



SEPTEMBER # 1—Tour of Rocky Mountains

Visuals: tour schedule, photos of wild animals and scenery

While our class thought it unfortunate that we were going on a multiple-school bus to the Rocky Mountains, this only served to bring more cohesion to our group (if that is possible!). We sat together, thanks to the responsible members of our group, mainly Daniel and Noboru (did I say that? Noboru responsible? Yes, it seems that he is becoming so!). Anyway the two of them arrived early at the bus and staked out seats for us.

This meant that Song, Daniel, Sumi, Bae, Fernando, Nicole, Noboru, Juliana, Marina, Se-Eun, and I were all together at the back of the bus along with our three “new” classmates (the French, German, and Austrian guys) who recently joined our class. Barry came along as one of the teacher-sponsors, but he couldn’t sit with us. He was posted at the front of the bus to tick off students’ names as we unloaded and loaded at each stop.

At first we thought that it would be awkward having the three new guys as strangers in our midst, as we have become such a tight-knit group, some might say a clique. But they fit in better than we expected. I’ll explain this more as I go on.

Leaving early, we were to stop for lunch stop in Merritt, about 270 kilometres from Vancouver. We were driving the Coquihalla Pass route into the Interior. This is known to be the fastest, though not the most scenic, route through the Coast Range Mountains. Nevertheless, we still saw lots of impressive scenery of mountains, rivers, and rugged terrain. There were no

roadside facilities and we didn't see much evidence of civilization other than the trucks (many!) and the cars sharing the highway with us.

At Merritt on first sight of a cafe, we got out for lunch. It was western style and somewhat dark inside. Without thinking about seating arrangements with the group, I went off to the "Cowgirls" washroom, so when I returned the others pointed to Noboru as there wasn't another spot in the booth.

As I sat down at the two-person table with him, Noboru said, "I didn't purposely engineer this, you know."

"Engineer this?"

"Sitting alone with you."

"Noboru, don't worry. I know our group is too big to all sit in one booth."

"When I stopped to read the headlines of the newspaper, I didn't realize that you would be heading off to the washroom."

"It's okay, really," I said, as I smiled and reached across the table and pressed his hand.

This might have surprised him, as much as it did me, so I said, "I haven't forgotten that you saved my life last weekend."

"Grandly overstated."

"Well, you might have," I said sincerely. "Especially if everyone had forgotten about me at the top and gone down on the gondola without realizing that I wasn't with the group."

"Impossible to forget you."

"Not necessarily. There was a very sad case recently of a father who left his daughter sleeping in a baby seat in the backseat of his car and then went into work leaving her asleep in the hot car in the parking lot for the whole day. She died from dehydration. He had been assuming his wife had dropped their baby daughter off as usual with the babysitter."

"The relevance of this?"

"Well, if the group had split up and all had assumed I'd gone down with someone else, I could have not made it to the top of the mountain, and I would have missed the gondola going down and had been left on the trail overnight, and...."

"Been eaten by a bear," he smiled and raised his eyebrows while apparently not believing what he was saying.

"Possibly. Apparently there's been more aggressive bear activity in Canada this year than for many years."

"If you include that one highly publicized incident in Ontario, more than three thousand kilometres away. But go ahead, Erika. Think the best of me for whatever reason," Noboru challenged with quiet humour.

"No, really. Didn't you see that newspaper coverage about a bear in a backyard at the top of Lonsdale early this week?"

"Somehow I missed that," he said as if I had been making this up.

"Really, Noboru, it's true. A bear came down off that mountain. The wardens had to sedate him and take him somewhere else further up Howe Sound."

"So you assume this bear walked down under the Grouse Grind on Saturday night and he had a taste for human blood?"

At that moment, my heart came close to melting for Noboru.

"It's very possible."

I might have tried to come up with a convincing argument, but Song arrived at our table. She wanted to take a photo of our group before reboarding the bus. We paid our bill (Noboru even let me pay my part without making a fuss), and we went outside and got in formation for Song, our always-capable photographer. After she lined us up, however, someone from another school kindly offered to take the photo for us so that Song could be included too.



The bus made brief stops in Kamloops and Clearwater (shortly after that we saw a mountain goat!). Supper was postponed until we arrived in Valemount and checked into the hotel for the night. As we stood at the reservation desk, waiting to be assigned our rooms, we speculated on where to eat supper and agreed to meet back in the lobby in 20 minutes. We were all so hungry.

As soon as we knew our room numbers (our guys were next to the two girls' suites), I saw Noboru stoop to pick up my backpack and then decide against it. After his apologies for sitting at a table alone with me at lunch, perhaps he wanted to avoid seeming to give me unwanted attention.

Supper was uneventful as we were all exhausted from getting up so early in the morning and from sitting in a bus all day. So we went back to the hotel to go to bed. After a few minutes of thinking of Sandy, including our comfortable time together in babysitting Noel, sleep came easily.



The next morning the wake up call came much too early. We filed out of the hotel at Valemount without breakfast! But the sun shone clear in the morning air as well as on Mt. Robson, a proud-looking, striated, snow-capped mountain, apparently one of the highest in the Rockies. We started our scenic drive to Jasper. That's where we had breakfast. When we got to Jasper we had to change our watches ahead one hour to Mountain Time. Canada is such a wide country—it has six time zones.

Then we were all off to Maligne Canyon. I say *all* only after much urging to get Sumi to come with us, as there was an option to stay in Jasper to shop! She later agreed that it was worth skipping shopping to go to Maligne Lake. It is so beautiful with turquoise water, its own island, and rugged, worn mountains all around, some of them still snow-capped. Maligne is apparently the longest lake in the Canadian Rockies. So many mountains. So many lakes. I wish I had identified them all at the time I photographed them because now I fear I have them mixed up!



We got out and walked around for an hour without any misadventures, except for when we lost track of Marina. This is her kind of country (mountainous!), so she was gone in a moment. She obviously felt very comfortable in this terrain and was perhaps in need of some time alone. Apparently just before we left Vancouver she had received word from her parents in Liechtenstein that her dog had died. She'd had this pet as long as she can remember. She is feeling terrible that she was not there for him when he got sick.



Just as we were beginning to get worried about Marina, she appeared in time to board the bus setting off for Athabasca Falls, where we were to eat our bagged lunch. It's as if Marina had a sixth sense about bus leaving times because, despite her unusually downhearted state, she managed to get back on time even though she wasn't wearing a watch.

Song and Daniel were inseparable. Their togetherness was prompted even more than usual in recognizing that Daniel will be leaving Vancouver soon after we get back. Throughout the trip they tended to go off from the rest of the group. At a distance you could see them standing looking at the scenery appearing almost as one silhouette, Daniel standing behind Song, his arms around the front of her shoulders, his cheek pressed against the side of her face.

However, when there was some time set aside to go shopping, Daniel and Song surprised us by going off to the shops, but again on their own, rather than with the rest of us. When they were done though, they were delighted to show us that they had bought matching leather boat-loafers. I was amazed that Song could get Daniel to consider something this casual, but indeed he did and they were both wearing them for the rest of the trip.

We are finally getting to know the three European guys from the French college who have extended their time at our school after being in their separate class in the summer. They hadn't integrated much then when there were over a dozen of

them, but the three of them remaining, in their mid twenties, now seem to be glad to be part of our group.

Pierre is the French guy from the area of Bretagne where the French school is located. He has his commercial pilot's licence, and he has some kind of applied science background. He is working toward his financial management diploma through distance education. At the same time, he is trying to improve his English at our school.

Adrian, from Austria, is in process of getting his commercial pilot's licence in BC. This is a six-month course that is apparently less expensive in Canada than in Europe. So he is studying for that in the mornings and coming to our classes in the afternoons.

Sebastian, the very tall German guy, mid-20s, is in Vancouver to study for his PhD in the department of music at the University of British Columbia. He intends to become a conductor. While he is waiting to get his funding from UBC confirmed, he teaches a course there two days a week. He hopes to be a full-time UBC graduate student in January. Meanwhile he is at our school studying to upgrade his English.

I saw Marina and Sebastian talking at times during some stops when we were out walking. Sebastian had received word that his grandmother, whom he had been close to, had just died the day before. Apparently he had wanted to cancel the pre-paid trip, but the two other guys encouraged him to attend in the hope that it might take his mind off his grief. He and Marina, having both experienced recent loss, were in the same emotional state and were able to commiserate with each other.



Touring the Columbia Icefields was one of the highlights of the trip. Standing at the base of a glacier was so awe-inspiring. Somehow it made me feel very insignificant. The glacier is old, as if a left over from a previous age, the Ice Age.

Looking up at it I felt as if it was advancing toward us, as if it could suddenly shift with one shrug and lurch forward, and crush us, with that immeasurable weight. But our driver told us the glaciers are now significantly smaller than they were a just few years earlier.

As we regretfully filed back into the bus, we were heartened knowing we would be seeing some more turquoise lakes. At Peyto Lake we got out again and climbed around a high viewpoint overlooking the lake to find the best place to sit and to take pictures. The lake was indeed an intense blue.



Somehow, in taking my camera out of my backpack, my library book dropped out of my bag and fell over a rocky ledge. My stomach lurched in identifying with it. So you can imagine my fright when I realized that Noboru, in seeing my book disappear, had, in a split second, decided to go after it. He instantaneously found a place to go over the edge before any of us knew what he was doing. We all seemed to freeze as if even yelling at him would somehow add to his danger. We couldn't even look over the side. It was as if we all stopped breathing until he climbed back over the edge a few moments later.

"My God! You terrified us!" someone exclaimed.

"Noboru, what did you just do?"

"What an idiot!" several shouted at once, as he reappeared.

"A book is hardly worth risking your life for!" I exclaimed, as he handed me the book with a victorious smile on his face.

"Oh, but what about all those annoying library charges to replace a lost book," he commented in sitting down next to me as we all moved back from the edge, realizing how easy it would be for any of us to fall over the edge too if we lost our balance.

"I hope you never do anything that dangerous for anyone again!" was what came out of my mouth in my freight.

"Not even a thank you?" he asked quizzically, smiling at me. Even though part of me was so angry with him for taking such a risk, I hugged his shoulder in relief.

"That's better," he said, smiling even wider.

Juliana looked up and smiled at us too.



We arrived in Canmore, Alberta, long after a regular suppertime (again!), but the lodge was especially comfortable and cheerful. We wanted to change before going out for dinner. The lodge is a place where you can actually sit and enjoy a log fire. I was dressed ahead of the others, so they agreed to meet me in the lounge where I would be reading. Sure enough, what with the warmth of the fire and our late bedtime the night before, I was dozing before I got through even a couple of pages of my book.

As I was coming out of my brief sleep, I heard two familiar voices. I paused in trying to identify them. Oh, Barry and Se-Eun. They were discussing something they undoubtedly would not want anyone to hear. So I remained motionless, pretending to be asleep, on the sofa behind theirs.

Se-Eun asked, "Now that you have received the contract from my school, will you be handing in your notice right away?"

"No. I won't do that for a while. I don't want to be written off too soon."

"Written off, how?"

"I don't want the attitude of the other teachers to change toward me, as might happen once they know I am leaving," Barry responded. "Also, our contracts here go till December, so I don't need to say anything until a couple of weeks before Christmas. That will give the administrators enough time to schedule replacement teachers for the January term."

"Have you told your mother that you are going away?"

"No, I have to settle arrangements with my sister first. To be sure she can commit to living at my place with my mom during my absence. I don't want Mom to fear the unresolved."

"Will she feel okay if she knows your sister will live with her and that they won't have to move?"

"Yes. That will make my leaving easier for Mom to accept."

"Are you excited about coming to Korea?"

"Oh, you know I am. Teaching internationally has been my dream. My reason for going into ESL teaching in the first place."

"And you feel ready to take on the role of playwright as well as teacher?" Se-Eun asked brightly.

"For sure. I will love creating scripts with my English classes. It will be particularly exciting knowing that your drama classes will produce some of them and that you and I will be refining them together."

I heard footsteps and then Se-Eun said, "Ah, Song, Daniel. You're ready."

"Yes. But there are a few stragglers yet."

I waited until others gathered in the lounge before I moved unnoticed with them toward the main entrance. I didn't want Se-Eun and Barry to realize that I had been "sleeping" within hearing distance of their telltale conversation. I did wonder how long it would be before everyone in the group would know that Barry was planning to go to Korea to teach with Se-Eun. I didn't intend to discuss this information until the others had heard about it from Se-Eun and Barry themselves.

We walked a couple of blocks to a restaurant. I saw Marina again talking with Sebastian while waiting to be seated. To continue their conversation, they chose a table for two within sight of our table. Marina is so kind to everyone that I was not surprised to see her emerging friendship with Sebastian, although I didn't expect her to have the emotional energy to be concerned about someone else at this time. As I watched them eat and converse, however, I could see that he was keeping the conversation going as much as she was.

Later that night after we had come back from dinner, Song, Nicole, Juliana, and I, who were sharing a room, were lying in bed talking. Song was already anticipating how unbearable it is going to be when Daniel has to leave next week. I asked her if she has any regrets now about being his girlfriend. While acknowledging how wounded and lost she is going to feel without him, she said, "I will have wonderful memories of him, of us, that will stay with me forever."

Juliana said, "You once mentioned that Daniel's original dream was to fall in love with someone here and take her back

to Switzerland with him. He indeed did fall in love. How does he feel about not taking you back to Switzerland?"

"He knows I couldn't leave my family or my country. His future is in Switzerland. He couldn't leave his work. So we have to go our separate ways. But now at least we both know it's worth having a loving relationship, not something we knew before."

"So you are sure parting is what you want, Song? This is not just something that Daniel has convinced you of?" Nicole asked.

"I believe we do have to go back to our own countries. Alone. We're not like Claudia. She's without her immediate family now and won't be having kids. Also she has the money to travel. So for her it's different."

Juliana responded, "That is probably wise, Song. And you need to think about this too, Erika. I have an aunt who owns a travel agency so she sees a lot of vacation relationships. She says that, like summer loves, they rarely work out, once the two return to their regular routine. Then they quickly wonder what they ever saw in each other."

This comment hurt me in revealing that some think that I am acting naively. I did not say anything, as I still don't have answers that sound rational and convincing. I have certainly not been ignoring my at-times conflicting thoughts. All I can say is that, for me, love seems impossible to walk away from.

Nicole said, "I feel so lucky that Fernando and I are from the same country and will both be working in a medical environment in Monterrey. There's nothing to prohibit continuing our relationship once we get back."

"And did I hear that your parents have said you can stay two months longer than planned?"

"Yes, my dad especially has surprised me in being generous all of a sudden, so I can return home at the same time as Fernando."

"You are so fortunate," Song admitted.

Knowing how much Song loves Daniel, I still found myself amazed that she isn't now going to try to change the plan to extend their time together.

Despite this unsettling conversation and in thinking about Barry and Se-Eun's plans, I confess I did wonder if I would consider making plans with Sandy. Under what conditions.... I thought about Claudia encouraging me to apply to study architecture at UBC to give Sandy and me time to determine if we could have a future together. Is it feasible to consider trying to be together long term despite the sacrifice of not always being with our families?

Thinking of this, I did wonder if I would be able to sleep despite our long, adventurous, tiring day. After a few minutes, I did fall sleep, but I awoke abruptly by a nightmare. I was in the Vancouver airport, with my luggage, and Sandy was standing there watching me as I headed for the departure gate knowing I was never coming back. Never coming back. We were parting knowing that we would never see each other again.

I had tears streaming down my face and I was sweating before I realized I was awake. The sheets on my single cot were a tangled mass. After I had remade the bed, I was afraid to go back to sleep for fear that nightmare would return. Nicole, Juliana, and Song seemed to be sleeping soundly.

A couple of hours later, when I was still tossing in bed, I considered reading and then realized I had left my library book in the lounge before supper. A wave of panic went through me. After Noboru's perilous climb to recover it, I couldn't lose it now. I quietly put on a cover-up and walked down the stairs.

Everyone else in the lodge seemed to be sleeping. But in passing the door to the bar, I saw Se-Eun and Barry sitting alone, holding hands, at a corner table. Low music was playing, but they were the only ones there except for an employee drying glasses at the bar.

Earlier when we were all getting off the tour bus, Barry, doing his official count of all the passengers, secretly squeezed Se-Eun's hand as she passed him in the aisle. Seeing them together in the bar made me miss Sandy more. So impulsively, I went to the reception area and, from a rack of postcards, chose an image of Maligne Lake that we had visited earlier in the day. Standing at the counter, I wrote a simple message:

*Hi Sandy,
Enjoying exploring blue lakes nestled
between towering mountains and having fun
with the group, but I still seem to be
"preoccupied by some guy."
Love,
Erika*

I bought a stamp from non-communicative night clerk, who apparently didn't appreciate being disturbed at this hour of the morning. I checked the postal-code book and filled in Sandy's code below his easy-to-remember street address that I had noticed on the side of his house when I first visited. I put the card in the mail slot. Somehow writing the card made me feel closer to him. I climbed the stairs with my retrieved book in hand and went back to bed, and to sleep, without reading.



The activities of the next day could have easily filled a week. At Lake Louise we hiked upward in the surrounding forest that offered a wonderful view looking down on the lake. We also went on the gondola ride and then walked around on the glacier.

We visited Sulphur Mountain and “swam” in the upper hot springs. Actually the naturally heated spring water was so relaxing that we just lounged around in it. Despite feeling down and not irradiating her usual bubbly energy, Marina was making an impression on Sebastian. I saw them at the far end of the hot springs pool talking quietly together and once, facing her, he touched her upper arm.

After leaving the pool, we drove to Banff and arrived in time for some serious shopping—to Sumi’s delight. She came away with several bags of “finds.” Actually Bae was carrying them. With his usual sheepish smile, he acted as if he objected to following Sumi around carrying her packages, but he was probably savouring every moment. He referred to himself as Sumi’s Sherpa, which apparently means a servant who lugs things around for his “master.”



Again we arrived late at the hotel so supper was to be our evening activity. While Juliana and I were in the room changing for dinner, she said Noboru's father had contacted him recently to see if he had lost his credit card, since no bills had been coming through for his dad to pay during the past month. I admitted that I too had noticed a considerable reduction in his consumption compared with the way he originally had been spending money. She seemed strangely pleased that I was aware of this. Is she now going to tell Noboru I've noticed?

Out in the fresh air, we again found a restaurant for our group along with most of the others who had been on the bus. Barry and Se-Eun made an effort not to appear as a couple. Se-Eun sat at a table for two with Claudia, and Barry sat in a booth beside Fernando and Nicole. I was pleased to see that Nicole revealed no trace of her earlier, immature behaviour toward Barry. Instead she and Fernando tasted each other's food from the same fork, shared a dessert, and seemed to be very comfortable with each other.

On the way home from the Rockies, we were all exhausted from early mornings and so many activities. I shouldn't have had a full glass of wine with our last dinner, but we were in an enchanting restaurant on the top of a hill in Kamloops overlooking two rivers. It was sundown. Sparkling lights came on one by one in the area below. Seeing the couples in our group (Song and Daniel, Sumi and Bae, Se-Eun and Barry, and Fernando and Nicole), I wished Sandy were with me to share this romantic environment. In fairness I confess to feeling some affection for Noboru, sitting across from me, as he had been so kind to me during the entire trip.

When we returned to our seats at the back of the bus, I didn't mind that Noboru changed seats with Juliana, so he sat next to me even though I had intended to put on my overhead light and read. Many others around us were soon sleeping. The warmth and the near darkness of the bus promoted intimate conversation. Noboru seemed unguarded. Did the wine of dinner have an effect on him too? He will be leaving Vancouver in less than two months, so he must realize there is limited time available for our relating.

He admitted how bothered he had been at the jazz festival in seeing Sandy and I together with Noel, as if Noel could have been our child. He had been especially upset in knowing that I had spent the night at Sandy's house. His revealing these feelings had me admit that Sandy and I are not involved. Noboru did seem surprised and, I think, heartened by this.

Apparently he then realized it was not too late to give me advice against “having an affair with Sandy.” This language, sounding dirty, seems so unrelated to Sandy. I can’t imagine having any kind of contact with Sandy that would seem tainted. Despite everything I have ever assumed about avoiding sex before marriage, I found that I couldn’t promise Noboru that I would remain chaste—if my intimacy with Sandy evolves into something we both want and agree on.

In saying this I felt I had to explain how much I think I have in common with Sandy. Architecture. Music. Drawing. Photography.

Without saying so to Noboru, I was even secretly thinking of the possibility of having an architectural business with Sandy. Hold on! Just because Sandy’s brother Grant and Lynn have an engineering company together doesn’t mean.... Again, am I dreaming my life away?

Despite these almost embarrassing, non-rational thoughts, I continued my conversation with Noboru partially because of the cocoon-like nature of the sleeping bus.

I said, “Having all these common interests with Sandy makes me want to share these, if not with him, then with someone having such similar interests. I don’t want to be a couple like my parents where they live in separate spheres.”

“I understand that,” Noboru responded.

I added, “My father pursued my mother vigorously before they married, but soon after that they stopped sharing things.”

I paused to give him the chance to respond.

Finally he said, “My parents don’t do much together. I don’t want that kind of relationship either.”

“And you deserve more too, Noboru. Don’t just be challenged by trying to convince someone who isn’t naturally inclined toward you.”

“Is that what you think I am doing with you?”

“Perhaps. I hope you’ll love someone you have more in common with.”

“That may be too idealistic.”

“Have you thought about Sumi?”

“In what way?”

“As a potential partner?”

“Sumi? She is very much spoken for.”

“Yes, for now. While she’s here. But you must know she and Bae have no future together. She doesn’t intend to disobey her parents who could never accept a non-Japanese husband for her.”

“That’s hardly a cincher for me.”

"Perhaps not, but you do at least have that one simple advantage over Bae. And think of what you have in common with Sumi. She is a good match for you in tennis and volleyball. She has been active and fit all her life. Except for her strong-looking wrists, she doesn't seem like she could have been a professional gymnast or have a brown belt in judo. But despite being athletic, she is totally polished. Professional. I think the two of you would make a great team. Perhaps you could even have a business together."

"You've actually thought this way about us?"

"I'd like to see you well matched, Noboru. Seems you and Sumi could be ideal for each other."

"Sumi..."

He seemed surprised but pleased that I had been considering this.

"Are you attracted to her?"

He did not answer. In the dim light, he was looking down at the open library book on my lap and unconsciously folding and unfolding one corner of a page.

When he did not answer, I asked, "Do you agree Sumi is beautiful?"

"Who would not agree with that?"

"But you have never thought of the two of you together?"

"She is Bae's first ever love."

"I know. And you have been very generous in not intruding on that. But Bae knows there won't be any future for them as a couple once they leave here."

"Yeah, Vancouver is their Shangri La."

"Oh, so you remember that old movie we saw in the film course?"

"Yes, *Lost Horizon*. The couple, living in their protective mountain hideaway.... They were certainly in love but...."

Noboru's voice trailed off.

"Yes, in leaving that retreat, reality cracked their idealized love. Kind of sad, wasn't it? ..."

"Yeah."

"So what about after Bae and Sumi go their separate ways?"

Noboru wasn't ready to answer.

"I hope you and Sumi will see each other when you are both back in Tokyo."

He laughed slightly, "I might have to stand in line."

"Possibly, but it could be worth it."

He looked like he wasn't going to say anything more.

"You said Sumi was only a couple of minutes behind you in completing the Grouse Grind."

"Sure, but she wasn't single-handedly carrying a gourmet birthday party on her back."

"Noboru.... I am not talking about me. I'm thinking of how Sumi is able to keep up with you. What you could do together."

"Ah, versions of the Grouse Grind on Mt. Fuji."

Keeping the mood light, he added, "Or skydiving once a month!"

We laughed quietly together.

Then he seemed to be deep in thought.

Finally I asked, "Did you notice what Sumi ate at the restaurant tonight?"

"No."

"The same combination salad that you had."

"Really?" He seemed pleased.

In saying this I realized how much Noboru had changed. Four months ago that salad would have been greasiest entrée on the menu, even if he were planning to play tennis the minute he got up from the table.

The bus's overhead lights came on. An announcement said we were getting close to the school. This roused all the sleepers in the bus. Students reluctantly stretched themselves awake.

After the bus stopped, everyone gathered up their belongings under their seats and from the overhead racks.

Noboru and I stepped into the aisle. Three rows of seats ahead of us, Sumi turned and smiled at us, unaware that she had been the subject of our extended talk.

As we filed out of the bus behind the others, Noboru squeezed my hand. I remembered Barry's similar gesture earlier in the day with Se-Eun, so I thought about how that gesture could be translated in more than one way. For Noboru, it seemed to say, "Thank you for caring."

Photographs of Rocky Mountains courtesy of Karin Muff, Switzerland, except for the photos of viewpoint above Peyto Lake (p. 295) and the main street of Banff in evening sunlight (p. 300), which are courtesy of Gabriel Macedo, Brazil; and Lake Louise from trail above (p. 300), courtesy of Nadja Rathgeb, Germany



SEPTEMBER # 2—Mary's Out-of-Town Guest

Visuals: Mary's North Shore hiking photos

I returned home late Monday night to find that Mary had an old friend staying with her. Apparently Drew, from Toronto, had attended business appointments in Vancouver on the Friday and had decided to stay for an extended weekend to enjoy the good weather and Mary's company. They had been to high school together as well as the first two of years of university. We spoke only briefly as we were all settling for the night.

He was still there for supper on Tuesday. He and Mary were sitting at the computer going through the photos that Mary had taken while they had been hiking over the weekend.

Drew was very friendly to me, including me in conversations with and without Mary. At one point, when Mary was called to the telephone, just as they were finishing dinner, she asked Drew to make some tea, as I was still eating. He filled the kettle, put it on the stove, and turned the element on. When the water came to a boil, he turned the element off. The water was cool again when Mary got back into the kitchen so, without saying anything, she started the process again, including boiling the water, making the tea, putting out cups, milk, spoons, etc., on the table. As we sipped our tea, we talked about their plans for the evening to go dancing. He continued to sit there as Mary and I cleared the table and did the dishes.

On Wednesday Mary and I finally had the place to ourselves. After I returned from school, Mary was sitting at the covered dining room table with a variety of materials in front of her—old newspaper clippings, bits of wood, small metal objects, and four pieces of wood about 16 inches long. She was

gluing together some small pieces that are to be part of the historical relief she is working on as a commission for a large wall piece.

On knowing dinner would be later than usual, Mary suggested I set out a snack for us. As I did this I asked how their dancing had been.

"Oh, lots of fun. Drew is a marvellous dancer. He knows the difference between the tango and the rhumba, for instance, not something most people of my generation are aware of."

"He seemed very nice."

"He is and, despite being unannounced, I was glad when he arrived, but I was also very relieved when he left."

"Because you wanted to get back to your art?"

"Primarily. It never crossed his mind to be concerned about the time I was losing on my project in spending those days with him. And such a high maintenance man. Did you notice?"

"You mean about him not even managing to make tea?"

"Ah, so you *are* observant. After four days of watching me make tea, why didn't he know where I keep the tea and the cups, and how to pour boiling water over the tea bags, and even how I dispose of the used ones? Is all that women's work?"

Mary did not expect an answer from me as she glued two-inch-high rusty numbers on a rough piece of board.

She continued, "And what about the eggs yesterday morning? I could hardly contain myself when, after four days, he said, 'Did anyone think to buy eggs?'"

"Yes, I did notice that."

"I felt like saying, 'In arriving unannounced for an extended weekend, did you think to bring in a load of groceries?'"

"Yes, in my country no one would dare to arrive like that without a gift."

"Exactly. The Japanese are more likely be too excessive with gifts. But domestic generosity is apparently simply not in the genes of some North American men my age."

"I'm glad Sandy knows how to look after himself."

"I think that many young Canadian men have grown up knowing how to do their share. Maybe it's because of the prevalence of divorce amongst their parents. Such guys have learned that they can't assume somebody will be around to look after them day and night."

Mary put four boards in position with glue and clamped them together to form a frame.

"Sandy's certainly better at this than any Japanese males I know."

“Well, I’m glad. Most men my age never learned this—one reason I don’t have a permanent man in my life.”

“But don’t you miss male companionship?” I asked, as I warmed and buttered some muffins and poured the tea.

“Companionship is fine, as long as it doesn’t mean sacrificing all your personal goals.”

“Has it been a choice like that for you?”

“Pretty much. You know, at one international calligraphy conference I went to, of the 75 instructors, the majority were women. On opening night, each artist had a couple of minutes to introduce herself and show a couple of examples of her art. In saying something about becoming an internationally recognized calligrapher, most of the married instructors said they couldn’t have accomplished what they have done without their husband being their biggest supporter. There seemed to be no middle ground. Either a husband was supportive—encouraging and helpful—or there was no husband. When a woman has a husband who needs to be cared for like a child, she simply doesn’t rise to international stature in anything.”

We were quiet a moment while Mary applied glue to the back of an old newspaper clipping and carefully positioned it between two pieces of rough wood.

“So the choice seems to be help or hinder.”

“Exactly. Help or hinder. That’s why it seems so nice to see you and Sandy together. You could help each other.”

I was pleased at this, however, I just commented, “But for you?”

“It certainly could have been financially easier having a man in my life, but doing so would have meant giving up all my goals, everything to do with my art.”

Mary concentrated quietly a few minutes while she glued two more mismatched, rusty metal numbers onto the greyish-mauve board.

I dared to add, “But to me you seem like such a romantic.”

“It’s true. I love to see relationships where life for both partners seems to be better as a result of their being together.”

After Mary glued and clamped more pieces of wood and rusty metal together on a small flat panel placed horizontal on the table, she rotated the assembled piece right side up toward me. Then it was immediately obvious—the overall image created by the oddly shaped pieces of board, the newspaper clippings, and the rusty bits of metal and looped wire depicted three women telephone operators seated in front of a wall of wired equipment. The newspaper heading declared: “Female Workers Are To Be Protected Under Law.” The mismatched metal numbers combined to say 1934.



SEPTEMBER # 3—Se-Eun and Daniel’s Graduation

Visuals: photographs of Daniel and Se-Eun receiving their graduation certificates, images of the seawall from False Creek North and the restaurant there

While we knew that Daniel’s graduation ceremony was to be today, Se-Eun surprised the group only a few days ago by announcing that she was leaving too. I wasn’t as surprised by this as some of the others, but she didn’t admit the plan to have Barry follow her to Korea.

We realized that this graduation again signaled a partial dispersal of our group. Each teacher stepped forward and introduced, one by one, the students leaving his or her class. Each of those students received a certificate stating their length of stay and level of language proficiency attained. There many photos taken and many tears shed. Autograph books appeared while students at the last moment exchanged addresses.

Acting in his formal role as her teacher, Barry presented Se-Eun with her certificate. I wondered what he was feeling. Perhaps his sense of pending loss is lessened in knowing that their separation is to be only temporary. With Claudia also having left recently, I was also confronted with how I would be feeling when I receive my certificate before leaving for home.

How Song was feeling wasn’t any secret. She cried openly when Daniel received his diploma, and she hugged him when he came back to the group where we were standing together. In seeing Daniel and Song being photographed together, I noticed how they looked so much better matched now than they originally did. He was wearing his boating loafers, casual pants, and a shirt open at the neck (no tie!). And what had been Song’s peasant-like jumper and tee shirt had

become a tasteful cotton A-line skirt and colour-coordinated blouse.

When our group set out to go to an Asian restaurant on the North False Creek waterfront, Daniel walked, not surprisingly, with his arm around Song's shoulder the entire way. Noboru walked with me when the sidewalk favoured only two-abreast. But I was aware of him watching Sumi closely.



When Bae, before sitting down at the table, was momentarily preoccupied in talking to Song, Noboru pulled out Sumi's chair for her. But he did this in an awkward, embarrassed way. I got the impression that Juliana also noticed Noboru's newly self-conscious attention to Sumi.

We all were able to enjoy a wonderful meal together and we presented Daniel and Song with humorous greeting cards and small gifts. For Daniel this was desk accessories (stapler, mug, and paper clips box) decorated with a Canadian maple leaf and, for Se-Eun, this was two mugs with the drama symbols of tragedy and comedy on them like the faces on the Deep Cove Cultural Centre Sign that Mary had explained to me.



I am still wondering how Song, being such an emotional person, is going to manage without Daniel. Daniel, however, was being philosophic as he made a toast to Song.

"Song has helped me realize that making the time for a special relationship is worth it. I am grateful for what she has taught me with her gentle, affectionate ways. I may be a long

time in finding a girlfriend that I feel as lovingly toward or comfortable with as Song.”

Everyone cheered and clapped. Song, of course, cried some more.

Daniel said, “Bae, I know how much Song values your friendship, so please continue to help her during the remainder of her time in Vancouver.”

Bae looked his endearing self in smiling at Song at this request.

“Also,” Daniel continued, “I hope you and Se-Eun will maintain contact with her once she returns to Seoul, to help her remain safe.”

Daniel had his hand on Song’s arm or maintained other physical contact with her throughout the entire dinner and, as usual, never stopped being completely attentive to her. We lingered over dinner a long time, even as the staff began to shut down the restaurant for the night. I am always surprised that the staff members allow the customers to sit so long rather than forcing them out.

As we left the restaurant, our group gathered outside on the seawall. Being September, the air was slightly cool with a light breeze coming off the water, making us realize that summer, our wonderful summer, would soon be coming to an end. Still we lingered together, breathing in the ocean air, and our friendship.



Flight	Destination	Sch Time	Counters	Gates	Remarks
OZ6101	Seoul-Incheon	12:20	076-092	D52	Part 1
JL17	Tokyo	12:45	158-166	D65	
JL5788	Mexico City	13:00	132-136	D70	
AC3	Tokyo	13:45	076-092	D55	
AC881	Beijing	13:50	137-143	D66	
KE72	Seoul-Incheon	14:20	118-124	D64	
AC7	Hong Kong	14:30	076-092	D58	
CX889	Hong Kong	15:10	150-156	D65	
88106	Los Angeles	15:25	145-149	D71	

SEPTEMBER # 4—Airport Goodbyes to Se-Eun and Daniel

Visuals: airport sculpture and interior/exterior of Internationals building

As Se-Eun and Daniel both were returning home on Saturday afternoon, seven of us went to the airport to be supportive of them and those being left behind—Barry and Song. Se-Eun had to say goodbye to Barry with undeclared future plans. As far as I know, the others have no idea of their intention to get back together in Korea when Barry takes up the offered teaching position there. It was difficult for me not to allude to this as we all suffered with them in saying their goodbyes. Instead we had to watch Se-Eun turn her back and walk away into the security area.



There was half an hour before Daniel needed to go off to his gate. I smiled in realizing that Song and Daniel had on their matching boat-loafers. In remembering how Daniel looked in his first months in Vancouver, I was amazed at how he would now dare to go on an airplane wearing beige khaki pants, a pastel green polo shirt, and a moss green pullover sweater—without a tie, vest, or jacket.

I realized that Song had accomplished what she had originally aimed for in making Daniel into a more relaxed, more human person, as well as helping him understand how nice it is to have a girlfriend.

While dreading the moment for Daniel to walk away to the boarding gate, Song had been standing with her cheek

against his chest, as she had also done while waiting in line with him to get his luggage checked. His chin was on the top of her head. I had never gotten over their height difference although I had long since forgotten about their age gap, as they seemed so sincerely loving.

We found a place where we could all sit together. Song was weeping again. I was feeling for her knowing that her goodbye would be forever.

As Daniel took his final leave to head to the departure lounge, he placed Song's hand in Bae's even while Bae stood close to Sumi.

Looking at Bae, Daniel said, "So you'll look after Song in Vancouver and after you are back in Korea...."

"I will. I will," Bae affirmed, very pleased.

Despite being sympathetic to Daniel's feeling of loss, Bae obviously welcomed his new official role as Song's protector. On waving before Daniel disappeared around a distant corner, Song was sobbing. Bae put his arm through hers. Then Sumi took her other arm and, along with Bae, led us all out the sliding glass doors to go back downtown.

We were all subdued. Barry, who had been quiet from the moment Se-Eun left, found a single seat on the bus and sat alone. I kept walking toward the back, whereas others were content to stand in a cluster closer to the side door. After one stop, a seat became available next to me and Noboru spotted it and sat down.

After a few minutes of remaining silent, Noboru said, "Depressing isn't it?"

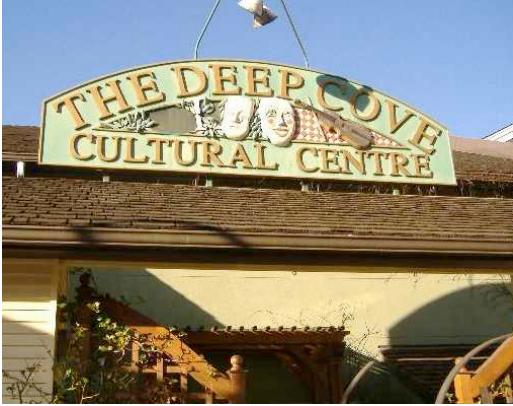
"Pardon?" I said in being called back from my own private thoughts.

"It's obvious everyone is feeling pretty low. Being forced to admit that this is something each of us is going to have to face. Parting. Saying goodbye to people we care about."

"Yes, I know," was all I said. Was Noboru again trying to get me to reconsider my feelings for Sandy? Was he again trying to suggest it was more logical for me to be interested in him, Noboru, than in Sandy, so I wouldn't have to give up my boyfriend on returning home?

I just wish Noboru would realize that this could even more be true for him and Sumi.





SEPTEMBER # 5—Attending a Play in Deep Cove

Visuals: photo of grocery store, the main street, Mary's nephew's restaurant

Earlier in the summer Mary and I had discussed going to a play at the Deep Cove Cultural Centre. When Mary finally suggested a time, I asked her if Sandy could come with us.

"Of course," she responded immediately.

Sandy and I arranged to meet at Deep Cove, an hour before the performance, so he and I could go for a walk first. We also decided to go and have something to eat after the play and then he would drive me home.

On the bus to the Cove (this is what Mary calls it), I felt pangs of excitement in anticipating seeing Sandy again. It seemed so long since I'd spent the weekend with him and Noel and met at the picnic at Spanish Banks. The trip to the Rocky Mountains firmly distanced what had gone before. I was wondering if it might even be awkward between Sandy and me, if it might take some time to get back to our previous level of comfort.

Mary and I got off the bus within sight of the cultural centre. She headed off to visit her parents saying she would be back just before the start of the performance. Again I was surprised to see Sandy standing, as we had agreed, at the fountain of the two heads just outside the cultural centre. He started across the crosswalk to greet me.

"Hey, you didn't say that you would be coming by bus."

Sandy's taken-for-granted hug suggested that no time, and no Rocky Mountains, had passed between us.

"Mary believes it is immoral to drive a car on a bus route unless there is a very good reason."

"Yet she is a member of a car co-op?"

"Yes, but she is only willing to drive a co-op car when she has to work out of town, carry a lot of stuff, or travel into some unfamiliar suburb at night."

"Especially in going to a scary suburb," he laughed, knowing I too was more comfortable being alone downtown than I would be on the outskirts.

"So what does she think of me for driving?"

"Well, she knows that there is still poor bus service between West Vancouver and Deep Cove and between West Vancouver and UBC, so I assume she finds your driving forgivable."

"Ah, good," he smiled.

"But why do you say that the bus service is 'still poor'?"

"Well, Mary hopes to live to see the disappearance of the private automobile all together. But for that to happen, she knows public transportation will have to improve."

We picked up our reserved tickets inside the cultural centre. Then Sandy and I headed down the street to the waterfront.



He took my hand comfortably as we headed toward benches overlooking the beach. We paused there but then walked along under the yacht club's pier and toward the kayak rentals shop.

"So are you still preoccupied by the *same* guy?" Sandy commented with a smile.

"Yes, definitely. So you received my card!" I said, very pleased to find that the postal service was that fast after hearing Mary's complaints.

"I did, and I was pretty impressed that you knew my address."

"I remembered seeing the number on the front of your house and observing that it is a five plus my birth date. I noted this because five is symbolic of a happy home."

"Does the 318 part mean you were born March 18?"

"Yes, exactly."



"So you are a Pisces."

"Apparently."

"My mother would approve of that," he laughed.

"Why?"

"Because I am a Cancer, and Pisces is supposed to be my most compatible sign."

"Does your mother know a lot about astrology?"

"Well, she believes in the basic signs. She pretty much gave a book about our sign to each of us at our moment of birth," he said with some humour.

We sat down on a bench above the pier looking at the light striking the mountains across the water and the waves lapping against the quiet shore.

"I don't know how much knowing about the sign has influenced me, but I seem to have a lot of the basic characteristics of a Cancer. The good and the bad."

"The basic characteristics?"

"Yes, and this also seems to be true for the other members of my family. My father, of course, scoffs at all of this, but my mom says he can't help being a non-believer because he is a Capricorn. Capricorns are too down to earth, matter of fact, to ever believe in astrology or anything else they can't see or prove."

"So tell me the characteristics of Cancers and Pisces."

"Well, they are both artistic, sensitive, and intuitive. And Cancers are homebodies. Domesticated."

"So that's why you are a good cook," I commented.

"They like to be at home, although they tend to be a bit messy, because they never like to get rid of things. Never throw things away."

"And what about the bad characteristics of Cancers? Tell me about them," I urged him laughing.

"No, I am sure they will be obvious soon enough."

"Tell me."

"No...." he laughed, jostling my shoulders in good humour.

"Come on...."

"I don't want to spoil our relationship."

That comment made me feel warm toward Sandy.

"Every sign must have some weaknesses as well as strengths."

"Of course."

"So tell me. You don't have to admit to them, just tell me what astrologers say about Cancers."

"Well, then.... Cancers can hold a grudge. When someone has done something against us, them, well, they don't forget or forgive quickly."

"And?"

"Well... they can be moody."

"Moody, as in sad or bad tempered?"

"Both."

"And maybe want to be alone when they are unhappy?"

"Yeah. Something like all of that."

"Okay, so I have been warned.... What about Pisces' traits?"

"Pisces are spiritual, kind, and have compassion for others, empathy. And they tend to believe in the best in others."

"And what about their bad traits?"

"Their weaknesses? Well, they tend to be dreamers, which can be a strength too, but they can't always work constructively toward their dreams to make them happen."

"Mary is a Pisces too."

"That is probably why the two of you get along so well, both being the same sign. Is she a dreamer?"

"Yes, for sure. You know the parking lot below the dining room window?"

"Yes."

"Well, she says she dreams of the time that there will be no homeless people scavenging, no one going through the recycling and garbage bins there. Instead the whole concrete space will be converted into grass and flowers and a flourishing

vegetable garden with fruit trees. It will be a pleasant relaxing place with tables and sun umbrellas so neighbours can sit and talk as they get to know each other better."

"A worthwhile dream.... But how do the homeless fit into this vision?"

"She would like to see them all have proper housing, and until that happens, at least have access to showers. The showers could be in Laundromats, where homeless people could shower at least once a week, while their clothes are being washed. All free of charge for those who need that help, with the cost paid for by the social services department."

"Indeed, Mary must be a compassionate person."

"She is. But, you are right. Even though she has a social conscience, she is not politically active right now beyond going on the occasional march, writing the occasional letter, signing petitions, etc. She admits to feeling guilty about her lack of constructive engagement."

"So that's not surprising then, is it?"

"Maybe not, but she's also pretty busy with her art commission."

"Ah, yes, she is artistic. What kind of an art commission is she working on?"

"An historical art installation for the lobby of a new building in Coal Harbour."

"Really? Historical?"

"It reveals more than 100 years of Vancouver history."

"That could be fascinating."

"She has to have it done by the first week of April, so I hope to be able to see it all put together and hung before I go back to Japan."

As I said 'go back to Japan,' I secretly wondered about my dream to study architecture at UBC and whether I could make that happen. I hoped I could prove that Pisces' inability to pursue one's dream is not true for me. Yet at that moment I silently acknowledged my inability to even discuss my dream with Sandy. But soon I'll feel up to telling him I convinced myself. Soon....

Sitting within sight of the kayak rentals shop, we became aware of some cooler pre-autumn air and longer, end-of-summer shadows cast by the setting sun. We stood up and started to walk back. As I looked up at the restaurant we had eaten in the day of kayaking, I was reminded of when Noboru first revealed his interest in me. I had never told Sandy about that. Was there any reason to tell Sandy now? Noboru is leaving in November. I couldn't think of why Sandy needed to know. Nor could I bring that up easily.



“Oh, Erika. I’m sorry to say, I don’t have time for us to have supper together as I drive you home.”

“Ah. That’s disappointing.”

“I know, but I have to stop at the studio on the way home to do at least an hour’s work for a pressing deadline tomorrow. I thought that cancelling the supper was preferable to not seeing you at all tonight since it’s been so long. I had to at least see you.”

Sandy explained about still being under a lot of pressure to finish up his part on one of the major projects he’d been doing with his father so as to be ready to go back to UBC. With the mention of UBC, I again felt anxiety shoot through me. Another chance to say something about applying to UBC that I let pass. I just couldn’t get up my nerve to say anything. Yes, there it was again. The indecisive, irresolute Pisces.

I also thought about what Claudia had said—about how Sandy’s social situation would change once he was back at university. I felt frustrated that I didn’t know how to bring up these concerns in a way that seemed to flow easily from our conversation. So I said nothing.

Sandy finally filled the silence: “I am supposed to say hello to you from Lynn.”

“Oh, Lynn, your advisor.”

I smiled, but apparently Sandy, all seriousness, does not want to acknowledge Lynn in this role.

“She called today. She still appreciates the time you gave to Noel.”

“So you talked about me?” I said in what I hope sounded like a teasing tone.

“A little,” he said, checking my expression, perhaps to see how much he might say. “I forgot to tell you that she left a bathing suit for you.”

“Your family is particularly generous with bathing suits,” I laughed. “That’s very nice of her.”

Sandy added, “It is almost brand-new, but it is too tight for her, so she thought you could wear it when we use the hot tub.”

“I’d certainly like to go in the hot tub together again.”

“We will.”

Only a few people were around as we walked back toward the benches above the swimming beach. Some were packing up from late picnics or carrying supplies from their boat to their car in the yacht club parking lot after having been out on the water.



Walking back up the main street, we met Mary. A moment later Patrick came bounding down the wooden stairs of the small, old grocery store on the corner. He was almost running as he came toward us carrying three cartons of eggs. Rather than being dressed in a chef’s white jacket and pants, he was wearing baggy, knee-length shorts. (I’m glad Sandy doesn’t wear pants that pretend he has no rear end!).

Mary said, “Patrick, where are your whites? You look more like a skateboarder than the chef of an upscale restaurant.”

“I’m not actually cooking tonight. I’m just at the restaurant planning the new fall menu.”

I briefly introduced Patrick to Sandy. They shook hands.

“Ah, the guitar-playing chef,” Sandy said, remembering what I had said about him.

“And you must be the guitar-playing future architect,” Patrick smiled, remembering our conversation from the summer barbecue. “That’s an interesting combination too.”

They talked a moment of what kind of music they play before Mary alerted us to having to go into the theatre. Patrick sprinted off with the eggs.

Mary, Sandy, and I found our seats in the theatre and read the program while we waited for the performance to begin. Mary silently pointed to the name of the member of the cast who is the brother of one of her former boyfriends. Knowing the brother was to be in the play, Mary had told me, during our trip on the bus, about how hurt she had been at the time when that boyfriend chose to become involved with another woman. Mary

admitted she hadn't realized until long after how it was probably better that they had, in fact, broken up.

Apparently that boyfriend was much more physically active than Mary is. While she was pleased to camp in the walk-in section of provincial parks, he preferred to camp on glaciers. And while she enjoyed sailing on a sunny day within sight of land, he was making a metal boat to cross the Atlantic Ocean alone. How unfortunate it seems to have to breakup, despite loving each other, due to "lifestyle issues." That's also what Daphne had been telling me about on Galiano Island.

Mary had earlier arranged to stay overnight with her parents. So after the performance was over, Sandy and I were back in his car alone together.

Sandy said, "I told you about the band's plans for our final gig before you went to the Rockies, didn't I?"

"A little. The outdoor concert at UBC?"

"Yes."

"So how did that go?"

"Very well. There was a lot of over-the-top, back-to-school enthusiasm in the crowd. But not only that. We sold out every CD and tee shirt."

"Good for you!"

"Yes, besides setting that sales record for us, it's reassuring to start a new school year with some unexpected cash."

"How did it feel to you, knowing the concert marked the end of your time with the band?"

"Heartrending."

"But you still feel you've made the right decision?"

"Yes, I am not doubting that."

"I wish I could have been there."

"Well, we are planning a reunion gig on Valentine's Day. Would you like to come to that?"

"In February?"

"Yes."

"I'd love to," I smiled.

Having such a long-term plan to do something with Sandy made me feel secure—secure in knowing that Sandy assumes we will still be seeing each five months from now.





SEPTEMBER # 6—Photographing the Sunrise at Coal Harbour

Visuals: photographs of sunrise

Song, our avid photographer, mentioned the wish to do something to mark the autumn equinox, so I suggested that we photograph the sunrise from Coal Harbour on the official first day of fall. I thought this sounded healthy, as a way of lessening her sadness over missing Daniel. Only later did she admit this was actually Daniel's birthday, the reason she wanted to do something memorable. We agreed that she would stay overnight with me in order to be on time to photograph the sunrise before school.

When Bae heard of this plan, he decided we shouldn't be out in the dark that early in the morning without him as our protector. After all, he had promised Daniel that he would keep Song away from harm. Bae said he could get a ride into the city with his homestay father whose stock market job requires him to be at work that early. Song and I agreed he could come with us, providing he was at our door by the time we were ready to leave.

In walking down the stairs in the morning, Song and I were pleasantly surprised to see that Bae was trying to look casual in leaning against the door jam. Not by nature an early morning person, he did look not quite awake. We admitted that we had had our doubts as to whether he would show up at all. The three of us walked toward Coal Harbour in the dark.

It was an intense black morning. When we reached seawall close to the entrance of the Stanley Park Causeway, we got out our cameras and placed them on the broad top of the old stone railing that attempts to be Doric style. While we

waited for the sun to appear, we talked. I guess a man who was jogging by recognized the accent of Song and Bae because he stopped to say that he had spent a year teaching English in Korea. This man, Walter, admitted he welcomed the chance to speak Korean. He stayed with us while we were photographing. The orange sun emerged out of the black and turned the sky to paler shades of black-blue, charcoal-blue, intense-royal blue, and almost light blue.

Hungry by then, the four of us decided to go and have something to eat at a Coal Harbour café. As we walked east along the path following the shoreline, Walter seemed to gravitate to talking more to Song than Bae and me as he talked about some of his best experiences of living in Seoul as a teacher. By the time that we all got seated in the café, I felt that Bae was feeling somewhat possessive of Song even though Walter showed no ill intentions toward her. Even in finally saying goodbye to us, Walter didn't try to get any contact information, proving he really was honourable.

Because it was so lovely out, Song, Bae, and I agreed to walk back to the school via the Coal Harbour seawall. We took more photographs, including of some of the cityscape and striking looking yachts. While these are visually impressive, Mary says they are obnoxious and they make her feel angry. To her they are proof that some people have way too much while others, the homeless, don't have their basic needs met. This is something she sees as immoral, something significantly wrong with society and dangerous in producing a "have" and "have not" society.

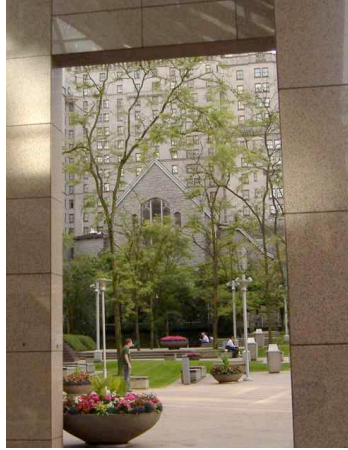


Bae, who was rather quiet, brought up the subject of Walter again. He said that he hoped we would not have talked to Walter if he, Bae, hadn't been with us. We said Walter seemed a pleasant, trustworthy man and we didn't agree that

we wouldn't have talked to him if we'd been on our own. Bae still insisted it would have been too risky to talk to him alone.

Song and I decided not to argue with Bae. Apparently as a result of our attitude, Bae seemed convinced that we need even more of his protection in the future.

During our walk and photographing, we didn't realize that we were being more leisurely than we had time for. When we got to Burrard Street we still hadn't realized that we were about to be late for class if we didn't hurry.



When we did see a clock, we ended up running the last block. The rush and, dare I say, the shared fun of getting there just on time made me feel that Song had kept away any total depression of missing Daniel.

But that lasted only a few minutes....

For the past week we have been studying a film entitled *L'Auberge Espagnole*. It is a movie about a group of international students studying in Barcelona, Spain, and sharing an overcrowded apartment in order to survive on their limited budgets. It is remarkably easy for us to identify with, as it depicts these students' struggles in dealing with each other and their problems of having to communicate in imperfect, shared language. The film also reveals their infatuations and involvements within and outside the group.

We have watched segments of this movie for a few minutes of each day for over a week. On the first day of viewing the film, Barry gave us assignment sheets to fill in as we have been going along. For instance, we have had to write a brief summary of the plot, list the students staying in the apartment and the countries they are from, describe the main characters, make notes of the idioms and their meanings, and explain the ways the students compensate in communicating with inadequate knowledge of a common language.

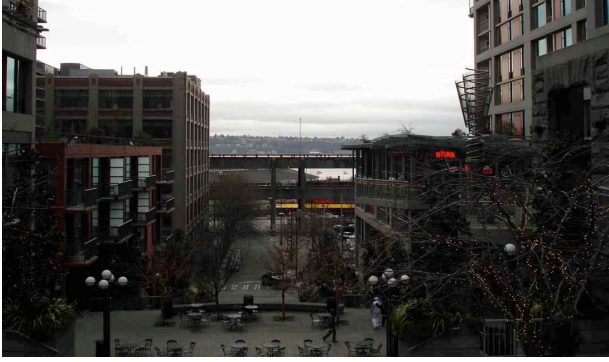
Well, today we were watching the last segment. This includes scenes of the students' big, end-of-term party where several of the students know that they will never see each other again as they will be leaving the next morning to return to their home countries.

Well, sitting in the dark, watching this film, all of us could feel the pain of this inevitable separation where words can't express the attachment experienced. Also some of us realize that even if it is possible to meet again in the future, we will never feel this close again.

Of course, many of us were weeping even after Barry turned on the lights. With her head down on her arms that were folded on the desk, Song was silently sobbing. Bae, sitting next to her, touched his hand against her arm.

Even knowing in advance about this sense of loss won't help us avoid this heartache when it is our turn to say goodbye.





September # 7—Seattle Disappointment

Visuals: photographs of Seattle, Pike’s Market area, the Music Project, Space Needle

In a light rain and with overcast sky, our somewhat diminished group set out for Seattle yesterday. Others at the school had tried to discourage us from going, saying it wasn’t culturally or visually different enough from Vancouver to make the trip worthwhile. But we needed to see for ourselves. And arriving home last night, tired from being on the road so long, I now agree with those who tried to dissuade us from going. Of course most of us simply wanted to be able to say we had gone to the United States. After all, we had gone to the trouble to get visas.

Well, at 6:30 in the morning Noboru, Sumi, Bae, Song, Fernando, Nicole, Juliana, and I got to the shuttle bus that goes directly to Seattle. That is “directly” unless you consider a long delay at the border crossing as being less than direct.

Given that Song was on her first trip alone since Daniel had gone back to Switzerland, it was particularly unfortunate that “her number came up.” That means that, for no apparent reason and despite having a valid visa, Song’s belongings were of interest to the American immigration officials. They examined every item that she was carrying. While she had nothing to hide legally, she was devastated as they took each item out of her purse and her daypack one by one, including sanitary pads, Midol pills, make up, and extra underwear. They also turned her pack inside out and examined the lining.

Seeing her change to a sickly pale, Bae came forward and put his arm around her shoulders, as she watched this, silently dismayed. The rest of us had already gone through the checkpoint so we stood watching this from beyond the glass door. We were feeling helpless, unable to do anything for her.

When she rejoined us on the other side of the door, she broke into tears. Sumi and Bae hugged her and we all urged her to not take this personally. Easy to say.

"We are going to buy you a special lunch when we get to Pike's Market, Song," Noboru said.

And Sumi, knowing it would work for herself, said, "Then we will go and buy you some new shoes."

This assumption made Song recognize some humour. "New shoes can't make me feel less depressed, Sumi."

"Sure they can. Maybe you've just never tried shoe shopping when you're feeling down."

Well, when we got to Pike's Market, which we found generally rather noisy, crowded, and somewhat dirty, we did manage to find a Mexican restaurant perched on the hill there. It had with a glassed-over deck and a view of the ocean. Even though at that moment it was threatening rain, we chose to sit outdoors under the glass roof. Fernando and Nicole did most of the ordering for us speaking to the waitress in Spanish. Some of us shared food. It was actually very good.

Then after looking around Pioneer Square, on Sumi's insistence, we headed for the downtown shopping area to find a shoe store. But in looking at the window display of the first shoe store we came to, instead of being eager to go in, Song broke into tears again. Bae again put his arm around Song's shoulder to lead her away. We all looked closer to see what had triggered such a response. It was a pair of navy blue Birkenstock sandals exactly like the matching pair that Daniel and Song have!

"Well, maybe we should try the monorail instead," Noboru suggested. "Let's go to that music centre at the end of the line."



When we got to the Music Project, we waited in line to buy tickets, hearing the incredible noise of the place. This and the size of the unusual building made it somewhat overwhelming, certainly not restful or serene. Without knowing

what we were getting ourselves into (Noboru's influence again), we all purchased the more expensive ticket that included the "musical ride."

Many of the historical exhibitions were about the development of music in the United States. The presentations were innovative, and of course I kept thinking about what I might be able to tell Sandy about contemporary music history. Display units featured advertisements and posters promoting concerts, performers' outfits, and the musical instruments of many notable musicians. These included Jimmy Hendrix, Bob Dylan, the Beatles, Elvis Presley, etc. (I took notes!)

While the exhibits themselves were fascinating, we soon grew tired of the noisy rooms crawling with unkempt youth who looked as if they were accustomed to spending entire weekends in the building. We headed outside to get some fresh air and some relative quiet. We got in the line for the musical ride without knowing what it was. By the time we got into the theatre, it was too late to turn back, but I did wonder at a sign that said, "People who have heart trouble and pregnant women should not participate."

Bae, Song, Noboru, Sumi, Juliana, Nicole, Fernando, and I filed into our seats in one row. The attendant came and checked to ensure that the safety bars were down across our laps. I wondered what all this had to do with music.

Well, after a few minutes I had my eyes closed to protect myself. I realized this "ride" was just something I would have to endure. Our seats lurched forward in the dark, seemed to swoop down, drop from mid-air, turn and twist, all to the most deafening sound that, in my opinion, only some would call music. There was no way to get off. No way to escape or stop the experience. From some flashes of bright light, I could see that Song, sitting next to me, wasn't taking this any better than I was. Her knuckles were clinched tight to the arms of her chair until she grabbed at Bae's hand. Sitting on the other side of her, Bae put his arm tightly around her shoulder.

"Don't look at the screen," he told her.

"Yes, shut your eyes," I confirmed in realizing that not looking at the screen was helping me survive.

Remembering her seasickness, I was afraid Song might start vomiting. I was feeling somewhat nauseous myself.

Noboru, in noticing my tension, held my wrist firmly under his hand in holding on to our shared armrest.

He whispered to me, "Try looking at that red light on the wall."

Sure enough a small red stationary light on the wall a few feet from us convinced me that our seats were really only

capable of moving within a four foot square. We were not falling to the great depths that we felt.

Finally it ended. Never was I so glad to be able to get up out of a seat and walk away. Bae guided Song toward the exit. The rest of us followed numbly behind them.

When we got outside in the cool air, several of us simultaneously said, "Thank heavens that's over."

I felt I was walking crooked, or the sidewalk was buckling, I was so shaken. I was angry that people could be so taken in, unexpectedly having to give up all control, and be forced to endure something such as that when they would rather stop the experience. Sumi and the guys, on the other hand, hadn't minded, although Fernando could see our point—that we should have had the right to know what we were getting into before ever sitting down in that theatre.

We toured around what had been the site of a world's fair in the 1960s. Mary had told me about how visiting at that time had been such an adventure for her family who rarely travelled. But now it seemed somewhat like an abandoned site except for the lineup at the bottom of the Space Needle.

Question: "Should we go up?"

Now even Noboru was unwilling to go into a situation where we didn't have the freedom to leave when we wanted to.

It started to drizzle. We decided to get the earlier bus home. As a result we had a rather uninspiring supper in a chain restaurant in one of those seemingly endless malls that line the highway from Seattle heading to the Canadian border. We got wet as we dashed out of the restaurant to get back into the bus, and it rained heavier as the night got darker.

In the bus Sumi and Bae took over as Song's guardians and sat next to her and across the aisle. I ended up in a seat next to Noboru sharing an armrest. His forearm was pressed against mine for much of the trip home. But I was too exhausted to care, despite wondering about how that might feel to him.



Photographs of Seattle courtesy of Mathieu Gemin, France



September # 8—Viewing Art Exhibits in West Vancouver

Visual: photographs of Ferry Building, Silk Purse Gallery, waterfront

We just wanted exposure to a little BC culture but, for me, it turned out to be an emotionally ragged day.

Mary had recommended seeing two small art galleries on the West Vancouver waterfront, and I convinced Song, Juliana, and Sumi to accompany me there. When Bae and Noboru heard of our plan, they decided to come too.

By the time we left the school, I was sorry to be wearing my sister's high-heeled boots, even though Juliana had noticed them earlier in the day and complemented me on them saying, "Very stylish boots. Sexy even."

"Sexy is not what I'm after. They're my sister's. She insisted I bring them in case I couldn't find boots as soon as I arrived. I am trying to get up the nerve to give them away."

"Oh, I'll take them!" Juliana said enthusiastically. She came closer and positioned her foot next to mine.

"Hey, they look just the right size."

"Okay, they're yours. I'll bring them to you tomorrow."

The walk to the West Vancouver bus confirmed I was ready to give them away—not just because of how suggestive they looked to me; but because they were so uncomfortable to walk in!

The exhibition at the Ferry Gallery was featuring collage. The one at the Silk Purse Gallery was exhibiting sculpture from found metal objects and formalist paintings. Both exhibition spaces are in reclaimed buildings that previously served other purposes. The Silk Purse, an old cottage, was particularly suitable for display of the metal sculpture created out of found materials by Mary's friend. And her paintings, in subdued colours, also looked particularly tasteful in this old, converted cottage on the waterfront.



The other exhibition space, called the Ferry Gallery, formerly was the administration office, ticket booth, and waiting room of a ferry that operated in the 1920s and 1930s. The ferry crossed from the West Van waterfront to the Vancouver waterfront before the Lion's Gate Bridge was built.

In the Ferry Gallery I loved some of the colour schemes of the collaged compositions and I enjoyed being able to see how the images were made. Most of them were created as illustrations for books so they weren't prepared as permanent art. They are compiled mainly from evocative images found in 19th century printed ephemera, such as postcards, so they can't help but be visually appealing. I wonder if one could ever get that same richness from the collaged visual elements Mary is working with.

Through the whole trip, I noticed that Bae seems to be getting noticeably closer to Song. Part of his duties as Song's protector? He sat on the bus with her, shared a snack out of the same bag, and they took pictures of each other. Do I see Bae becoming more than just a best friend to Song? (Why am I such a romantic, always wanting people I love to become couples?)

When Sandy and I talked on the phone the night before, he told me he would join us at the galleries if he were to get out of a nearby meeting before 6:00 pm. As this possibility sounded remote, I actually forgot about this both in the morning and also as we viewed the work in the galleries.

After seeing the exhibitions, the group strolled a bit along the waterfront promenade. Then we headed for the pier. Because wooden walkway allowed for three-abreast, Bae linked arms with Sumi and Song. They led the way. Noboru similarly walked between Juliana and me. Despite the fairly dull weather, everyone was in a good mood.

As we almost caught up to Bae's trio near the end of the pier, I halted abruptly in my tracks. One of the heels of my sister's boots got stuck between the planks of the boardwalk.

Jarred by my unexpected stop, Noboru let go of my arm and asked, “What’s happened?” Looking down at my foot, he leaned over saying, “Oh, let me release this.”

Crouching down in front of me, Noboru worked the heel out from between the planks. For stability as he did this, I put my hands on his shoulders.

“There,” he said finally.

“Juliana, these boots are definitely yours,” I laughed.

When Noboru straightened up, we went back into formation. Noboru linked arms on one side with me and on the other side with Juliana. Remembering our meeting with Walter at Coal Harbour a few days earlier, Bae decided to give us girls advice about how to judge men—specifically what kind of men to avoid.

He started out reasonable enough listing men in dark hoodies, men with large dogs in vans, men in cowboy boots, men with multiple tattoos or with multiple diamond rings on their fingers, etc. But then the others helped Bae enlarge the list by including men with pierced lips or nose, men with green dye on their beards or who wear army helmets while riding their motorcycles, etc. At the time, this seemed hilarious so we were all laughing.



Unexpectedly, from behind us, I heard someone call my name. Juliana, Noboru, and I stopped suddenly again and looked around. It was Sandy!

What a happy surprise, but an embarrassment too. The six of us had been acting so silly. I let go of Noboru’s arm and went to Sandy.

“I can’t believe you made it!” I exclaimed. “And hey, you’re dressed up.”

“Just business code for meeting clients,” Sandy responded, as he loosened the tie he apparently had forgotten he was wearing.

Sandy didn’t take a step with me when I took his hand, and I noticed that he appeared to be feeling...down? Tired? Something more?

Seemingly absent-mindedly, he stated, "The meeting broke up earlier than I expected."

"Bad meeting?"

"No, it was okay. Have you been to the galleries already?"

"Yes."

"But look... now... I'm intruding."

"You're not intruding, Sandy. Soon we will be going our separate ways as everyone heads home for dinner. We just want to take photographs from the pier first. Come with us."

I drew him forward, but he did seem reluctant, even though everyone greeted him warmly. I did feel a little awkward in doing reintroductions, because for some reason, Sandy was blushing. I didn't understand why.

After photographing the shorelines toward Ambleside and across to Stanley Park, we returned to the area in front of the Ferry Gallery.



Sandy had previously had said he would drive me home if he arrived in time to meet us. He indicated that his car was parked a block away but within sight.

Dropping my hand, he took a few steps in the direction of the car as the others said goodbye to me and proceeded to cross the street. They were heading for the bus stop out on Marine Drive to get back to North Vancouver.

But Noboru stayed behind and quietly said to me, "So you'll be okay in getting home on your own, Erika?"

It was as if he needed reassurance that I was not feeling abandoned and by default having to go in Sandy's car.

"Yes, I'll be fine, Noboru. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Okay then. Goodnight," he said. He turned and sprinted toward the others heading toward the main street.

Sandy and I continued to walk straight to his car. He opened the passenger door for me and then went around to the driver's side and got in. We did up our seat belts, but rather than starting the car, Sandy looked straight ahead toward where

we had been walking on the pier and he said, "I didn't know Noboru is in love with you."

I felt like I gulped visibly. I didn't know how to respond. I said, "Why do you think this?"

"By the way he looks at you. And the two of you seem very close."

Oh. Had Sandy seen Noboru getting my heel out from between the planks of the pier? How would that have looked to Sandy from this angle, from this distance, with Noboru crouched in front of me and me with my hands on his shoulders?

"He obviously cares a great deal about you."

"I'm trying to get him interested in Sumi."

"So it's true...."

"Apparently."

"Should I be worried?"

"No, absolutely not."

"Is it awkward for you? Him wanting you?"

"It has been at times. I don't want to hurt him, because he is so good to me. And I don't want divisiveness within our group. But I don't share his feelings and he knows this."

Sandy was quiet.

I touched his knee to try to reassure him, but Sandy seemed preoccupied.

"I wish you had told me," he said, not looking me.

"Why? How would that change anything?"

"This makes me worry about what else I don't know about you, Erika."

That comment cut me deeply.

"Please, Sandy, you are the one I care about. And I'm not hiding anything about me."

I smiled at him but he continued to hold onto the steering wheel and look directly ahead. I didn't know what to do. How could I convince him? He seemed frozen. Could this be about something more than Sandy just feeling threatened by Noboru?

"The fact that Noboru would prefer to have me as a girlfriend, rather than just a friend, says something about him, not me. Please don't hold this against me."

Sandy refused to respond.

He was still not looking at me when I added, "Trust is very difficult to rebuild, Sandy. So first, please, be very sure if you think you have a basis to doubt me. Without trust we have so much to lose. Can't you see that?"

Distracted by a barking dog on the other side of the street, Sandy looked away. Apparently he was not sure how to react to my words. I remembered Leah and Larry's comments

alluding to Sandy's painful past with what I understand to be an unfaithful girlfriend.

"Also, just because Noboru is from Tokyo doesn't mean we are destined to be together. All that matters for you and me is that I am not, and do not intend to become, involved with Noboru."

Without showing any reassurance from hearing me say this, Sandy started the car.

He asked, "Shall I drive you straight home?"

I felt like a little kid being threatened with punishment.

"Could we have supper together?"

He left a long, agonizing silence between us before answering, "I made some stew last night. Would you like some of that?"

"Yes, I would like that."

"All right."

Sandy surprised me in doing a U-turn on this side street directly from his parking spot. Then he headed out to Marine Drive, the main thoroughfare. We remained silent as we stopped and started along with the rest of the cars heading east. I could tell I hadn't restored his confidence. I wanted to get through to him, but I didn't know how. I felt like crying.

He drove up Taylor Way and all those hills. We were quiet still when he steered down the steep driveway and into the carport. As he took off his seat belt, I dared to say, "Sandy, I need a hug badly."

He turned slightly toward me, tried a faint smile, and he let me hug him, but he didn't respond and we didn't kiss. I thought, is this what a moody Cancer is like?

He just said, "Let's go in and have some stew then."

Sandy's parents were away. As we went in the front door, the telephone rang. Sandy went into the kitchen to answer it. He sounded like he was trying to sound upbeat or at least normal. He asked about Noel. I assumed he was talking to his brother until Sandy added, "Are you planning to do anything special for Grant's birthday?"

Oh, so it was Lynn, Sandy's sister-in-law and "advisor." The swinging door to the kitchen closed. Did Sandy shut it, or is it really that slow in closing on its own? Despite being curious, I walked toward the living room windows to give Sandy privacy. The conversation lasted a few minutes. I was glad that Sandy seemed comfortable in talking with Lynn, but I did wonder what he would admit to her. Would he tell her that a friend of mine seems to be in love with me?

When Sandy returned to the living room, he didn't mention who it was. He simply said, "Why don't you put your things over here."

He hung up my jacket in the closet by the front door, and I put my daypack on the floor beside it.

Looking at some shoes on the floor of the closet, I asked, "I'd like to take off these boots." I wished I could explain about the boots, but I just asked, "May I borrow these thongs?"

"Good idea. Mom wouldn't mind."

He took off his jacket and tie. His pale yellow business shirt looked good on him.

We went directly into the kitchen. The door does shut slowly, on its own, so I am left wondering.

"Have a seat," he said, moving some architectural magazines from the oval table onto the counter that formed the backrest of the nook.

I moved along the table towards the windows so that Sandy could sit beside me if he chose to. He placed cutlery, a side plate, and mug in front of me and set out the same for himself as far away as possible from me, his back to the counter. Then he put a bowl of hot stew down in front of me without any attempt at conversation. He warmed some crusty buns in the toaster oven. He made some tea. It was painful between us. I wondered what I could do.

He said, "Go ahead and start."

He finally sat down holding his bowl of stew cupped in his hands, the steam rising into his face, as he sipped off the hot gravy. A purposeful barrier between us?

Then the phone on the counter behind Sandy rang again. He reached around and picked up the receiver facing away from me. Apparently it was Lynn again.

I ate in silence while he answered "no" and then "yes" several times. Either Lynn was asking Sandy questions or giving him advice. He didn't acknowledge me.

"Okay. I will. Yes, I promise. Okay. Goodbye."

Apparently Sandy didn't want any further advice and was trying to get off the line quickly.

"Promise what?" I asked as he put down the receiver.

He blushed but he did not answer my question. He buttered his bread. He then seemed preoccupied in awkwardly cutting the larger pieces of beef in the bowl. Another way of avoiding talking with me?

"Your stew is delicious."

"Thank you."

"Really tasty."

"Will that be enough?"

"Yes, I'm good." (But far from satisfied, I thought.)

I was motionless while he finished eating. I wondered where we could go from here.

He surprised me when he finally, in a flat voice, said, "Shall we take a glass of wine into the hot tub?"

"The hot tub!"

Matter-of-factly, he added, "There's no point in having a bathing suit here, Erika, if you're not going to use it."

"All right."

Standing up, we both silently cleared away the few dishes and put the butter and milk in the fridge. (No suggestion of kissing there now.)

He just said, "Then let's go see if it will fit."

He went into his bedroom to locate the bathing suit that Lynn had left for me. I stopped at the open door (room today: yes, rather messy—another Cancer trait). He searched through his dresser drawers and, as he proceeded, tossed a couple of tee shirts into the open laundry hamper near his closet door.

Not looking at me, he said, "It's okay to come in."

I still felt shy being in his room while his parents are away. I confess it also made me feel a little sexy, despite feeling so strained. So distant.

His face brightened in pulling out the black suit with royal blue trim on it.

"Here it is. Let's see if you will be able to wear it."

He lifted up the suit so I would come toward him. He held it against me, stretching it from my collarbone to my crotch. I was aware that he was touching me.

"Will it be okay?"

"I hope so. I like it."

"Well then, try it." "

As I started to walk away, Sandy crouched down to retrieve his sandals from a cluster of shoes at the back of his closet. He said, "See you out there. I'll be checking the temperature. And please bring a couple of towels out of the big drawer."

After I closed the bathroom door, he called, "Oh, and, Er.... You can wear the white terry towel robe that's hanging on the back of the bathroom door."

Why did that nickname make me melt—especially at this time of wondering if we'll ever again be comfortable with each other?

No one has ever called me Er. I've always been envious of people who are called nicknames by people who are close to them. A kind of claiming. Familiarity. That made me feel a little better.

Also I was pleased that the suit fit so well. I put on the robe and, remembering the towels, went out on the deck in my bare feet. It was somewhat chilly.

Sandy had a royal blue robe over his knee-length swim trunks and was wearing the sandals. Having read the thermometer, he suspended it back in the water.

"It's okay. You can get in. I'll get the wine. Red or white?"

"Either is okay, but not more than half a glass...."

He disappeared while I climbed in and sat down on the wide, shaped ledge circling the inside of the hot tub. It felt so good to have the hot water on my shoulders.

Sandy came back with two glasses of red wine on a small tray. He set the tray down and stepped out of his sandals and robe, leaving them in a pile within reach of the hot tub. He got in and handed me the glass of wine. I took a sip.

I liked seeing Sandy's shoulders again. I just hoped they wouldn't be out of reach forever.

Sandy took a couple of sips from his glass and then, as if forcing himself to speak, he said, "My dad made this last summer."

"Tastes good. Raspberry. I didn't know your dad makes wine."

"A hobby. We suffered through bad stuff at first. Now most of it is decent."

We looked up at the pale half moon and the stars that were beginning to appear. And we sipped without speaking. Sandy took a last mouthful and set aside his empty glass.

Looking down at his blurred feet in the water, he finally said, "Erika, I'm sorry. I hate being like this."

"So do I, but it has hurt me to think you don't trust me."

"Please forgive my impulsive words that came out in that black moment."

"Black moment?"

"In seeing someone between us," he said, finally looking at me.

"Sandy, there is no one between us. I'm moved by your reaction...that you could be upset by this perceived threat. But I have to feel that you trust me. Without trust, we have nothing."

"It's hard for me...."

Knowing a little about his injured past, I gave him a chance to say more.

He finally commented, "In seeing Noboru and Juliana together that time at Spanish Banks and in driving them home that night, I assumed Noboru is in love with Juliana, as he couldn't take his eyes off her. Now to find out it is you that he loves...."

"Sandy, even if Noboru does love me, he is not a threat to you and me."

"How can I know for sure that you will be strong enough to resist his advances?"

"Sandy you are being *so* unfair to me. I don't know how to convince you, but you must set aside this fear, this doubt, because we're worth it."

I didn't realize this would sound so strong.

He looked down as if this comment registered with him somehow, but he still didn't say anything.

His silence made me so frustrated. Not getting through to him. I couldn't help it. I started to weep.

This he noticed.

He took my not-yet empty glass and put it on the tray beside his. He moved closer and put his arm around my shoulder.

"Please, Erika, I need some time."

I felt myself exhale and relax into his touch despite his words.

I regret I didn't encourage him to say something more at that moment. Maybe I needed to prove my commitment to him right then, because, without knowing I was bringing up this huge subject, I said, "Sandy, I do have something I want to talk about with you."

"Go ahead."

I couldn't think of any other way to say it but in the most straightforward terms.

"I want to apply to the architecture department at UBC to see if I can get accepted for entry next September."

"Really. You want to do this? Come to UBC?"

"I'd like to do it mainly to give us more time. To see if we have something worth holding on to."

"It would be great if you were in the department. And you must know I also want us to have more time, Erika. Really, I do."

"I believe you, Sandy."

"Would your parents approve of your studying here?"

"I don't know for sure, but I am hoping they might. I will try to convince them when they are here for a week in February."

"Your parents plan to come here in February?"

"They have said they intend to."

"Would you go home at all if you get accepted?"

"Yes, I would still go home in April and then return in September if I am accepted."

"And what about a job?"

"I would work in my mom and uncle's business for those few summer months."

We talked around my plan of applying to UBC until my fingers were puckered from being in the hot tub so long. I was glad that Sandy seemed happy about the possibility of the two of us studying architecture together. It did help soften our wounds.

For a school night, it was getting late when Sandy drove me home. He stopped the car in front of the apartment. I did wonder if we would kiss. We both hesitated. I saw an envelope, addressed in sloppy handwriting, sticking out of Sandy's jacket pocket. I realized I had noticed it earlier when we were sitting in the car as we left Ambleside pier.

"Something important?" I asked.

"Oh," he said in looking down apparently surprised at it being with him. "No. Not important."

He seemed awkward about this, which made me curious.

"Not important but...."

"Well...."

"Well?"

"It is something that has angered me. Hurt me even. But it won't hurt us."

"Won't hurt us?"

Sandy just looked at his hands and didn't say anything.

I didn't understand the relevance of this comment, until I realized this letter might have upset Sandy so that he had overreacted when he saw me with Noboru.

"Perhaps it has already hurt us."

Sandy looked a little taken aback when I said this, as if I were surprisingly perceptive.

He looked at me but he merely said, "Erika, please. I'd like to talk to you about it sometime but not tonight. We've, I've, already been through enough today."

"That makes me want to know all the more."

"Yes, but you must be willing to wait. Trust me."

"Trust you?" I stated with a slight inflection, as his words seemed incongruous coming from him at that moment. So, with a slight smile, I added, "As you will trust me."

"Yes," he said, trying not to acknowledge the irony, although he did finally show a slight smile too.

We had a tentative kiss, but at least it was a kiss.

Despite my lingering hurt over Sandy's suspicion of me with Noboru, I had opened up new possibilities by talking about wanting to attend UBC. Does that finally confirm I am not always an indecisive Pisces?

I can't wait to tell Claudia I discussed applying to UBC with Sandy, even though I don't intend to inform anyone else

yet. Actually I am amazed that bringing up this subject was so easy, especially in the midst of our emotional stress.

It's as if the plan to study architecture in Vancouver, to give Sandy and I more time, is so logical. Now if only I can get accepted into the program....

A couple of days later, having had no further communication with Sandy, I was somewhat alarmed in receiving a letter from him through the mail.

I was returning from school without knowing if Mary would be home, so I chose to sit down on the small sofa on the mezzanine to read the letter in private.

Even Sandy's beautiful hand printing on the business envelope didn't put me at ease. In fact his envelope contained two letters—his and a photocopy of a sloppily written one.

Dear Erika,

How can I make up for the way I treated you yesterday? I am so sorry. Your willingness to come to UBC to give us more time together indeed moves me. I do hope we can make that happen.

You deserve to know why I was so emotional when we met. Yes, you are right in that my overreaction had much to do with that letter. It was from my former girlfriend. While I know I mustn't use it totally as an excuse for my unreasonable behaviour, it definitely did have an effect. I think it's fair to share the letter with you since it has indeed had an impact on you in so far as it has affected us. I'm also letting you see it because I don't want you waiting for an explanation when in fact I may never want to talk about this after all. Would you mind? Rationally I know that I should not be upset and angered by the letter, but apparently I am still vulnerable.

A scrawled address of the studio on the envelope seems to have been filled in after the letter was sealed. As far as I know, Serena does not have my home address and it is not listed in the phone book. But even if she should get through to me when she comes to Vancouver, I have no intention of meeting her or spending time with her.

After thinking a lot about this letter through the night, I have decided not to answer it. I put the letter back in the

original envelope, taped it closed, attached new postage, and put it back in the mail simply marked "Return to Sender."

I hope you will be generous with me in your understanding.

Best love,
Sandy

The letter below Sandy's had been sent to Sandy at his dad's studio.

*Mr. Sandford Gibson
c/o Gibson and Lee Architects
Marine Drive
West Vancouver, BC
Sept. 23*

Dear Sandford,

I hear from Gordon's wife that you have a girlfriend who has no professional interest in your music and has encouraged you to leave the band. I had already begun to fear that you would remain a second-class musician in a second-rate band due to restricting yourself to performing in Canada. Having spent a lot of time in the US since leaving Vancouver, I am convinced only losers stay in Canada.

But you could still become a first-class performer with my help. I can make connections for you in the US as I have for Shane, whose financial success and popularity have skyrocketed since he left the Alums and I became his professional manager. I have been able to open incredible doors for him by meeting with and personally getting to know managers of the big venues in the States.

At the moment I am trying to arrange to come to Vancouver to get together with the artistic director/producer of what promises to be a unique, one-time musical extravaganza to be held in the UBC stadium next spring. Apparently I won't be

able to secure a slot for Shane on this star-studded program unless I persuaded this producer personally.

I want to spend time with you when I'm in town making the Vancouver arrangements. I don't have a date yet. I will try to let you know in advance.

I hope you will set aside the negative feelings that you have against me, as holding a grudge doesn't do either of us any good. I want you to realize that I can do for you what I am doing for Shane. I can service you both at the same time.

I am sending this letter to your father's office assuming that, even if you are not doing work for him, he will at least pass on this letter to you.

Email me at serena.makesdeals@risingstarr.com with your current phone number, so I can reach you immediately. I assume you must have a cell phone and a personal email address by now.

Fondly remembering what we did for each other, Darling, I'm really looking forward to again being in touch.

Serena

In reading this letter I felt my stomach turn into a tight knot. Despite Sandy's difficulty in learning to trust and his fearful reaction to Noboru as a competitor—as someone who would like me as a girlfriend—I know that Sandy cares about me.

Also, finally I have been decisive enough to tell Sandy of my wish to study architecture here with him, to give us time to see how our relationship might unfold. And he's pleased about this possibility.

So why is it now, at the exact moment of acknowledging this potential for our future, that the threat of Serena's presence rears up! The idea of her trying to make contact with Sandy, offering to "service" him, fills me with fear.

Could the arrival of this ex-girlfriend in town still affect Sandy and me?

[End of Volume One]

[To read Volume Two, *Vancouver Memories: A Certain Commitment*, return to the Table of Contents and click on OCTOBER DIARY ENTRIES 1-8.pdf]