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Volume Two

# Vancouver Memories: A Certain Commitment



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## ***OCTOBER # 1—Impromptu Supper with Sandy***

*Visuals: photograph of rainy street from restaurant window*

Having admitted to Sandy my dream to attend UBC, I had almost forgotten our fight over Noboru, especially after reading that letter from Sandy's ex-girlfriend. It insulted Sandy (and me), tried to manipulate Sandy, and revealed that the old girlfriend could arrive here anytime. So my fear returned when Sandy phoned. I couldn't interpret his tone as he asked me to meet him for an early supper on his way through the West End in going home from UBC.

I was nervous as I sat in a Davie Street restaurant waiting for him to arrive. Did he want to talk about the letter after all? The former girlfriend?

I was in a window seat, watching people walk past in a light rain. I couldn't suppress my smile when I saw Sandy coming across the intersection.

"Sorry, I'm late," he said as he took off his slightly damp jacket and slid into the seat across from me. "There was an accident on the bridge tying up traffic."

"You look tired."

"Yeah, it's been a very long day. I didn't get much sleep last night. Have you ordered yet?"

"No, I didn't know whether to or not."

"You're good at this, so go ahead."

I ordered two of the three dishes we usually enjoy and then added two other small ones.

"Have you been all right?" I asked, as the waiter walked away.

"Yes and no."

I felt a touch of alarm.

"Are your parents still away?"

"Yes. And that has something to do with it."

"It? So you're not wanting to talk about that letter?"

"No. I have more perspective on that now. Except for apologizing to you again, I'd like to put that behind us. Is that all right with you?"

"Yes, all right. So you have another concern?"

"I do. I'm still trying my best to cover for Dad on that house on the top of the British Properties. In the new section."

"Supervising."

"If I can call it that."

"The one your Dad has given you a lot of responsibility on."

"One of the ones Dad has given me a lot of responsibility on. Regrettably, in this case, as I am beginning to feel."

"Sandy, don't start undermining yourself."

"I know, but..."

"Has something really bad happened?"

"Well, yesterday I went to a meeting in the client's office at Ambleside. Not far from where I met you outside the galleries."

He paused.

I knew we were both remembering that emotional devastation.

"When my meeting was over, I went into that same gallery, because I never actually saw that show."

Our conversation stopped as the server set out plates and green tea.

"Sandy, I wish..."

"It's okay, Erika, but reliving that occasion may have created bad feelings, because last night I had a terrible nightmare."

"Oh, no. Was I in it?"

"No. But perhaps those earlier worries provoked it."

"So tell me about the nightmare."

"Well, at the end of a shift on a grey rainy day, I was checking the forms of the house as the men started pouring cement, two things that in reality wouldn't happen simultaneously. But something diverted my attention, so that I walked away without actually checking the orientation of the forms against the plans."

"This was all a dream?"

"Yes, but it felt so real. Then through the rest of the night, last night, I was overcome with the conviction that the whole house was facing in the wrong direction on the lot."

"Turned around?"

"Yes. So that the view windows would be facing up the mountain, rather than looking across the harbour."

"Oh, no."

"I experienced absolute panic. It felt so real. Dream and reality had become one. I felt absolutely certain the house was backwards on the lot. It was all I could do to stay in bed. I just wanted to drive up to the site at that moment, even though it was still night."

"Reassure me, Sandy. Does this have a happy ending?"

He seemed to not hear my request for reassurance as the server set out our food.



"I wanted to go immediately to find out if the vision in my mind was true. But daylight was still more than two hours away. It was the longest two hours of my life."

"I wish you would have phoned me, Sandy. Even if I couldn't have done anything...."

"But at 4:30 am I wasn't thinking about contacting...."

"Even if you had just shared your fear with me. But now tell me it's okay. That your fears were not true."

I reached my hand across the table and put my fingers on his wrist, but he still seemed preoccupied.

He took a moment to eat some rice. Then he set aside his chopsticks saying, "When I thought daylight should come within half an hour, I drove up to the top of the road in the pitch black. There are no streetlights up there yet. I had a large flashlight and I got out of the car and walked around the excavation in the dark."

"Oh, dangerous."

"Yes, I didn't want to risk falling into the hole or kicking dirt down into the forms. So I went back and sat in the car."

"I'm glad of that."

"With the heater on, I watched a mean, grey-orange beam of light stretch slowly across the eastern horizon. Absolutely silent. Not even a dog barking in the distance or an early crow cawing. Just absolute silence. It felt eerie, whereas I usually like silence and being alone. Instead I felt so lonely."

"This was this morning...."

"Yes, this morning."

"Eventually it became light...."

"Yes, but only after feeling daylight would never return."

“But it did....”

“The black turned a royal blue, then grey blue. As soon as I could see even faintly, I unrolled the drawings, climbed over mounds of earth at the edges of the excavation, and started pacing around the forms.”

“And everything’s all right?”

“Yes, eventually I reassured myself everything is all right.”

“That the view windows face the harbour?”

“Yes, that the view windows will face the harbour. What an unimaginable relief!”

“Oh, thank goodness.”

“I felt that stress dissolve as a physical sensation.”

“So what did you do then?”

Sandy looked at me wondering what to admit.

“Please tell me.”

“I climbed back up to the car and got in and put my arms over the steering wheel and....”

“And?”

“Head down, I cried.”

“Ah, Sandy....”

“Cried out of relief.”

I rubbed his wrist.

“I haven’t cried in years.”

“It’s good to let yourself do that sometime.”

“Well, I guess it could be, because when I finally raised my head, I was overwhelmed by a most beautiful sun clearing the horizon. I got out of the car. What had been an eerie quiet had become a full, calming silence. An inspiring silence with the stillness of pure, white light. Within a few minutes, small birds were twittering in some nearby bushes. And you know....”

Sandy faltered and took a few more bites of food.”

“Go ahead.”

He moved his chopsticks from the side of his plate onto his crumpled serviette.

“I’d like to hear, Sandy.”

“Well, as I looked over the construction site and across to that inspirational sunrise that was beginning to illuminate and outline the city, I ... I could feel you there with me.”



“Me.... There.”

“Yes, standing alongside me.”

“I love the idea of being there with you, Sandy.”

“I felt your presence and a profound sense of peace.”

He looked at me quizzically as if he was trying to see if I understood the implications of what he was saying.

“Sandy, I want to be standing there with you. Always.”

“Well then, your getting accepted at UBC is the first step. I am so glad you are willing to try this.”

“It is the most important goal of my life now.”

“And for me, this is reassuring. About you. About us.”

“Now can you set aside the haunting feelings from that dream?”

“I certainly want to.”

He smiled and gently squeezed my fingers.



*Photograph of aerial view of Vancouver from a North Shore mountain, courtesy of Gabriela Hauser, Switzerland; others by the author*



## ***OCTOBER # 2—Canadian Thanksgiving***

*Visuals: Some of Mary's recipes, photographs of food in preparation, turkey, pumpkin pie*

Mary had told me Thanksgiving is about enjoying all the good food of Christmas with the same spirit of family companionship but without the stress of buying presents (for those who still do this—not Mary's family).

I was looking forward to helping Mary because I have never cooked a whole Turkey (very large!) or made a pumpkin pie (although I am now an expert at whipping cream!). Mary celebrates on the Sunday rather than the holiday Monday in order to have a day to recover from all that cooking and cleaning. On Friday, she and I went over the menu and made lists of ingredients we needed to buy.

I stayed in on the Saturday night in order help with making the pumpkin pie and onion casserole, assembling the stuffing ingredients for the turkey, washing the vegetables, and making the salad dressing, as well as getting out rarely used serving platters, extra cutlery, and wine glasses, and ironing a special tablecloth. So many details, but it was fun! Knowing that Sandy was coming to the dinner made all the work especially worthwhile.

Sunday was a beautiful day, so with a relatively early dinner scheduled, Mary's family arrived in the sunshine and all within a few minutes of each other starting with Mary's brother Howard and his wife, Ella, and daughter Jenny and then Mary's niece, Alisa, and nephew-in-law, Marcus.

"Something certainly smells good," they all agreed as they entered the door. Alisa and Marcus are in their late twenties (and Alisa is so pretty), but they look so much

younger. It is hard to believe that Alisa and Marcus are both academics.

Mary's parents arrived along with others. Her dad went straight into the living room and was willing to be treated like a guest—accepting a glass of wine and some snacks—whereas others in Mary's family went into almost a choreographed dance involving specific preparations. Laughing and talking, they set themselves to their unspoken tasks. It was obvious they had done this many times before.



Mary's brother Howard took the large, almost-too-heavy-for-us-to-lift, hot turkey out of the oven and put it on a large serving platter. He got out the electric knife (yes, electric!) and began to carve the turkey.

Mary's mom put on an apron and began making the gravy. And on Mary's request, Alisa and I began to bring out other items from the fridge—sour cream, cranberry sauce, butter, etc. At the moment that Sandy buzzed the doorbell, Ella said she would continue to help Mary get the final food on the table if Sandy and I would entertain Jenny in the living room.

Sandy arrived at the door with some flowers and a bottle of wine. I took his arm and led him to the kitchen door where I introduced him to those he hadn't previously met.

He handed the flowers and wine to Mary.

"Oh, these are lovely, Sandy. I love dahlias—such a symbol of autumn," Mary commented, as she arranged the orange and red flowers in a vase of water.

"Are they from your family's garden?"

"Yes, but there is no one is at home to enjoy them as my parents are still away."

"Such a pleasure. And should the wine go in the fridge?"

"It's just as good at room temperature."

Mary admired the distinctive label on the wine bottle.

"My dad makes the wine and the labels," he explained.

Mary said she hoped that she would be able to remove the label without spoiling it so she could keep it.

Sandy said, "Don't worry. I can always get an unused label to Erika for you."

Sandy and I took Jenny into the living room and got her drawing with some of Mary's bright felt pens as her grandfather looked on approvingly. It reminded me of looking after Noel. Sandy was very good with Jenny encouraging her artistic efforts.

Others helped round up extra chairs to bring to the table. Finally we were all ready to sit down. With the red candles glowing, the table looked so festive with all the wonderful food against the dark red tablecloth and serviettes.

Sandy sat next to me. Mary explained how she admires the Japanese tradition of together saying "itadacamous," before eating as a reverent acknowledgement of gratefulness for food. Apparently there isn't an equivalent expression in English.

Everyone was in a good mood as they handed around the platters. They seemed to be able to eat, talk, and laugh all at once! There would have been enough food for twice as many people. Without revealing my plan, I encouraged Marcus and Alisa to talk about UBC and the international students in their departments.

By the time we were enjoying the pumpkin pie and whipped cream, and tea or wine, everyone seemed to be feeling mellow. I was just unsettled when Jenny, who charms everyone with her amazingly advanced conversation, corrected my use of the word "whip cream." By what she said she revealed the differences between whipping cream (what her mother had brought in the carton) and whipped cream (what we were now eating). I was embarrassed that she could correct me and was keeping me conscious of needing to speak my best English!

As the grandparents and Ella went into the living room to sit down and entertain or be entertained by Jenny, Howard began to put away food. We encouraged Sandy to act like a guest and go with them, but he insisted on helping to clear the table and to dry dishes with me as Mary washed. Howard made up packages of turkey, and other leftovers for his parents to take home with them.

When the dining room table was cleared and the food put away, Mary brought out a board game. We played as couples. With Sandy as my partner, we did quite well. We laughed a lot because some people pretended to cheat. As the candles on the table and sideboard burned low, we knew it was time for the relatives to leave.

On the phone the night before, Sandy and I had agreed that, after the relatives left, I would accompany him down to his car. After many goodbyes at Mary's door, Sandy thanked Mary and put on his jacket. We walked downstairs and opened the front door. A gust of wind caused twirling maple leaves to descend in a flurry from trees lit by the streetlights.

Because I was without a jacket, we ran a little way along the sidewalk and got into the car quickly. Sandy started the car and turned on the heater. A pattern of perfectly shaped, orange and red maple leaves sticking to the dampened windshield looked like a Canadian design for a clear, decorated shower curtain. And some nearby cars were almost covered in leaves.



With continuing gusts of wind, we heard some thuds on the car roof and on the pavement. Chestnuts were falling from trees overhead and smashing out of their rough, green, prickly jackets revealing the smooth, dark brown chestnuts within. Many of these smooth brown nuts had already been run over by cars and crushed on the road showing their internal cream-coloured nutmeat.

"Will they hurt your car?" I asked as they banged on the hood and the roof.

"This car? Besides, who would notice a few more dents?"

There was a quiet moment before Sandy took my hand and encouraged me by saying, "So there are things we should discuss...."

"Yes. I've worried since I told you I'd like to study at UBC. I want you to know that, if I do come here, there are no obligations for you Sandy. While I wouldn't have dreamt to try to come here without knowing you, I wouldn't want you to feel responsible for me in any way."

"I'm not worried about that," he commented.

"I've convinced myself that there is as much logic to my coming here to study as there was for my sister and my mom to study in London. I just want you to know that I wouldn't have any expectations of you."

"Thanks for saying this, Er. I love the fact that you are willing to risk studying architecture here. I have wanted to talk to you about expectations too."

"Similar expectations?"

"No, not at all. Some are related to standard of living."

"How is that relevant?"

"Well, I wouldn't want you to get to know me better as a result of thinking I have some status from living in the British Properties. That is a very expensive area that does not reflect on my accomplishments—present or future."

"I understand that."

"Or even those of my parents. My grandfather left the house to my father and my uncle. They own it together. But if my uncle, who lives in Toronto, should decide he wants his half of the money out of the house, my parents would not be able to afford to buy his portion; they would have to sell it. Luckily at the moment my uncle is just happy to see the house remain in the family, so he hasn't forced a sale. I am saying this so you don't associate me with that house. I know it is a privilege to live there—one that I can't aspire to."

"Sandy, don't forget that I was originally attracted to you as a member of a band. My cousin has been in a band for years and has never been able to give up his day job. I haven't assumed that you are rich or will be rich. But this hasn't stopped me from wanting to know you from the start. The house is a pleasure to be able to visit. I especially like the view from the hot tub!" I laughed. "But I don't assume the house is a permanent part of your life or represents who you are."

"That's good then. I wouldn't want to find out later that it influenced you in wanting to be close to me. Even my parents can't support the expense of living there without using their money carefully. Because they want a balanced life, they choose to not work day and night, so they live modestly despite being in that house. They make choices and don't aspire to things that others now take for granted."

"Such as?"

"Well, they share one car. They don't have a cell phone for personal use nor any special features on their home phone."

"Special features."

"You know, such as call display."

"Oh, sure."

"I don't think Dad would even have a cell phone for work if he weren't out of the office with people at the studio needing to contact him. And Dad has never encouraged me to get one for myself. The office is willing to lend me one when I visit a construction site. His attitude is that cell phones encourage a lot of worthless chat that passes for conversation."

"Actually, I agree. From the phone calls I overhear on buses, nothing ever seems worth making a call about."

"Exactly. Besides I don't want to be available 24 hours a day to everyone. That would be like being on a leash."

"I agree."

“Also Mom and Dad don’t have a computer in the house. They just use the one in the studio. People have managed without them for years. They refuse to be swayed by advertising suggesting we need these things constantly now. Instead they choose to have season’s tickets to the symphony and the theatre and they travel occasionally.”

“Then they are wise.”

“Yes, I think they are.”

“This discussion about standard of living and expectations.... Well, it is something my mom thought I should mention to you.”

“You’ve talked to your mom about my wanting to come to university here?”

“Yes. I hope that’s okay with you, Er. I wanted to talk to someone about it, so I phoned Mom in Ontario.”

“Actually I like the fact that you are close to your mom. How a man relates to his mother is supposed to say a lot about how he treats women in general.”

“She’s very supportive of me. We can talk about anything.”

“You are her baby,” I teased.

“It’s true. Mom and Dad assumed they couldn’t have another child after my brothers were born. So when I came along all those years later, she knew I would be her last chance to experience having a child in the house. She’s savoured every step of my growing up without pressuring me to speed up my development.”

“So when you told her I want to do architecture here, what did she say?”

“She’s delighted. She knows that I want more time to get to know you.”

“I like your mom.”

“She likes you too. And she appreciates your good influence. But look, you’re getting cold.”

Sandy moved over and rubbed my forearms. Then he stretched his jacket around me. I could feel his warmth still in it. His cheek was close to mine when he said, “There’s something else about expectations that I think we should talk about, Er. But it’s a little more difficult to bring up.”

“What?”

He stayed silent.

“Really.... Just say it,” I encouraged him by moving away slightly so that I could see his eyes in the flickering light of the street lamp shining down through the swaying chestnut and maple trees.

“Why is it hard to mention?”

“I wouldn’t want discussing it to change our pace, Er.”

"Is it about sex?" I smiled at the way he was agonizing.

"Yeah," he grinned.

"I thought you were good at talking about sex."

"I said I think it's important to try to be."

"So what is it?"

"I need to know your views, because they could be different in our cultures," he said.

"Yes, they probably are."

"I wouldn't want us to do anything that might damage your reputation at home. And I'm not sure if, how, your hoping to return here in September changes anything between us."

"I've grown up assuming I wouldn't have sex before marriage. That has seemed important. But since meeting you, I have wondered whether this still seems as essential to me as it used to. And times are changing at home too."

"I'm glad you are willing to admit that you too have considered this. My logic tells me it makes sense to make sure nothing happens between us at least until you know that you will be coming back. If you don't plan to return in September, I assume it would be better not to become involved. You must know that this isn't through any lack of desire, but I want to act responsibly."

"Well, I'm glad you care about this, but what do you mean by change our pace?"

"Well, even if I knew that becoming sexually involved isn't out of the question for us, I still wouldn't want to miss any stages in our relationship."

"I don't want to miss any stages either. But I don't know what to say."

"You don't have to say anything right now. I'd just like to think that we will be able to talk about this, now that we have gotten over the difficulty of bringing it up."

"Has your mother given you advice on this too?" I teased.

"Well, actually she did. After she first met you."

"She did? What advice?"

"She told me that because our relationship is probably different for you, if I am your first Caucasian boyfriend...."

"Which you are."

"Well, that you are likely to remember forever how I treat you. And you are likely to think that how I treat you is how all Caucasian men, specially Canadian men, treat women."

"But you might think the same of me, right? That all Asian women, or all Japanese women, treat men as I treat you."

"Sure."

"So I guess that means we need to treat each other particularly kindly."

"I'd like to have that as a pact, Er. That we will try to make things clear to each other, explain our assumptions, as we go along."

"I am willing to do that."

"Good." Sandy paused for a moment before adding, "So, have we said enough for tonight?"

"Yes. For tonight."

We kissed.

As we drew apart, Sandy asked, "Are we still planning to go to that film this week?"

"I want to. Have you got time?"

"I will make time."

"I want you to come, but you know some of my group will be coming too, so I wouldn't be going alone if you have too many assignments...."

"Thanks for understanding this. Mid terms are looming, but I want to come as long as you'll sit with me."

"Sit with you?"

"Well, I mean providing I don't have to sit behind you and Noboru. I definitely couldn't manage that!"

"I think I like it that you're a little bit jealous," I joked.

We kissed for a few more minutes and then I returned upstairs. I rather like Canadian Thanksgiving!





## ***October # 3—Vancouver International Film Festival***

*Visuals: View of VanCity theatre*

Today Sandy came to the apartment and then we walked over together to the VanCity Theatre where many of the screenings of the Vancouver International Film Festival take place. I wasn't sure if Noboru would be coming and if he did, how he and Sandy would interrelate. I hoped Sandy wouldn't feel as bad as he had in West Van when we visited the galleries. Sure enough, Noboru came down the sidewalk with Juliana, Bae, Sumi, and Song. A few minutes later, Marina, Fernando, and Nicole were within sight too.

"So can someone tell me what this movie is going to be about?" Nicole asked.

"About an all-girls high school band in Japan during a time that the school was having a student exchange with Korea," Sumi responded.

"Have you seen it, Sumi?" asked Bae, who seems readily convinced of Sumi's authority on any subject.

"No, I read my host-family's program. They come to a lot of the films."

When we got into the theatre, we all filed into one row of seats with Sandy and I taking the last two seats closest to the aisle. With this arrangement, Noboru and Sandy never had any contact with each other in the theatre. But when we all went to a café after the film, Noboru and Sandy participated in the same conversation without seeming threatened.

"Did you enjoy it?" I asked Sandy.

"A lot. It reminded me of all the struggles and triumphs I encountered with my first high school band and the rush that having the audience with you like that when they came out with their chorus of 'Linda, Linda, Linda,' well, that's the thrill of being in a band."

"But are Japanese and Korean teenage girls really that passive?" Juliana asked.

We talked about the apparent passivity of females as shown in that film. We wondered how any Asian male and female teens ever get together, as they seem so formal with each other compared to teens in Vancouver.

"I can't believe the female students wouldn't dare to go after a guy they are interested in..." Juliana commented.

"That's fine for you to say since you gave your husband an ultimatum as soon as you met him," Marina commented.

"Ah, the direct approach," Sandy commented.

As if to herself, Song softly said, "Daniel and I would never have got together if I had waited for him to notice me."

"Yes, so at least one Asian female has been able to strike up a relationship with a guy she likes," Marina responded.

"And I certainly want a girl to claim me," Bae smiled.

"Yes, but not just any female," we teased him.

"True, not just anyone," he said, giving a quick smile to Sumi and Song.

Juliana continued, "Sumi, would you initiate contact with a guy you wanted to get to know better?"

"I'm not sure."

"Not sure?" Noboru reacted. "Sure you would!"

"Why do you say this?" Sumi asked with interest.

"Because you are so direct in other parts of your life."

"I'm not saying that I would be passive in responding to initiatives by some guy I'm interested in. I just don't think I could make the first move."

"I can't believe you are saying this..." Noboru said quietly, as his gaze lingered on Sumi's face.

"So what the film showed *is* representative of female Japanese culture..." Fernando commented.

"Probably female Japanese high school culture," I responded. "I've heard that the international students who come here are the courageous ones. They are more likely to go after what they want. The passive ones simply stay home."

"Other female international students have told me about how decisive they became from being in Canada," Marina commented. "Being here encouraged them to go after their goals and also be unwilling to settle for anything less than what a male would receive under the same circumstances."

I was wondering what some in the group would think if they knew I was hoping to apply to attend UBC's architecture program. Have I changed in having the nerve to go after this?

When everyone was concentrating on eating muffins and drinking tea or coffee, Sandy asked Fernando, "Do you and Nicole plan to keep in contact once you are back in your county?"

"Yes."

"And my parents have agreed to support me to stay in Vancouver two months longer, so I can go back to Mexico at the same time as Fernando," Nicole answered.

"Oh, lucky. What about the rest of you?" Sandy asked casually. "Sumi and Noboru, will you see each other when you get back to Japan?"

Noboru hesitated as if wanting to hear what Sumi was going to say. Looking directly at her, he finally said, "I certainly would like to."

Quietly, still holding Noboru's gaze, Sumi responded, "Yes, that would be nice."

Perhaps to break that momentary intensity, she added, as if for Sandy's sake, "We live about an hour from each other."

When everyone agreed it was time to go, Sandy and I walked briskly back to the apartment where Sandy's car was parked. It had become cool. We got into Sandy's car despite knowing Sandy should be heading home immediately to get back to some pressing assignments. But when he saw me blowing on my hands, he turned on the heater and then took my hands in his to rub some warmth into them.

I said, "Do you know one of your questions after the film may have caused a major shift in Sumi and Noboru's relationship?"

"Seriously. How?"

"Well, in answering Juliana's question, Sumi revealed that she wouldn't initiate a personal relationship with a guy, something that surprised Noboru. It's as if he always assumed that if Sumi were interested in him, she would make it obvious."

"But how did my question make a difference?"

"She admitted she would be willing to see Noboru in Japan."

"Is that a big deal?"

"Well, he has assumed that in Japan Sumi would have so many guys in line that she would never make any time for him."

"How do you know this?"

"Noboru told me this when I was trying to get him interested in Sumi."

“Is that something you have attempted—trying to get him interested in Sumi?”

“Yes, Sandy. I told you this.”

“To get his focus off you?”

“Partly, but also because I believe they have so much in common.”

“I don’t remember you telling me that. That you’ve tried to get Noboru interested in her.”

“I told you that when we were in your car at Ambleside after going out on the pier.”

“Oh. When I was feeling so distraught I couldn’t hear.”

“Just preoccupied to the point of not really listening.”

“Now, you’re being too generous, Erika.”

“By encouraging Noboru to see how much he and Sumi have to share, I was hoping he’d see how little he and I have in common. To help him move on.”

“Then you have been a very good friend to him,” Sandy commented quietly.

“I’ve tried to be good to him, but not more than I would be to any other friend.”





## ***OCTOBER # 4—Going to the Symphony***

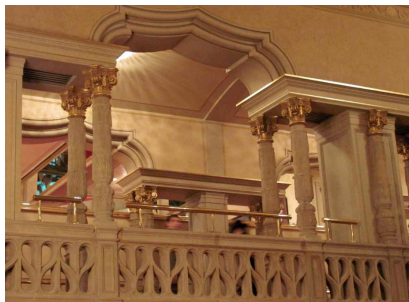
*Visuals: Photographs of interior and exterior of Orpheum Theatre, façade, lobby, and ceiling, flower door detail*

Last night Sandy and his mom Robyn took Mary and I to the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra— very inspiring! We used the season's tickets Sandy's parents share with their neighbours (who were away). The performer was the super-talented, Canadian violinist Corey Cerovsek.

Sandy and his mom drove to the apartment and then the four of us walked to the theatre on Granville Street. Sandy looked terrific, more dressed up than usual—dress pants, sweater over a button-down shirt, and a jacket. As we walked along the street, Sandy held my hand. It felt so comfortable. So taken for granted.

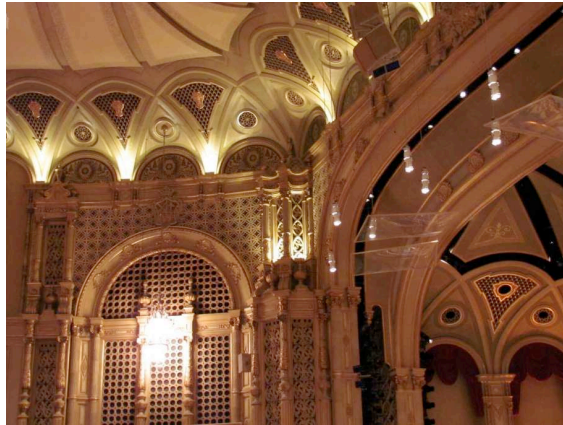
The symphony is in a beautiful old building across from the movie theatres. It's easy to walk past the front of the theatre without noticing it, but it is very impressive inside.

At street level beyond the ticket booth, you climb up steep stairs and walk along a long hall with high ceilings that are carved, gilded, and have chandeliers. The lobby off the side entrance is an open space with steep stairways leading up to various balconies. The gilded columns and balconies suggest love scenes from the masked ball in *Romeo and Juliet*.



Once in our seats we watched the orchestra members tuning their instruments. A sound filled with so much anticipation! In this performance the conductor spoke about aspects of the program. Video monitors at the sides of the stage provided close ups of featured players.

Corey is very handsome (in his 30s), and his playing is technically flawless while being so emotionally charged. He looks so intense in his black tuxedo. What a wonderful performer. So many encores for Corey! He joked that this was taking so long that the management would never ask him back (overtime costs for the orchestra?)!



Mary explained that she has known Corey and his family from the time when Corey was just a few months old. He is a year younger and his sister is a year older than Mary's daughter Daphne. The kids knew each until Corey and his family moved to the United States when he was 12, so he and his sister could study music at a university with a well-known music program.

Seeing the performance was a pleasure as I felt so close to Sandy. Throughout the performance, Sandy slowly, almost unperceptively, stroked my palm. This made me think of the first time he held my hand in the car in Victoria.

During the intermission, we stood in an open hallway overlooking the lobby. As we shared a soft drink, Sandy stood with his arm around my waist. This felt especially comfortable since we were there with his mom and Mary.

Just before the chimes started to ring us back into our seats, I decided to go to the washroom. As he took my program and the glass from me, Sandy said, "Let me hold those for you, Er."

Will I ever get over that pang of affection I feel when Sandy calls me Er?

After the intermission, the program was anti-climatic as Corey was not in it. Later Mary wrote an e-mail to compliment

Corey's mother. Apparently she revealed that Corey was disappointed that none of his old Vancouver friends went backstage to meet him during the intermission. Mary said it has never occurred to her to try to go backstage to see any performer.

As the four of us were walking home through the West End, we stopped together at a corner to allow several cars to go by, and Sandy's mom approvingly mentioned my hope to return to Vancouver to start my architectural program at UBC in September.

"Really, is this what you are planning now, Erika?" Mary exclaimed.

I felt awkward about not having yet told Mary, as we talk about so many things. When Robyn realized Mary hadn't heard about this, Robyn apologized. And Sandy added, "This is my fault, Erika. I didn't tell Mom that you are trying to keep this to yourself for a while."

"It's okay, Robyn. It's been hard for me to not tell you, Mary, about this wish, so I'm glad you know now."

Mary said, "Studying at UBC would be so exciting, Erika."

"Originally I thought I should talk to my parents first, in person, when they come here in February, but I've told my older sister and one friend and they are both supportive, so I'm encouraged. I am hoping my parents might see this as a positive idea too.

Mary asked, "Does that mean you'll be able to stay with me longer," she laughed.

"That would be wonderful but don't forget, I first have to be accepted by UBC before making detailed plans! And getting accepted is not that easy."

I am just pleased that those who know of my dream don't think it is a ridiculous idea.





## ***OCTOBER # 5—Anniversary Party of Sandy's Parents***

*Visuals: view of Lion's Gate Bridge*

Sandy invited me to his parents' anniversary party at their house. He admitted that most of the guest would be his parents' age, so my company would help make the party more interesting for him. I was certainly willing to accompany him.

I decided to buy something special to wear. Sumi came shopping with me and, due to her influence, the outfit I bought is, well, yes, it is black. I think both the dress and the shoes are quite flattering, even sophisticated. And Sandy definitely noticed.

"Hey, you look terrific," he said when he came through the door a little later than he intended. He had been helping his parents with last minute preparations.

He surprised me when he said, "You could bring your flute, just in case there is some opportunity to practise together."

"All right."

When we arrived at his house, the party was well underway. I would have felt totally overwhelmed if Sandy hadn't been with me. People were in the living room, dining room, kitchen, hallway, and even on the stairway that led down to the recreation room that was set up for dancing. And there seemed to be platters of food everywhere.

The downstairs was even noisier than upstairs and I found it surprising that rock and roll music was playing. Sandy explained that this is the music of Sandy's parents when they were our age. I think of Sandy's dad as being somewhat conservative—he approves of Sandy's ability as a classical pianist more than as a guitarist—yet much of the music played

during the party could have been inspiration for the music the band plays today.

I was amazed that Sandy's mom is such an enthusiastic dancer. Sandy told me that she had relied on rock and roll to stay sane while being trained in more "serious" music. Sandy had grown up listening to his mom's collection of rock music and dancing to this music at family parties. I was amazed that Sandy knows the words to so many of the songs.

Sandy introduced me to some relatives but it was difficult to talk, as there was so much going on. The surprise of the evening came in meeting Sandy's parents' best friends—Simon and Sue—the ones with whom they go on holidays and to the symphony.

Sandy and his parents had never mentioned that Simon is Asian. Is that fact just so taken for granted that an Asian person would be accepted and on equal footing amongst Caucasians that it was not worth mentioning? Is this attitude just with Sandy's family or is this indicative of Canadian society in general? Every time I noticed Simon he was smiling and being helpful to someone. How could anyone not like him? But still....

Susan, despite some grey streaks in her ash blonde hair, is very pretty and was tastefully dressed in a blue-grey skirt coordinated with pale blue satin blouse. She reminds me a little of Lynn, Sandy's "advisor" sister-in-law.

Supper was announced, so people drifted upstairs leaving Sandy and me alone dancing to slower and quieter music. That gave me the opportunity to mention this.

"Where is Simon from?"

"Here."

"Here?"

"Well, his family was originally from China, if that's what you mean."

"Nothing any of you ever said suggested that he is Asian."

"Is that a big deal?"

"No. Just surprising."

"Well, his family has been here longer than mine. He's fourth generation Vancouverite on both sides."

"Where is your family originally from?"

"England."

"How long ago?"

"Well, my mom's parents were born in Canada. But my dad's parents came over from London immediately after my grandfather qualified as an ophthalmologist in 1938. He and my grandmother were newly weds."

"That explains why your father seems a little bit British."

"Yes, my grandfather always had a noticeable British accent, despite being here for so long, and my father picked up some of that accent as well as the attitudes."

"Maybe that is why he seems more conservative than your mother."

"For sure. It's not just their age difference."

"How did your parents meet Simon and Sue?"

"Simon and Dad were in architecture together at UBC."

"Really!"

"Simon was the top architectural student in their grad year, but he was underemployed when he graduated, undoubtedly only because of his Asian heritage."

"I'm so glad so much has changed since then."

"I'll say."

"During their time at UBC, all architecture students in the program went through together in one class, starting and graduating together. That made Simon and Dad especially close."

"But now all the students don't go through together, do they?"

"Students have more varied course loads and different personal commitments now. So it is not unusual for some of us to take longer than the minimum time to graduate."

"So taking the year off was okay for you?"

"I had to get permission, but the department agreed."

"You said your mom was born in Canada."

"Yes, Toronto. She came to Vancouver with her family when as she was about to enter high school in the early 1960s."

"Why did her family move here?"

"Mom's mother's trained opera singers. Her family moved here when her mom was offered a position in the faculty of music at UBC."

"Really?"

"Yes, so Mom's mother gave her a lot of early instruction. That's why she never really got around to figuring out what she wanted to do. She just drifted into music at UBC, majoring in voice."

"Voice?"

"Yes, to be an opera singer."

"Really? An opera singer."

"Yes, but toward the end of her degree Mom realized that she was simply well trained rather than craving to be on the stage. That's why she didn't pursue singing professionally after she graduated."

"And I assume by then she had met your dad."

"She was in first year at UBC when she and Dad met. By then he had already finished his bachelor's degree and started

in the architecture program. Through him she realized she was as interested in visual art as in music."

"Do you think she might have liked to have been an architect?"

"Certainly she would have preferred designing to doing accounting, for which she doesn't feel she has any talent. She does that just to have some role in Dad's business. But I don't think she ever got around to thinking specifically about architecture as something she wanted to do."

"Women probably didn't generally go into architecture when she was at university."

"That's right, so she didn't consider it seriously the way a female of her interests and abilities might today."

"Opportunities certainly have opened up since then."

"For sure."

I didn't respond further, so Sandy looked at me and laughed, saying, "So is that all the information you need for now?"

"Yes. For now."

"Good," he smiled and moved closer as we danced a slow dance. I had only ever danced with Sandy at the gig the first month I met him. Even then I felt the attraction, but we had kept a certain distance. Now I thought, if I didn't love Sandy so much already, I would have fallen in love with him from the moment our thighs touched. Our bodies fit together so well. It's wonderful that there's a dance that enables two people to basically embrace while just moving slowly together.

We were like this when Sandy's mom came downstairs to retrieve a warming tray. Sandy didn't make any effort for us to stand apart. As she located the tray, she said, "Looks like I should set aside a couple of plates of food for you."

Sandy simply said, "Thanks, Mom."

I was amazed at this casualness (hers and Sandy's) in seeing Sandy and I in each other's arms. After she went back upstairs, I mentioned this to Sandy.

He simply said, "She knows how much I care about you, Erika. So why should we hide our closeness from her?"

After a few more minutes I noticed the bar area was actually a fully functional kitchen and there was a small dining room table and chairs set near the glass patio door.

"So this is an independent suite?"

"Yes. Remember I told you Mom and Dad gave me the option of having this space."

"Maybe I do remember something about that. But you decided to stay upstairs, as you are still attached to your original room."

"Yes, exactly."

“Cancers don’t like change. They are so devoted to their domestic space.”

“Ah, so now I am a Cancer before all else, am I?” Sandy laughed in a good-natured way.

“Only the good parts.”

“Oh, I don’t think you can say that now.”

I assume he was alluding to his reaction at Ambleside and something about holding a grudge, but I didn’t acknowledge that.

“Also Lynn and Grant are glad to still have this space to come back to when they visit Vancouver.”

“They lived here when they were first married....”

“Yes, when they were students, shortly after we moved into the house. This is one of the reasons my grandparents gave the house to my parents then. We could make better use of it as a family than my grandparents could, especially after they gave up driving.”

After most of the guests had headed home, the few closest friends of Sandy’s parents remained and came downstairs. They clustered around the fireplace getting into a lively conversation. Sandy suggested that he and I go upstairs to the piano.

I welcomed the fact that no one was upstairs. I retrieved my flute and joined Sandy sitting on the piano bench. He had opened the music book to the same Chopin Nocturne that we played last time.

He asked, “Do you think it is a good idea to perfect one piece before starting on another?”

“Yes. Let’s try this one together again.”

We played it through without stopping.

When we finished it, Sandy commented, “How did we do that!”

We were both surprised that we had each improved so much and could play it so well together.

I admitted that Mary had taken out the sheet music from the UBC library for me, so I had practised the piece.

“Well, I guess that’s fair, since I’ve been practising it too.”

“You have!” We laughed together.

“Yes, I have rediscovered how relaxing playing classical music can be. So after any stressful day at school, I have been coming back to the piano. So far I’ve just been playing pieces that I used to play, so it’s not too demanding. So it doesn’t seem like work.”

“That’s a good idea. Let’s choose another one then that we have both played before.”

“What about another Chopin Nocturne? There are others here. I used to play several of them as a group.”

“Sure.”

“Then for next time we can come up with a few more choices after determining ones that we’ve both played.”

We started off playing our second Nocturne in the same way we had when we tried playing together in the summer. We proceeded through the piece haltingly at first, so we laughed at bit, and then, getting smoother, we were able to anticipate each other’s timing and expression.

As a reward to us for getting through the new one a couple of times, we decided to play the first one again. Maybe we did this for reassurance of how good we could be.

Toward the end of this piece, I was aware that Sandy’s dad and mom were in the kitchen. And had Sue and Simon been up and down too? I thought I had heard them quietly say something in the kitchen a few minutes earlier. Sandy’s parents came out of the kitchen carrying a tray of liqueurs to take downstairs.

“You are sounding so good playing together,” Robyn said.

“Yes, a giant leap from what we heard of your first encouraging attempt,” his dad added.

“Practice does help,” Sandy stated.

“It certainly does,” his father added enthusiastically.

I could tell that Sandy’s parents were very pleased, not only with what we had played just then, but also with the fact that, by returning to practising with me, Sandy seems to be letting some classical music back into his life. Could that be another reason his parents seem so approving of me?

Sandy lent me, to take home, a duplicate copy of the sheet music we’d chosen as our second piece to practice. I went into the guest room to gather up my coat and bag. When I went back into the living room, I found that Sandy, in his jacket ready to drive me home, was out on the deck. I joined him there to savour the view. The lights outlining the Lion’s Gate Bridge made it look like an iridescent, looped necklace.

We did have a very nice kiss.

“I’m so glad you were here tonight.”

“Me too.”

“And I really do enjoying playing with you.”

“I hope we can do a lot of that in our future.”

“So do I.”

*Opening photograph of Lion’s Gate Bridge courtesy of Gabriela Hauser, Switzerland*



## ***OCTOBER # 6—Halloween Party Preparations***

*Visuals: photographs of pumpkin, students in costumes*

At the end of the afternoon class as the others filed out, Sumi asked me if I knew what my costume would be for the school Halloween party. So many of the others already had their idea and most of them were keeping their planned costume a secret.

“Actually, Mary just gave me an idea that sounds relatively simple to make. It’s based on an orange garbage bag.”

“An orange garbage bag? I can’t guess what that could be.”

“A block of cheese.”

“Oh, what a good idea!” she laughed.

“I’m just planning to add a label saying Canadian Cheddar, listing its weight and ingredients, etc. And I’ll draw the product code. You know. Those stripes that appear on all Canadian products.”

“Great idea.”

“Would you mind if I did the same?”

“Not at all. There can never be too much cheese! But let’s not tell anyone.”

“And for the head—some sort of hood?”

“Sure, with a plain black face mask.”

"That would be good enough. Could we do this together?"

"Absolutely."

"What about right now? We don't have that much homework tonight."

"We could buy the garbage bags, masks, and some cheese on the way back to the apartment."

"Good!"

"And you can stay overnight. Mary says it's okay to have a friend stay anytime. I have that spare bed in my room, so it's no problem."

We headed off to buy the supplies. As we walked through the West End we could see that some people are already prepared with decorations.



We got two different brands of cheese so we could copy two different labels. As promised, Mary provided the large pieces of white illustration board, the black waterproof felt pens, and some other coloured felt markers to make our labels. We did our best lettering to make them look convincing. We laughed a lot when we attached our labels and tried on the outfits. With our masks on, we looked pretty good, although we weren't totally disguised.

When Sumi and I finally hung up the outfits, we did our homework quickly and then went to bed. But of course, we ended up talking. Mainly about Noboru.

"I was so happy to hear you tell Noboru that you are willing to see him after you go home."

"Just because you don't want Noboru to be so preoccupied by you, Erika!"

"Not just. He would never have been interested in me at all if he had known you could be interested in him."

"You are too modest, Erika."

"No, please, I am not being modest. It's obvious the two of you have so much in common."

"We do, don't we?"

“Also he has not wanted to encroach on Bae’s attachment to you.”

“Noboru told you that?”

“Yes, Noboru told me that.”

“Really!”

“Yes, considerate, isn’t he?”

“That’s hard to believe.”

“Was it true that you weren’t able to reveal an interest in Noboru?”

“Well, the fact is, I didn’t let him know, so I guess I wasn’t able to.”

“But now you’re admitting that you could be interested in him....”

She smiled in a way that was an admission to this and then said, “He and I talked about that after seeing that film.”

“Oh, did you! I’m glad.”

“But I wouldn’t want anyone else to know this yet, Erika. I don’t want Bae to be hurt even though he knows there can be nothing permanent between us. He has been such a wonderful friend. I have never felt so cherished.”

“Yeh, Bae is a sweetheart.”

“I’ve appreciated having a caring male friend not pressing for more than I am prepared to give.”

I thought of Sandy as proof that a male friend doesn’t have to be just platonic or demand more than you want to give.

“So will there to be any change in your relationship with Noboru while you are here?” I asked.

“No. As you know, Noboru is going home in November. If there is to be anything between us, well...that will have to wait until I get back to Japan.”

“I wonder what he is going as at the Halloween party.”

“Let’s not tell him what we’ll be.”

“Good plan.”





## ***OCTOBER # 7—Halloween Party for the School***

*Visuals: photographs of and from the Rowing Club, classmates in costume, decorated West End houses*

On the night of the Halloween party, held at the Rowing Club in Stanley Park, Sumi and I got dressed at my place. Just as we thought we looked sufficiently “cheesy,” there was a knock on the door along with small voices singing out, “Trick or treat!”

“That’s the children from the building,” Mary said.

Opening the door, Mary said, “Well, look at you!”

She gave them candy and admired their costumes. The kids were dressed as a princess, power ranger, and the tiniest witch, and even their parents had masks and capes on and were carrying baskets of candy to give to us as well.

The children were surprised that we were dressed up too. They knew immediately that Sumi and I were cheese, so we assumed we had done a convincing job in creating our packaging.

Soon after the children said goodbye, Mary started putting on a white lab outfit, as the neighbours were creating a crime scene down in the lobby as a stage set for giving out candy to the Trick or Treaters.

Mary said that every year the neighbours in the building come up with a theme and create a scary setting. I hope the little kids didn’t have nightmares after seeing the realistic dead bodies lying on the front stairs and hanging in the trees on the boulevard in front of the apartment.

Sumi and I chose to walk over to the Rowing Club. It takes less than 20 minutes, as it is located at the entrance to Stanley Park in Coal Harbour. By going alone, we wanted to see

if we fooled anyone as we walked in. There was to be a prize for students who were completely unrecognizable as well as for best costumes.

We were surprised when Noboru, dressed as a rat, greeted us at the entrance saying, "Oh good, our cheese has arrived."

Spotting Bae behind him, dressed as a cat, his mask propped up on his head, Sumi said, "Bae, I thought you were honourable and wouldn't tell about our costumes!"

He just smiled his impish smile, which looked even more mischievous below his black cat's mask and whiskers.

Sumi said, "Pretty scary rat, Noboru, with those large, sharp teeth and claws."

Noboru responded, "All the better to eat you!"

We were photographed with Noboru trying to bite us in the neck, on the arms, etc. We also took some photos of our cat threatening the rat too.

With his recognizable smile, Bae victoriously said, "Notice that I am at the top of the food chain tonight."

The party was a lot of fun even though none of the four of us received the prize for the most notable costume. Some of the others were dressed as Dracula, witches, a bloody accident victim, cheerleader, ghost, etc.

Nicole and Fernando looked as if they came straight from a hospital operating room in dull green "scrubs" (clothing worn while performing surgery) complete with stethoscopes around their necks. Apparently Fernando's dad had sent them the outfits on their request. While not the most dramatic costumes, their matching outfits did, however, make a convincing statement about them being a couple. And so did their dancing. When they danced together everyone stepped aside and watched. They look like they have been dancing together for years.

Song looked adorable in her Little Bo Peep outfit. I kept looking around expecting Daniel to appear as a goatherd, in a tunic of rough sacking, leather leggings, cloth hat, and scruffy beard. If he hadn't returned home when he did, Song probably could have had Daniel agree to that, in the same way she had helped him become more relaxed and fun loving in general.

Marina was so pretty as a medieval lady in a long dress with flowing sleeves and a pointed, veiled hat. She seemed to be enjoying dancing with a very tall warrior knight, who we easily identified as Sebastian, the German guy. They must have planned their outfits together too. The hand-made armour revealed that Sebastian has some visual-arts ability as well as being musical. Their matched costumes also suggested that he and Marina have been spending time together since the Rocky

Mountain trip. Seeing that several of our group had dressed themselves as couples, I took a photograph of each pair.

The party food was terrific and, dare I admit, there was alcohol “under the table,” brought by the students themselves. I think that being in costume encouraged some students to drink more than they would have if they had been immediately identifiable. The most disturbing circumstance was that Noboru seemed to be drinking excessively.

After the results of the costume contest were announced and the prizes distributed, many people removed their bulky, hot costumes to get more fully into dancing. Sumi and I took off our orange plastic bags and our black masks, as they were definitely warm! The music encouraged everyone to get up and dance. At one point when all were bouncing in time to the music, I worried that the relatively old structure might collapse. The building is built out over the water on pilings.

After becoming somewhat exhausted from the fast dancing, a few of us went out onto the deck through the double French doors directly off the dance floor. The deck surrounds the building on three sides, overhanging the water.



What a spectacular view. The Rowing Club looks over Coal Harbour back toward the main Vancouver waterfront. Pirates Pierre and Adrian (from the French school) accompanied Marina and Sebastian out onto the deck. Others also wandered in and out enjoying the view from there.

To avoid smokers on the deck, I went around the corner of the building, beyond the view of those on the dance floor. I was glad of a few minutes to enjoy the beautiful night alone. I was thinking what a fun Halloween party it had turned out to be, despite my missing Sandy.

I was somewhat surprised when Noboru, no longer in his costume and smelling noticeably of alcohol, arrived out of the blue behind me. I turned to face him as he said something insignificant about the party (did he slur some words?). Then

we leaned on the railing looking at twinkling reflections of the Vancouver skyline.

Apparently Noboru was not concerned about leaving, whereas I was weary and ready to go home. I stepped back and leaned against the outside wall of the building, still out of view of everyone else. Noboru stepped closer to me and put his forearm near my head as if he seemed to need the support of the wall. We were standing closer than I felt comfortable with. Still, I never thought he'd make a move on me.

Absolutely unexpectedly he leaned into me and kissed me. Kissed me hard, pressing my whole body and, most painfully, my head back against the rough shingles of the wall, dragging my hair as he moved his arm downward. I was shocked by his behaviour, but I didn't know what to do. Without wanting to call any attention to us, I silently struggled to get free of him. With one hand I pushed at his shoulder and with my other, I slapped the side of his face. Slapped it hard, which was perhaps as much of a shock to me as to him.

Putting his hand to his face, his mouth open but without a word, he just looked at me (did he too wonder at what had just happened?) and then turned and left.

I stood there shaking from this incident that was beyond comprehension. Noboru's intensity and disregard had abandoned all feeling of honour and friendship between us. Beyond anything I ever expected from him. A betrayal of our closeness and trust. Why had he done this to me?

Stunned, I couldn't move. My upper lip felt scraped. I touched it expecting some sort of obvious damage, specifically blood, but it was like checking a bruise and being disappointed that it doesn't show for as much as it hurts. Still, I couldn't bear the thought of going inside and facing Noboru. Actually, I didn't have to face him then.

I was still feeling shaken, and all of a sudden cold, when Song walked out on the deck looking for me. She had previously arranged to come home with me to stay the night. I numbly followed her inside. The others were ready to leave. Noboru had already left, hurriedly it seems, apparently telling them only that he had had too much to drink, felt sick, and was going home immediately. (Right, "sick," I thought.)



Apparently they didn't realize that Noboru had had contact with me out on the deck, even though I felt they should be able to see and smell his brutal kiss on my face. But no one was noticing me in any particular way; they were simply perplexed by Noboru's hasty, almost wordless exit. Sumi especially was worried about why he hadn't been willing to wait to travel with the North Van group.

Most of my classmates headed toward the door ready to start filing out. At the last instant, Song leaned over to the far side of our table and grabbed a bag containing Noboru's rat outfit. Overloaded with her own bulky Bo Peep costume, she handed the bag to me. Apparently Noboru hadn't stopped to retrieve it.

At that moment his costume was the last thing I wanted to be carrying home! Why me? I didn't want anything to do with Noboru at that moment! But I also felt I couldn't mention what I was feeling to anyone, especially to Sumi or Song. I took Noboru's plastic bag on my arm even though the hairless tail and a bony rat's paw stuck out of the top.

Song and I got a ride back to my place with Nicole and Fernando in his homestay brother's car, so within moments I was turning the key in the door, without having had any time to recover my composure. Just as I was hanging up Song's jacket and my coat, the doorbell rang. With a feeling of alarm, I realized that it would be Sandy. I had forgotten that we had agreed that he would drop in on his way back from UBC and I hadn't been watching the time.

At that moment I was wishing I could wash my face, use some mouthwash, and comb my hair but, in his usual style, Sandy took the stairs two at a time so he was at the open door before I had time to even go into the bathroom to look in a mirror. I was aware that the overflowing bag containing Noboru's rat outfit was still in a heap on the floor beside the door. Sandy looked down and stepped over it without seeming to take it in. He was happy to see me, so I felt awkward in hugging him only, not kissing him. But luckily Song was there to say hi too, and Sandy's jack-o'-lantern created a diversion.

Still he noticed something different about me, as he good-naturedly commented, "Hey, you smell of alcohol. Did you have more than your half glass of wine?"

"No," I said with apparent humour, and Sandy didn't question this.

Somewhat proudly, he handed me a specially carved pumpkin, a jack-o'-lantern as a modernistic temple, which he had done as an assignment for an architectural project.

“Wow, this is good! Absolutely unique,” I said, mustering up as much enthusiasm as I could in an attempt to set aside my disturbed feelings over Noboru’s forced kiss.

“Another of my prof’s somewhat weird projects to get us to rethink architectural form,” Sandy commented. “Last week he had us designing a fruit, complete with seed and flower.”

Perhaps wishing to give us some privacy, Song asked, “Erika, is it okay for me to load our photos onto Mary’s computer so we can see them enlarged?”

“I think so. Mary didn’t mind last time. Can you manage yourself while I make us something to eat?”

“Sure. Shall I put your photos on too?”

“Okay. You see my camera there?” I asked, as I walked into the kitchen.

“Yes, I have it.”

Song is much more technical than I am. She is confident in using someone else’s computer, whereas I’m not.

“Sandy, maybe you would like to see the photos while I put on some popcorn and cocoa so it doesn’t get too late.”

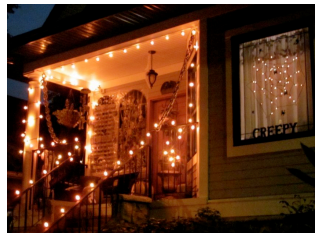
“Sure. Did your costumes go over well?” he asked me as he followed Song into the living room to Mary’s computer.

From the kitchen I answered “Yes, they were fine, even though Sumi and I didn’t fool anyone or win any prizes.”

I poured popping corn into the electric popcorn maker and found some butter and salt to go on the table with bowls for each of us. I rinsed my mouth and washed my face under the warm running water of the kitchen sink while the popcorn was popping. I felt like I was trying to wash the feeling of Noboru off me—or at the very least the smell of his alcohol off my face.

An automatic popcorn maker might seem like a good idea, but it is very noisy. As a result, I didn’t hear Sandy and Song’s conversation while she showed him our photographs. When Sandy returned to the dining room, he was more restrained than he had been in hugging me on arriving. However, due to my own anger at Noboru, I wasn’t attentive enough to think about why this might be.

Also, when Sandy was leaving, he gave me the kind of kiss he might give an elderly aunt at a train station. But Song was with us and I assumed Sandy realized that it was getting late for all of us.





## ***October # 8—Confronting Noboru the Day After***

*Visuals: photograph of West End on a rainy day*

The next morning as Song and I went out the door on our way to school, I stepped over the bag containing Noboru's costume, purposely "forgetting" to take it. I didn't want to deal with Noboru. I dreaded facing him. Despite the rain, I walked as slowly as I could without Song noticing. On arrival I "needed" to use the washroom and stayed there until class start time. As I entered the class, Noboru looked up and watched me. I felt his eyes on me as I took a place at the farthest table.

I didn't acknowledge him then or any time during the lesson. When I stayed behind at the break to have Barrie clarify a point of grammar for me, I could see that Noboru was standing in the hallway just outside the door. I felt a pang of anxiety. I gathered up my things unsure of what I was going to do. As Barry went out the door, Noboru stepped back inside the classroom confronting me.

"Erika, I'd like to talk with you alone."

"Alone. Alone, Noboru? I was alone with you on the deck last night. I don't want to be alone with you."

"Erika, look, I'm really sorry about last night. That is not something that I will ever do again against your will. You have to realize that."

"I don't realize that, Noboru. I didn't expect you to ever totally disregard my feelings. So how can I know you'll never try that again?"

"You've got to trust me."

"Trust you!" I didn't mean to raise my voice so loud. I didn't want people out in the hall to hear our conversation.

"Why should I trust you now?"

"You can't let one false move...."

"False move!"

"Yes, you can't let one false move overshadow months of friendship."

"Why didn't you think of that last night?"

"I wasn't thinking at all last night. I drank too much last night. You know that."

"Yes, you drank too much last night. Does drinking excuse all manner of unacceptable behaviour?"

"No, of course it doesn't."

"Right. And why did you drink too much?"

"Why?" he asked as if not comprehending.

"Did you drink purposely so you could approach me like that and have an excuse for such behaviour?"

"On purpose? So I'd have an excuse to kiss you? Erika, don't be ridiculous!"

"You didn't? Not even on an unconscious level?"

"No, I swear. Come on, Erika. Don't analyze this. Just accept my apology and forget that it ever happened."

"That *it* ever happened...."

"No harm happened...."

"No harm happened providing you don't consider broken trust, violation of unspoken assumptions, and complete disregard for another person's feelings as something. I consider those something. Yes, harm happened, Noboru. You have harmed what I thought was a rather nice friendship."

Some of our classmates started to come back into the classroom marking the end of the break.

Seeing me with Noboru, Song said, "Oh, Erika, did you give Noboru's costume back to him?"

"No, I left it at home."

She may have been surprised by my tone (I'm usually a nice person!), as there was no suggestion of apology in my voice and I didn't promise to bring the costume in the future. Song was perplexed that I hadn't brought it, since it had been right beside the apartment door. Noboru, however, seemed pleased to realize that I have the costume. He immediately recognized this as an opportunity for contact.

"May I come to your house to get it tonight?"

I was glad to be able to say, "No. Mary and I are going out right after school and won't get home until very late."

With that I left Noboru standing there as other students filed into the room. Again I stayed as far away from him as I could so I wouldn't have eye contact with him during the class. And after class I rushed away without talking to him.

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