game had gone on despite our lack of concentration in watching it.

I am now anxious about how Sandy will react to Noboru’s return. I don’t intend to say anything about his being here until absolutely necessary. I want Sandy to be free from worry as long as possible, especially since I don’t know how long Noboru intends to stay. Hopefully he came back to establish a fuller relationship with Sumi and that his reasons for being here have nothing to do with me.



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