



Second APRIL # 1—Our Postponed St. Patrick’s Day Celebration

Visuals: photographs of the Gassy Jack sculpture, the Steam Clock, the Irish pub, and St. Patrick’s Day decorations

We wanted to get Sandy, Noboru, and Sebastian together with our group for the first time since the ordeal on the mountain. We decided to have an evening at an Irish pub because we had missed our school’s event there on St. Patrick’s Day that others from the school had enjoyed so much.

On the chosen night, Sandy’s mom drove Sandy into town on her way to an event. Fernando, Nicole, Bae (Song is still away), and Sandy and I then bused to Gastown from the school. I didn’t feel that Sandy should try to walk that far yet. When we got there we waited outside the club in a lineup. Sumi and Noboru arrived a few minutes later.

Facing Sandy, and with only a touch on his elbow, Noboru seemed to acknowledge a debt to Sandy and an inexplicable connectedness. How can I describe this? Respect, deference? More than just that—affection, gratitude, and closeness. I felt that Noboru’s former feeling of competitiveness toward Sandy is finally gone.

Once we were inside the pub, we all sat at a cluster of tables claimed by Barry and a couple of young students who are from his new afternoon class. After a few minutes Pierre, Adrian, Sebastian, and Marina also arrived, completing our planned group.

“Hey, good to see you, Sandy, in more pleasant circumstances,” Sebastian said, in his usual good humour.

“Yeah, warmer circumstances,” Sandy commented, as Sebastian reached across the table to shake hands.

“Gently, eh!” Sandy laughed.

“Yeah, yeah, I know,” Sebastian responded, seeing Band-Aids still on Sandy’s fingertips.

"So how are you?" Sandy asked.

"Well, I'm here. And with both feet," Sebastian quipped.

"As I am," Noboru commented.

"Thanks to you, Sandy."

"And look," Noboru said, as he spread out his fingers and turned over his palms.

"Ah. No blisters," Sandy said.

"Good stuff," Fernando stated. "Given the circumstances, your injuries could have been much worse."

"Not that we have a lot of experience in treating frostbite in Mexico!" Nicole laughed.

"My fingers should be back to normal in a few days too," Sandy reassured us.

With regret in his voice, Bae said, "I wish I had stayed longer on the mountain and could have done something for the three of you."

"There is nothing you could have done for the guys, Bae, once the blizzard started. No one could," Sumi tried to reassure him. "Besides, you did something very helpful."

"What was that?" Sebastian asked.

"Tell them that cute anecdote, Bae," Sumi said encouragingly.

"Well, on the Monday when you guys were rescued and taken to Lion's Gate Hospital, I began to wonder what had happened to your snowshoes because I doubted that they would have been transported in the helicopter with you."

"Good for you, Bae, because we certainly weren't worrying about them," Sandy said.

"How did you think of that?" Noboru asked with some disbelief.

"While in the rental shop, I had read the posted hourly rate for late returns and been shocked that it was more than double the rate of regular rental."

"So what did you do?" Fernando asked.

"I contacted Ward, the ski patroller."

"The ski patroller Sandy talked with on our way to the rental shop?" Marina asked incredulously. "You remembered his name?"

"Well, it's a simple yet unusual name, so it struck me when I heard it," Bae responded.

"What a good memory," Sandy said, obviously impressed.

"So I called Grouse's main phone number and, saying I was a friend of Sandford Gibson, I asked to have Ward, the ski patroller, call me back. And he did."

"Good thinking!" Sandy declared.

"I asked him if he would go looking for the snowshoes and perhaps skis—Erika had alerted to me the possibility that you may have gone after the guys on skis for the sake of speed."

"Which I did, so Erika's conjecture was right," Sandy said, smiling at me.

"Luckily Ward knew the location where the helicopter had picked up the three of you. Apparently the whole traumatic incident had been widely discussed by all ski patrollers," Bae stated, "so they probably all knew where you had been found."

"I'll bet they use this as a textbook case in their training of new patrol recruits," Sebastian commented, "to demonstrate an exemplary response to fast-changing danger."

Was Sandy blushing slightly?

"Anyway, Ward agreed to search for your snowshoes that day. Later he called me back to confirm that he found them and Sandy's skis, after digging around the area, and, on a sled, had hauled all of them back to the rentals shop."

"Digging around?" Pierre asked.

"Well," Sandy explained, "we'd used the skis and snowshoes to help support our snow roof. So it's likely they wouldn't have been visible immediately, especially after additional new snow fell."

"So that's how you made your shelter," Mariana remarked with interest. "I'll remember that if I am ever stuck on a snow slope at home overnight."

"But, one more thing," Sumi commented. "Don't forget to tell everyone about that, Bae."

"Well, with the rental guys, Ward negotiated an honorary exemption of the late fee."

Noboru laughed and said, "Good for you for initiating this, Bae."

"Yes, thanks so much, Bae. I'll have to contact Ward too and thank him," Sandy said.

Adrian added, "But I bet the honorary exemption would have been allowed anyway, because Sandy made all Grouse ski patrollers look so good."

"I'll say," Noboru confirmed.

(More blushing?)

"But Ward asked me to give you some advice, Sandy," Bae added.

"And what's that?"

"Ward said that your rescue proved he had been right in saying you must always wear your ski patroller's jacket on the mountain. He said this incident confirms that you can never tell when you are going to have to save somebody's life—even when they are doing something as apparently harmless as snowshoeing!"

We all laughed.

Looking at Sandy, Marina said, "But I guess you won't be back on the mountain anytime soon."

"Oh, I am not promising that," Sandy responded.

Looking at Pierre, Fernando asked, "Do you remember why you and Adrian decided to go to Whistler Mountain that day instead of Grouse?"

"No...."

"You don't? You said Grouse Mountain was 'too tame.'"

"Boy, was I wrong," Pierre responded.

"Now I think we'll stick to just flying over it,"

Adrian agreed.

"How is that going?" Sandy asked.

"Well, mostly okay. I am on my last course for my pilot's licence, but it will be a while before I get enough flying hours to complete it."

"But that's fine because then you'll stay in the city longer," Sebastian commented and Pierre agreed.

A server arriving at our table interrupted the flow of this conversation. He took our orders. The young women with Barry looked so immature that I was sure the waiter was going to ask for their i.d. (Did they have any?)

The music was loud and rousing and the audience sang along, clapped, and stomped their feet.

Sandy and I intended to tell my friends about my UBC plans if there was a quiet moment. I was glad Juliana (not feeling well) had stayed home, because I wasn't eager to hear her potential cynical reaction. It was better too that Claudia wasn't with us (on a brief return to Taiwan), as the others might have resented that she knew of our plan so much earlier. Noboru and Sumi had respected our wish to keep our secret.

The boisterous music continued. To feel we were really celebrating St. Patrick's Day, most of us had dressed in something green. Barry, sporting an emerald and avocado tie (definitely not my taste!), was sitting between the two young students. He teased one of them for not wearing green, but she insisted that she was. She pushed aside the neckline of her low black sweater to show him the strap of her pale green camisole. Barry wiped his brow saying, "Phew."

Both of the girls giggled. This flirtatiousness seemed so immature compared to how Barry had conducted himself with Se-Eun and Claudia. I wondered if Nicole saw her former self in these two young women.

Finally there was a quiet moment as the band rested, so I told the group about my plans to attend UBC. Sitting next to each other on the upholstered bench, Sandy sat there with his

arm around my waist smiling at me. All were amazed and surprised that we had been planning this for so long.

"Oh, you are so lucky," said Nicole, a shared sentiment.

"I wish Song and I could stay here forever," Bae said, revealing that he was missing Song, who was still away.

With Noboru having known about my plans in advance, his accusatory attitude was now gone. Still, he was quiet as the others enjoyed our news and were pleased for Sandy and me.

Sebastian said, "It'll be great to have you both at UBC. Maybe you'll even get me to eat lunch on occasion."

"Lunch? What's that?" Sandy teased.

"Something a little more to eat than what we had on our night on the mountain."

"And maybe in more comfortable surroundings," I added.

"Well, only pros can afford to eat at Trekkers, and anything else is fairly unappealing or is more than a trek away."

Remembering the free concert that Mary had asked me to attend with her, I inquired, "Any chance you'll be able to get us some free tickets for music department performances?"

"Now, there's an idea that sounds promising—eating our own packed lunches while watching noon hour performances," Sandy commented.

"That's certainly possible," Sebastian said.

"Maybe we can even come to some of *your* performances."

"That would be even better. I hate conducting material for my exams to an empty hall," Sebastian concluded seriously.

"And did you say you'll still be around until the fall?" Sebastian asked, looking at Adrian.

"Yes, for sure."

"So, you'll stay too, Pierre?" Sandy asked.

"Yes, I'm not going anywhere without Adrian," Pierre answered looking affectionately at him. "Of course, in the meantime, someone in Vancouver could always offer me a job as a technology manager."

"Otherwise, Pierre seems destined to become even more of an expert in English," Adrian laughed.

"Nothing wrong with that," Sandy responded.





Second APRIL # 2—My Hilarious Birthday Party

Visuals: photographs of Asian food store, strawberry-whipped-cream cake, and spread of Korean and Japanese food

When we decided on a night for my delayed birthday dinner, Mary told me that eight is the maximum number that we can seat comfortably around the dining table.

When I seemed reluctant to accept this limited number, Mary offered not to come.

"I could greet your guests, and then just go to a friend's house."

"But Mary, you are the most important person to attend, otherwise we could just go to a restaurant. Language students want to talk with native speakers. Besides, I especially need you to talk with Barry while Sumi, Song, and I are cooking."

"All right then."

That settled it. I invited our entire class. How could I not? Mary may have worried about us being elbow to elbow at the table, but she did not mention it again.

After school on the day of the dinner, Sumi, Song, and I went shopping at the Asian food store near Stadium Skytrain station. Extraordinary selection. Too many decisions! We took much longer than we expected. So we were in a panic when we finally reached the apartment.

Mary was somewhat concerned about us being so late, and she was amazed as we came in loaded down with almost more groceries than the three of us could carry.

Soon bags were all over the kitchen floor leaning against the base of the counters and stove. We were stepping around them as we got out pots and pans, washed and cut vegetables, started to boil water, etc.

One large plastic bag was sitting over two of the four elements on the stove. Of course we put the heat on those elements! The bag melted and smelled disgusting. We couldn't scrape the plastic off the elements so we couldn't use them.

Also we didn't have a pan large enough to cook the vast quantity of rice that we had bought. Mary showed me a rice cooker belonging to her daughter, but she didn't know how to use it and there were no instructions. I decided not to risk experimenting. Well, I might as well have tried, because we immediately ruined two pots of rice, as we couldn't get enough water in either pot. The rice merely dried out and scorched on the bottom of the pan. Another terrible odor!

We ran around opening the windows, but of course the smell lingered. With the largest pans no longer usable, Song had to cook the Korean noodles in small batches. Time consuming!

As tense as Sumi, Song, and I were in wanting to come up with a wonderful Japanese/Korean dinner for our guests, and with so much going wrong, we started to laugh and couldn't stop. How could we be so out of control!

Meanwhile, Mary was at the dining room table putting the birthday candles on the strawberry-whipped-cream cake that she had made. This was all I would let her do. I told her that Sumi, Song, and I would take care of the rest.

But when we were making the beef with Korean noodles, sesame oil spilled on another element and caused a mini fire—a flash that immediately set off the fire alarm! That sound was so distressing. Made my heart beat faster. Mary rushed to our aid smothering the flames on the stove by putting a large lid on the flare up. She opened the main door. She was fanning the fire detector with a large bath towel trying to get the alarm to stop ringing as the first guests were buzzing the downstairs doorbell!

Thinking we might not be able to cook the dinner we planned, Mary pulled from a drawer the menus for two take-out restaurants. One Singaporean, the other Thai.

"These are quite reasonable and very good," she reassured us as she turned to greet guests who had arrived at the open door. From that moment, Mary was preoccupied with meeting guests and directing them into the living room.

Despite Mary's hint about ordering-in, Sumi, Song, and I were not about to give up on our dinner. We still had the oven, microwave, one element, and, as desperate as we were with the last part of the bag of rice, the rice cooker.

Almost all the guests arrived within a few minutes, as several of them had travelled together, including Barry and Claudia. They came directly from attending something downtown earlier in the day. As Barry helped Claudia remove her coat, he seemed to have returned to his mature self, a

welcome adjustment after seeing him flirting in the Irish pub with those young students. Barry presented me with a yellow and rust-coloured orchid, "for the birthday girl."

"Oh, how kind. Thanks so much."

I was surprised at this choice of gift knowing that I wouldn't be able to take it back to Japan with me, but it was thoughtful of him to bring me anything, since we had told him that the dinner was a combined effort of Sumi, Song, and me.

In entering the apartment, all our classmates must have noticed the smell of the smoke and seen the gray haze hanging over the stove, but they were kind enough not to mention them. Without a hint of concern, Mary cheerfully led them past the kitchen door into the living room. Sumi stepped aside and quietly embraced Noboru, a long, extended hug. Wordlessly he kissed the side of her neck. He didn't mention the smoke either.

Bae arrived with a large container of food.

"What's this?" I asked as he handed it to me.

"A Korean dish that I made."

"Oh, Bae, you didn't need to bring anything."

"But I wanted to."

"Well, this is very generous of you. Thanks so much."

Song took the container from me and took off its lid.

"Oh, great. Kimchi," she exclaimed. "We can always use kimchi, Bae!"

Mary was marvelous in keeping our classmates talking while Sumi, Song, and I dealt with the mini emergencies in the kitchen. We couldn't stop laughing as we speculated on what could go wrong next. Still we kept working at making one dish after another and crowding them into the oven to keep them warm. Luckily some Korean food doesn't have to be served piping hot.

Perhaps no one was more amazed than Mary when we finally called everyone into the dining room. Platters and platters of delicious-looking food were standing by or were already on the table. Hard to believe we had made them all—several vegetable platters, the beef with Korean noodles, a pork dish, seafood sushi, okonomiyaki, and yes, mounds of rice. We had finally resorted to the rice cooker and it worked perfectly!



Everyone squeezed together to get seated around the table. Mary was right that this would be awkward for elbows, but everyone was in good spirits and didn't seem to mind getting their serviettes mixed up. We settled into serious eating with much appreciation expressed. Several wanted to know the recipes for making some of the dishes.

In a quiet moment Barry turned the conversation to what Song's parents and mine had experienced while they were in Canada. For me that seems a lifetime away.

With the guys having been lost on the mountain, well, that has distanced everything before that. While the others seem to have moved on, that event still distorts so much for me. It has left a huge wound of awareness of how much I love and need Sandy and want my future and his to be shared. I feel vulnerable. Yes, more vulnerable now. However, I also feel somehow more secure in knowing that Sandy is on my side and wants to be at my side. Can feeling both more vulnerable and more secure at the same time be real?

I was distracted in the kitchen for a minute so I did not hear what Song had said about her parents' visit. I managed to answer Barry's enquiry in saying, "Mary was amused by the fact that my parents, having only a week in Canada, chose to go north to view the aurora borealis and east to see Niagara Falls."

Barry asked, "Do you know why Mary thought this was amusing?"

I held out my hand so that Mary might answer this question herself.

"Well, you can't see much of the county in one week, and Niagara Falls and the North are not first destinations for most Canadians, especially in winter."

Barry added, "True. If Canadians see Niagara Falls once, well, that is generally enough for them. And most Canadians have never even thought of going up north."

"Did your parents enjoy the aurora borealis, Erika?" asked Juliana.

"Oh, yes. They thought the lights were extremely beautiful. But it felt bitterly cold, despite the bulky red suits that the tour operators supply."

"And probably their companions were mainly other Japanese tourists, not Canadians. Right?" Mary said.

"Yes." Song added, "The same was true in Niagara Falls. Most of the tourists were Asian."

"I noticed that too," I added.

I explained, "My parents were terribly disappointed that they couldn't get to Prince Edward Island, but apparently lots of Canadians haven't gone there either."

“That was my parents’ first choice. Having seen Ann of Green Gables on television, well, it was a wonderful place to visit,” Song commented. “We just wished we had more time to spend there.”

Mary said, “I confess, many years ago, I drove across Prince Edward Island in six hours and felt that I’d ‘seen’ that province.”

“When you only have one week of holiday, you see what you can,” Song stated. “I returned to Korea with my parents to make the holiday seem longer, even though they went off to work during days that I was home.”

There was some quiet, serious eating when hardly anyone talked. I was somewhat preoccupied about when Sandy would be arriving. I delayed clearing off the table. He had phoned an hour earlier and apologized saying he would be unavoidably late, for a reason he would tell me about later. He asked me to save him some main course and said he would certainly be there in time for birthday cake.

While most of my classmates were happily taking second helpings of main course and talking without seeming to be in any hurry to get on with dessert, I felt as if I were waiting for Sandy. When the intercom buzzed, I was thrilled. Yes, a physical sensation. I left the table to greet Sandy. When I opened the door, he was standing there with a smile on his face.

“Happy birthday, Beautiful.”

He was carrying a big bouquet of spring flowers, his guitar (which I had asked him to bring if his fingers felt up to playing), and a small flat box. Still appreciating him even more from our previous weekend together and the scare of losing him on the mountain, I enjoyed our unrestrained kiss, leaning into each other against the wall just inside the entrance.

Claudia came out of the bathroom, smiled, walked around us, and wordlessly took the flowers from me to put them in water. Sandy encouraged me then to open his other gift—a single pearl drop on a fine gold chain.

“Oh, it is so stunning. I love it. But I don’t like to think of you spending your money on me.”

“Some of my bonus. From supervising the nightmare house at the top of the Properties while dad was away. It’s nice to end that distressing experience with a positive association.”

I turned the necklace over in my hands.

“It feels almost warm.”

“Good. Would you wear it continuously for me until you return from Japan?”

“Certainly. I’d like to do that.”

“Okay then, let me help you put it on.”

Doing up the small clasp was a challenge for Sandy as his fingertips are still not totally back to normal sensitivity. But with his arms around my shoulders, I didn't mind the delay in getting the two ends joined. That just extended our closeness and encouraged us to laugh a little. Finally he had the necklace secure and he lifted my hair out from underneath it, smoothing it out on my shoulders. For some reason this felt so intimate and calming.

I like knowing that I will always wear the pearl, as a way of having a little part of Sandy with me until I return to Vancouver. And under what circumstances will he help me off with it?

Sandy held my hand as we walked into the dining room. Everyone broke out clapping, and Noboru said, "Ah, our hero returns."

I felt so proud of Sandy. Was Sandy's mom right in suggesting that I can be proud of him now too? The group knows that, according to Noboru and Sebastian, Sandy saved their lives. And, for me personally, Sandy is the reason I will be returning to Vancouver. To be studying architecture here. In front of my friends, it felt so wonderful to stand there with Sandy, his arm around my waist.

"So the two of you plan to attend UBC together," said Juliana in an almost confrontational tone, similar to what Noboru's had been originally. Juliana had not been at the Irish pub to hear our explanation then.

"Yes, we do," Sandy stated firmly and smiled at me.

"I guess I shouldn't be surprised."

"How do you mean this?"

"Well, I figured you were somehow going to change the rules, Erika."

"Change the rules?"

"Well, not go home."

"Staying here was not my original intention."

Abruptly ending this exchange, Juliana asked, "How did you get the bruised eye, Sandy?"

I was surprised at this question, as Sandy's eyelid now shows only a slight trace of bluish-mauve, almost like eye shadow. Then I realized Juliana was probably making this comment based on what she had heard about his eye rather than what she was seeing.

I looked at Sandy with interest, as I still didn't know the answer to this question. Sandy sat down with me at the table.

"Maybe we should have the cake before we get into anything like that," Sandy said to avoid answering.

"Yes," Sumi said. "But first we must make sure everyone's had enough main course."

"Sandy, help yourself before we clear the table," Song said as she passed him the dish of pork noodles.

"I'd love to. Such variety and it all looks so delicious. It looks like you have been working on this for days."

Mary got up to help remove the dishes we had finished with, but Song said, "Mary, remember you are our guest."

"After all the work the three of you have done...."

"It's okay."

Claudia joined Sumi and Song in doing the clean up so that I could continue to sit with Sandy as he ate. With just a bit of direction from Mary as to where things go, the three of them were remarkably efficient. A few minutes later the counters were mainly clear again. Sumi brought the cake, with candles lit, to the dining table. Everyone broke out into spontaneous singing of "Happy Birthday" to me.

I had no trouble coming up with my wish. Yes, it included Sandy. When I blew out all 24 candles in one breath, every one cheered and clapped.

Then in a leisurely manner, we enjoyed tea or wine, with Mary's wonderfully tasty cake covered with strawberries and whipped cream. As some of the group were wandering back into the living room, Mary said goodbye and left, having arranged for a late night visit with another night-owl friend. I suspect she was just trying to give the group and, later, Sandy and me, some time to be alone.

Sandy was finishing his final bites of cake. Juliana, with an insinuating tone that only she can muster, confronted him by saying, "So how was last weekend, Sandy? I hear Erika has been helping you with your *recovery*."

What a ridiculous thing to utter. Did I see Sandy blush somewhat? If so, I am not surprised. I was certainly embarrassed. That made it sound like our cherished time together is something I have been discussing, complete with intimate details, with all my girlfriends, which is definitely not true.

Luckily, we were spared having to respond to Juliana directly when someone rang the doorbell. It was baby Tyler's mother from across the hall. Sandy and I went to the door together.

"Hi Erika."

"Hello, I hope we are not making too much noise."

I was glad that there were birthday streamers on the door suggesting this was a special occasion.

"No, not at all. I was just wondering if your would-be pediatrician is with you tonight."

"Oh, our pediatrician...." I smiled.

Nicole, somehow alert to what was going on, heard this, and coming to the door, responded, "Yes, our will-be pediatrician is here tonight, and so is his assistant," she responded in presenting herself.

"Would it be possible for you to look after Tyler while I go and check on my mother who is not feeling well? My husband will be home to retrieve Tyler in 15 or 20 minutes."

"Of course, we can do that," Nicole responded.

"Okay, I'll get Tyler."

Meanwhile Nicole called Fernando to the door and explained what was happening.

Fernando said hello, reintroduced himself, and received Tyler from his mother's arms into his. Tyler was almost asleep.

"As I said, his father should be home momentarily to retrieve him. Thanks so much."

Fernando and Nicole returned to the living room and sat down. Tyler instantly fell asleep in Fernando's arms without making a peep, and Nicole held Tyler's tiny foot.

I went back to the dining room table to sit with Sandy as he finished his dinner.

I said, "Sandy, I was embarrassed at Juliana's comment about my helping with your recovery. That statement had so much innuendo in it that simply isn't true. I want to assure you that I have never discussed any details of our private life with her or any of my other girlfriends."

"That *was* an awkward moment, but by now I understand what Juliana can be like. How some assertions coming out of her mouth can sound tasteless and insinuating. But I think most of the others probably understand that too."

"I purposely haven't shared any specifics about our closeness with anyone, because that would dilute the value of those experiences for me."

"Don't worry, Er. I trust your discretion completely."

I still love hearing Sandy use the word *trust* in reference to anything that applies to me.

A knock on the door again ended a conversation. Tyler's grateful father came and retrieved the baby.

Marina said, "Erika and Sandy, if you are finished eating, please come in and join us now. We have a gift for you, Erika."

Sebastian and Marina gave up their spot on the sofa to us as we came into the living room.

My classmates had brought me a combined gift so I opened just one gift-wrapped box, as the others chatted and laughed. The gift was a rose, pink, and grey tee shirt that had a drawn image showing two cities, Tokyo and Vancouver, with many flight paths connecting them that were sprinkled with symbols of various passenger jets.

"Wow! Where did you ever find this?" I asked, amazed that they had come up with something so relevant and personal.

"We didn't. Someone in our talented group designed it and then we had it printed."

"Someone?"

"Actually *two* of our artistic classmates."

"Guess."

"Song?"

"Yes. And?"

"Sumi."

"How did you know!?"

"Have a look at the back," Song responded.

I turned the shirt over. Everyone in the group had signed on the back with their name and a greeting to me.

"We decided to put our personal greetings here to avoid giving you a lot of cards that won't fit in your suitcase."

"Good planning. I'll especially enjoy wearing this whenever I am feeling stuck in Tokyo and just wanting to get a plane back here to Sandy."

Sandy laughed and said, "But maybe you should avoid wearing the shirt around your dad this summer."

"You are right. A potential future life of trans-Pacific flights is not something my dad will want to be reminded of. So this will be my subversive tee shirt. I'll wear it covered it with something else at times when my dad's around and I need to strengthen my resolve as he attempts to undermine Sandy and the life I am choosing."

"Ah, the rebellious daughter," Marina laughed. "You'd never know to look at you, Erika."

Soon, with everyone in the living room, Juliana spoke up, changing the tone again. She looked at Sandy and firmly stated, "So, about your eye..."

Sandy picked up his guitar as if he were about to start a song. Noboru looked around. Addressing Sandy directly, Noboru asked, "Haven't you even told Erika?"

Noboru looked at me. I guess I looked as blank as I felt on this subject.

Sandy strummed a couple of cords on his guitar in a noncommittal way.

"Noboru, I think it's time it came out," Juliana said.

"Keeping it to yourself is probably harder on you."

"What it is?" Marina asked and then added, "I think there is a lot we don't know about that night. Sebastian has been silent on some questions too."

All of a sudden Sebastian also looked more serious than usual, as if he too would just as soon avoid full disclosure. He

reached into his backpack and brought out a recorder, which I didn't know he could play.

"Sure, maybe talking could be good. Help lessen my feeling of guilt," Noboru finally admitted.

"So tell us," Adrian said.

"Well, simply put, there was, well almost, a fistfight," Noboru admitted.

"A fistfight?! Between whom?"

Sandy still didn't look up.

"After I refused to follow Sandy's advice that we should stay together and build a shelter rather than try to hike back to the lodge in the blizzard, well, I turned my back on him."

"Turned your back on him," Fernando repeated, as if assessing this fact.

"Yes, I was determined to try to return to the lodge."

"Against Sandy's advice? When you knew he is aware of what that mountain can do," Marina uttered.

"Yes, against his advice."

"So...."

"Well, Sandy knew that digging in, building a refuge, was our only chance of survival," Noboru explained.

"Yes?"

"So he grabbed my shoulder as I turned to leave. He tried to stop me. And yes, I reached around and hit him."

"Oh," several of the group said in unison.

"Hit him in the eye. As hard as I could, given that I was wearing gloves."

"No...." Sumi exhaled.

"Yes, I was the one who caused Sandy's swollen eye."

"Noboru, how could you under those circumstances, when Sandy was trying to save your life?" Marina asked.

"I know, I know, I've asked myself that a thousand times since then."

"So then what happened?" asked Song who, being away, had missed seeing any media coverage. "Your sister's orange and red knitted hat saved you?"

"No, I'm afraid that hat wasn't enough to save me."

"So what happened?"

"I was determined that I wasn't going to spend the night outside in that blizzard. I was sure I could find my way back to the lodge. So I headed up the hill on my snowshoes."

"How far did you get?" Marina asked.

"Oh, perhaps hardly even out of sight if there had been normal visibility."

"Which there wasn't," Sebastian added. "Snow was blowing horizontal."

"Yes, it was very slow trying to trudge up the hill against the wind. And, in the failing light, I soon realized that the trail was fast becoming obliterated. At the top of series of small slopes, I huddled against the trunk of a tree as I struggled, in my frozen gloves, to open my backpack and eat my remaining, limited, snack food," Noboru explained.

"And then what?" Song asked.

"In a muddled way, and still feeling rather spiteful toward Sandy for seeming to know everything, I considered what to do. Finally I decided I would have a better chance of getting back to Sandy and Sebastian than I would in getting any closer to the lodge. Reluctantly I started back down the hill."

"Thank goodness you came to your senses," Juliana interjected.

"Yes, even heading downhill was slow going in the gale-force gusts. The snowdrifts were getting deep, and I was feeling exhausted. By that time I could barely see anything for the snow and darkness, so I just kept struggling to walk downward. Luckily I more or less stumbled into the mounded shelter at the bottom of a hill."

"Meanwhile, what had you been doing, Sandy and Sebastian?" Fernando asked.

Sebastian commented, "After digging the narrow trench and covering it with packed snow, Sandy and I crawled in, pulling more snow behind us."

"And then?"

"We emptied our backpacks to use them as a covering on the narrow snow floor. We considered our food supply—Sandy's sandwich, near frozen fruit, cookies, and trail mix, and my corn chips, pear, and thin slice of pizza. We decided to eat my stuff in the hope of regaining some energy. Just as we were finishing those few bites, there in the dark of our low-ceiling burrow, something began pawing through the wall. We were momentarily terrified, at least I was."

"Oh, my gosh," Aidan said, with much empathy.

I looked at Sandy. He was poised as if he was not hearing this and just wanted to start playing some music.

"The wind moaning around our snow structure blocked out any identifiable sound," Sebastian added.

"Yeah, by then the wind was so loud I couldn't communicate with you from the outside," Noboru said. "It's a good thing you didn't have a gun, or you might have shot me as I tried to force my way in."

"You're right. I think we, I, might have. I thought you were probably a mountain lion as you broke through," Sebastian stated, not in jest.

"Despite this, they didn't look exactly pleased to see me when I crashed in," Noboru told us.

"Well, I guess not, since we didn't have room for you," Sebastian responded.

"So, yeah, I was an interloper."

"You were in pretty bad shape. Incoherent and shaking," Sebastian added. "While Sandy worked at widening the space and reconstructing the roof, he had me lie on top of you to try to give you some of my body heat."

"Heat is a bit strong as a word," Noboru commented.

"It's true. I didn't really have any heat to give."

Sebastian added, "Sandy was on his knees and elbows trying to avoid standing up in the wind as he tried to patch the roof and to pack together, and pull around us, more snow. Once our snow tunnel was impenetrable again, except for a small air passage, Sandy, in the dark, and despite what must have been a painful eye, emptied Noboru's backpack and managed (I am not sure how) to rip apart Noboru's micro umbrella to serve as additional ground sheeting for us to lie on."

"Your precious umbrella, Noboru?" Juliana asked, "I've borrowed that umbrella on more than one occasion."

"Well, it was precious." Noboru confirmed. "But you won't be borrowing it again. We all lay there, exhausted in a heap, listening to the wind howling only a thin snow-wall away."

"And Sandy, with his swollen eye almost sealed over, kept telling us we must not fall asleep. Saying we would die if we fell asleep," Sebastian added.

"Wow," Pierre commented, noticeably touched by what this must have felt like, knowing that death really seemed to be waiting for them.

Noboru and Sebastian paused in their commentary as if in deep thought.

Marina questioned, "So do you have any confessions, Sebastian?"

"Me? Well, yes. I do," he said, setting his recorder across his lap. "So I should own up too. Since I owe my life to Sandy, and especially my feet."

"Your feet?" Song asked.

"Like Noboru, I am not proud of my behaviour. In fact my scouting master would be terribly disappointed in me."

"Your scouting master!" Juliana hooted.

Sebastian ignored this. He had become very serious again.

He cleared his throat and said, "Well, after Noboru went off on his own, Sandy and I made the structure with our hands in stiff, frozen gloves. But Noboru came back."

"Yeah, yeah. But what about your feet, Sebastian?"

"Well, we were all suffering from freezing feet. I decided that if I took off my boots I could put both feet in my plastic lunch bag, so I could rub them together, and that might seem warmer. Sandy knew this was a bad idea—taking off my boots. He knew I needed the protection of the boot even though it was frozen. And I see that now."

"So did you take them off?"

"Well, I started to, so Sandy had to stop me. There was a bit of a skirmish."

"Not another one!"

"And in that scuffle, I put my foot, well, actually one of my overly long legs through the end of our tiny enclosure."

"Oh, Sebastian!"

"Yah. Yah. I know. But that brought me to my senses, as Sandy crawled around on his elbows again to patch up the damage before we all perished from the blizzard force wind now blowing into what had been our enclosed space."

"And wasn't there another incentive?" Noboru reminded Sebastian.

"You know there was."

"What was that?" Fernando asked.

"Sandy offered us his food if I kept my shoes on."

"So I left them on and Noboru and I devoured his ham and cheese sandwich, homemade cookies, and fruit. They were the best I've ever eaten. The three of us were then left with nothing more to eat. That did convince me of how important Sandy thought it was to stay in our frozen boots."

"I guess it was a good thing that you were rescued the next day then, so you didn't starve to death."

"I'll say!"

"Sandy didn't let us think about that possibility. He kept a countdown to daylight," Sebastian explained. "Occasionally we'd check the time in the glow from Noboru's watch. How I loved that tiny spot of light even though it was blue."

"Yes," Noboru added. "Sandy kept telling us how many hours we had until daylight. He promised us that ski patrollers and search and rescue guys would then come and get us. He kept us hopeful by his great faith in the ski patrollers being there in the lodge waiting, ready to search for us at daybreak when the storm would end."

"And he talked as if the snow was obviously going to stop then, so all we were really waiting for was daylight."

"Yes, he never let us consider what would happen if the storm went on beyond that."

Sebastian added, "Sandy had us tell stories of our best holidays in warm climates and describe what we looked forward to most in the future."

Noboru interrupted in saying, "He also had each of us recount, in turn, all the memories we had from before age five, and then from age five to ten, then ten to fifteen, and so on."

Sebastian added, "At one point he even tried to get us singing, but that took more energy than we had. Noboru especially was too far gone for that. He seemed to keep slipping from us. Sandy repeatedly shook us when we were on the edge of dozing, when we no longer cared what would happen to us if we did go to sleep."

"Actually I really wanted to sleep so that I could just get the whole ordeal over with," Noboru admitted.

Sandy looked as if he were wishing this conversation would end, but Noboru continued.

"Sandy kept telling us to think of Erika, and Sumi, and Marina, waiting for us back in the lodge. In the warm lodge. Sitting there, worrying, but expecting us to survive. Wanting us to survive. He even told us that our children wanted us to survive."

I looked at Sandy again. Now he was blushing for sure. I touched his knee, but he refused to acknowledge me. Still looking down at his guitar strings, he strummed a couple of chords.

Sebastian said, "Even though Noboru and I were just wanting to go to sleep, forever, to get out of our pain from the cold, Sandy kept encouraging us to think about something worth trying to stay alive for."

Despite holding his recorder with both hands, looking like he would like to start playing, Sebastian dared to ask, "And didn't Sandy offer you another incentive, Noboru?"

Sandy quickly looked up at Noboru with a look I'd never seen before. Alarm. Yes, it seemed to be alarm.

"Huh, well..." Noboru hesitated.

Perhaps feeling the awkwardness in the air, Bae pointedly asked, "And how did the rescue occur, Sandy? The rescue."

Sandy's faced relaxed. By comparison this seemed to be a question he was willing to answer. Still, slowly, he responded, "Well, we heard the helicopter pass over us at daybreak. But we didn't know whether or not they had spotted us. We didn't know if they'd seen the large SOS letters we'd stamped out."

"That's when Sandy decided we should fill in those huge letters with branches," Sebastian added.

"So, Sandy set to knocking heavy snow off frozen tree boughs and then somehow breaking them off with his already

frozen hands," Noboru commented. "Meanwhile Sebastian and I kept guard with a huge branch each, ready to flag down anyone flying over."

"And the sound of the returning helicopter was at least as wonderful to us as it had been to Erika, Sumi, and Marina as they have described it," Sebastian added.

"So that's how they found you," Nicole commented.

"Yes."

"And found you alive," Fernando emphasized.

"Yah," Sebastian and Noboru commented with much apparent gratitude.

"I think we are both equally ashamed of opposing Sandy's advice," Sebastian admitted.

"For sure," Noboru commented.

And without saying anything more, it was apparent that lying on top of each other all night while sharing their biographies had bonded the three of them like nothing else is ever likely to do. I was glad that Noboru and Sandy's relationship could never again be primarily one of competitiveness over me.

When Noboru directly stated that he owed his life to Sandy, Sandy responded, "I am glad to have been able to do this for you, Noboru, especially since you rescued Erika on that very same mountain last summer. You may have saved Erika's life or, at very least, spared her possible trauma from encountering at least one bear in the area."

I had forgotten about this. That this was the same mountain where, without Noboru's help, my life could have been threatened. It seemed such a different place during the blizzard from what it had been during that hot August climb on Sumi's birthday. I was glad that Sandy had thought about this. And that Sandy and Noboru both believed that they owed something to each other, if indirectly in Sandy's case.

After this revealing discussion, Claudia finally suggested that we should have a singsong. With some relief to stop talking about the blizzard, Sandy started strumming his guitar more purposefully.

Noticing Band-Aids on Sandy's fingers, Claudia added with concern, "But are your fingers okay to play, Sandy?"

"They are still a little tender and not agile, but slow songs are okay."

"And since when do you play the recorder, Sebastian?" Juliana asked.

"Only since I mistakenly heard that it is the Canadian national musical instrument."

"Mistakenly?"

"Yes. Someone later corrected this fact informing me that it is the equally humble ukulele that holds this honour."

"Which is why he plays that now too," Marina smiled.

"Really!"

"Well, I realized both are handy to carry around."

"So you just picked that one up and began to play it too?" Pierre asked in amazement.

"Well, in knowing a few other instruments...."

"Ah, our multi-talented, will-be conductor," Adrian added.

"Just don't tell anyone outside this group," Sebastian said, somewhat embarrassed. "The recorder and ukulele are not considered serious instruments for an aspiring conductor."

As others gathered up various sound makers to contribute to the singsong, Sandy quietly asked, "Erika, will you help with your flute?"

"Sure," I said, as I headed to my room to retrieve it.

With spoon on a beer can, fork on a wine glass, etc., the others were ready to provide percussion.

Sandy, playing by ear, soon started to respond to requests, as did Sebastian. I tried to follow along with at least a simple melody. The others sang. There was a lot of good feeling in the group in making this music together.

Toward the end of the evening, someone specifically asked Sandy to sing the song he sang on the beach to me in the summer. I was surprised when Sandy declined saying, "Right now it is still in process, and I want Erika to hear it in its final form first."

Juliana surprised me in stating diplomatically, "Of course, Erika must hear it first, since it is your personal love song to her, right?"

Sandy blushed slightly and didn't answer.

Juliana added, "Oh, all you romantic types.... I've just remembered that I want you to see some of my wedding video."

"Wedding video?"

"Yes. You've all inspired me. So a couple weeks ago I decided that when I go home, I want to try to rekindle some romance with my husband."

"Well, good."

"Yes, I am determined to try to reconnect and reawaken the feelings that we had at the time of our marriage. So I asked Marcello to send me our wedding video, and he did. Actually, he put it in the mail, express, the very same day!"

"Oh, I want to see it," Song purred.

"Okay, I'll put it on in Erika's room so you can each catch a few minutes of it as we gather up our coats, etc."

"Great," Sumi said.

"Since I've received it, I've been thoroughly analyzing what it reveals."

"So are you in love again?" Sebastian asked.

"Well, heading in that direction," she smiled happily.

Song and Juliana had the video on by the time we went into my room. Several stood watching it.

"Such a beautiful guy, right?" Juliana said, as the video showed her groom waiting at the altar of the cathedral when she approached in her flowing white gown.

Answering her own question, she stated, "Yes, he's my man."

"And see how he's looking at you...." Nicole commented.

"Yes. How can you ignore that?" Marina added.

"That's just it. I am determined to recover those feelings."

When the North Shore people decided they had to leave to catch the next bus, we all gathered at the door. Sandy stood with his arm around my waist as if he were now willing to take on the role of partner-host in saying goodbye to our guests.

To Sandy, Noboru said, "Goodnight, Man," as he touched Sandy's upper arm, and to me he said, "Goodnight, Aunt Erika," as kissed me on the cheek. I was perplexed by the designation for suggesting a kind of extended family and platonic connection between Noboru and me. Sumi must have noticed my confused expression because she whispered in my ear, "It's okay, Erika. Tell Sandy that Noboru won't hold him to his offer."

I didn't understand this, but the two of them then left us without giving further explanation.

After we closed the door, I mentioned this to Sandy. All he said was that maybe I should ask Sumi what Noboru has told her.

Sandy probably thought that would be the end of this conversation, but when he and I were later sitting at the dining table having a snack of carrot zucchini muffins and green tea, I approached the subject again.

"Why can't you tell me about the term, 'Aunt Erika'?"

"Can't we have one secret between us, Er?"

"Why should we need to, Sandy?"

He didn't respond and just looked down into his teacup as if it were 20 metres deep.

"Sandy, something happened during the blizzard that still hasn't come out."

Sandy proceeded to make a great art of spreading fig jam evenly on half a muffin.

"Why are you afraid to tell me, embarrassed to tell me? It's not as if the you and Noboru had sex on that mountain."

"Erika!"

Actually I was surprised that I'd said something that crude, but I continued in asking, "Well, what could be so difficult to admit? How could I think differently of you now for whatever happened between the two of you."

Sandy got up from the table and took our cups and plates to the sink and washed and dried them and his hands, and proceeded to head into the living room.

I stood up to follow him there.

"Sandy...."

"Surely I can have one secret, Erika. Haven't you ever kept a secret from me?"

"No."

"Never?"

"Never."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh.... Okay. One."

"Aha! So you needed to keep a secret from me?"

"I didn't want to worry you."

"About what?"

"I once had dinner with Noboru alone. At Troll's Restaurant. On the way back from hiking on Bowen Island. Just before Noboru was to return to Japan."

I sat down on the sofa beside Sandy.

Calmly he asked, "So why didn't you tell me?"

"Sandy, have you forgotten your irrational fear of my being unfaithful to you with Noboru?"

"It's something I'm glad now to forget."

I took Sandy's hand.

"That was a painful time for me, Sandy. Feeling like I needed to protect you constantly regarding my friendship with Noboru. Besides I was still getting over the suspicions, the hurt, I had from thinking you were being unfaithful to me."

"So glad we got through all that."

"And we can survive this now, Sandy. Why couldn't we?"

"I'm afraid you could see this as a betrayal of you if you don't consider the circumstances."

"The circumstances...."

"Yes. Understanding that when you're trying to keep a person alive, trying to give them some will power... well, you say things."

"So what did you tell Noboru?"

"Okay, Erika. If you need to know...."

"I do."

"Well, I told Noboru he could be godfather to our first child."

"Sandy, you said what!"

"I know. I know how ridiculous this sounds now. Out of context. And I'm especially embarrassed by the assumptions."

"So that's why Sumi said Noboru won't hold you to it."

"She said that?"

"Yes. That's what she said."

"Has that got anything to do with why you ignored all the media coverage? For fear that the prying newspaper or tv interviewers got Noboru or Sebastian to reveal that?"

"Perhaps."

"But obviously Noboru and Sebastian didn't say anything that personal. The media never mentioned that when they reported on what kept Noboru and Sebastian alive. At least not in any news coverage I saw."

"Well, I'm glad."

"Besides, I like to think of a child in our future too."

"You do?"

"Yes. Don't you?"

"Providing the timing is right, yes, I admit that could be wonderful. To be that together."

"And maybe having Noboru as godfather ... well, maybe that's an idea I could get used to."

"Really?" Sandy commented with a smile.

"Well, let's see how things work out amongst the four of us. How closely we stay in touch."

"So you are not mad at me, Er?"

"No. You couldn't have asked me first. You hardly suspected that on some occasion you were going to have to keep Noboru alive."

"Thanks for understanding this, Erika."

"Now Noboru may be using the term 'Aunt Erika' as a reminder of his debt to you, Sandy. An acknowledgment of what you were willing to offer him to save his life."





Second APRIL # 3—Visiting Studio, Taking My Luggage to Sandy’s House

Visuals: photographs of the studio, the development, and view from Sandy’s house

Even getting my luggage out of my closet to start packing to go home was making me unhappy. So many students become despondent in facing their return to their country, as this implies going back to jobs and a regular routine, saying goodbye to friends and Vancouver, and giving up personal freedom to being ruled by family expectations and social pressure. I must not take out my despair on Sandy.

After Sumi, Noboru, and I had rebooked our flight, Sandy suggested that I give him for safekeeping any of my belongings that I will want for UBC but that I will not need in Japan in the next couple of months. I like the thought of this—of Sandy looking after some of my stuff so it will be here waiting for me at his house when I come back. Somehow this makes my return seem more certain.

Sandy also said he will enjoy seeing some of my luggage in the bottom of his closet as a way to prove that I am real, that I am not just his most extravagant dream. I like this idea too. That he is glad of this assurance.

So I packed a suitcase with winter clothes, including the boots I bought here, and two boxes of books and papers that I won’t be needing in Japan. On his way home from UBC, Sandy came by to pick them up. There’s no way I could have got all

this on a plane! Yet I haven't been aware of buying much (at least not the way Sumi has for instance!).

"Why would you leave the orchid with me?" Sandy asked, looking somewhat anxious in seeing the plant sitting in the hallway next to my suitcase. "I don't know anything about looking after plants."

"Sandy, you are an intelligent guy. And look, there are instructions here. I am sure you can manage to keep it blooming. Whenever you think of me, just think of caring for the plant."

"How often should I water it?"

"About once a week."

"You think I am only going to think of you once a week?"

"Well, maybe more often than that," I smiled at him.

"I'll over-water it for sure. My mother wasn't even able to keep an orchid in flower for a month."

I finally realized that Sandy somehow equates keeping the plant living with keeping our bond alive. That's why he was not willing to risk letting the orchid die.

"Okay. I'll ask Claudia. At my birthday party she said she loves orchids and told me about her experience of growing them."

I phoned Claudia on the spot.

"Okay, Sandy. You, and apparently our relationship, have been saved. Claudia has agreed to care for the orchid while I am away."

"What a relief!"

The trip to take my belongings to Sandy's house was also to serve as my goodbye visit with his parents. They had invited us to dinner. Sandy had casually mentioned making two stops on the way there. We also agreed that we would return to the apartment together for the weekend.

"So what are the two stops to be?" I asked, once we were in the car.

"A surprise."

"What kind of a surprise?"

"Points of interest."

"Tourist attractions?"

"Attractions? Yes, but not tourist spots. At least not for the average tourist. But then you are not the average tourist."

We were crossing Lion's Gate Bridge.

"Come on, Sandy, what are the attractions?"

"Did it never occur to you to ask to see the studio?"

"Your father's studio?"

"Yes. Before agreeing to work with us, you should probably check it out first."

"I'd love to see it."

"Well, good, because that's where we're heading."

"Wonderful."

We were on Marine Drive. In a couple of minutes we turned into a lane and drove into a parking lot at the back of a two-storey, relatively new building. We got out of the car. Sandy unlocked a ground floor door to a stairway.

"I suppose it would be more impressive going in the front entrance, but...."

At the head of the stairs we opened another door onto a large open room that was glowing with late afternoon sunlight. About fifteen drafting tables were in this open space, and some individual offices and a presentation room were along one wall. Wordlessly we walked through the open office toward the front where there was a reception area with a stylish desk and chairs and large, healthy plants under a skylight.

"Wow, what a lovely space."

"Yeah, it is good, isn't it?"

From a tray on the front desk, Sandy wordless picked up an envelope and put it in his jacket pocket, and then we returned to the open office.

"So, do you have a particular work area?"

"Yes, over here."

"Oh, of course."

Sandy's drafting table was recognizable by a familiar pullover on the back of his chair. The accompanying large computer on the side table had some of Sandy's small drawings taped to it. A small radio with earphones, a coffee cup featuring a sketch of a house by Frank Lloyd Wright (Sandy's architect hero), and a telephone pad covered with Sandy's telltale doodles were also there. There was a waist-high storage unit containing rolled blueprints and his hardhat was hanging from a hook on the side of it.

"You may notice that my place is closest to the photocopy room. That says something about my status here. Definitely no special treatment for the son of a partner."

"And your dad's office? That one in the corner?"

"Yes."

"Very nice. Where do you think I would sit?"

"Probably here. Andre's former space."

"Andre's?"

"Yes, he has recently retired."

"So behind you," I said, to tease Sandy.

"Yes, but there is no symbolism here. It just happens to be the place that is available." Sandy smiled.

I wandered around and noticed that between the two washrooms there was a room marked "Shower."

"There's a shower?" I asked.

"Yes, it just happened to be in the original building before we did our renovations so we kept it. But it has been surprisingly useful, especially to Dad. It often saves him a trip home when he's going from work directly to an event or from an event directly to work."

"And is this the darkroom you mentioned?"

"Yes."

"May I peak in?"

"Of course."

I stood in the doorway and touched a light switch that turned on a red light, showing a sink and trays on a countertop with closed, overhead and under-counter cupboards; a heavy-looking, inverted, camera-like piece of equipment; and a large paper cutter. I noticed that turning on the inside red light also activated a red light outside the door that said, "Do not enter."

"Wow. Very professional," I commented.

I followed Sandy into the presentation room, which was like a boardroom with a large oval table surrounded by eight executive chairs. Along the interior side of the room, a wall unit of shelves served as a library reference area and display space.

"And that model, did you help build it?"

"Yes, that's the one I told you I was working on last summer. That along with a lot of the other presentation materials for that complex."

"Wow, it's beautiful and so involved. I had no idea that you would make a proposal on such a large project."

"And build it."

"You won the contract?"

"Yes. We'll go and see it now."

"See it? I don't remember you saying that you'd been awarded the contract."

"I'm sure I must have told you, Erika. You probably just pictured it as something other than it is. But come in here first."

We went into the room with open shelves holding the photocopier, fax machine, and other equipment.

"Try this," Sandy said, choosing a hardhat and then standing in front of me and putting it on my head. Alone in the quiet building, this felt quite intimate, being face to face with Sandy as he did up the buckle under my chin.

"What do you think?"

"Hard to tell."

He took the first one off.

"Would this one fit better?"

He put a second one on my head and helped me adjust the clasp. It felt better immediately.

"This one is perfect."

"Okay, bring it along with us."

"So we are going to the site?"

"Yes, our final attraction."

"Our final attraction, Sandy? I don't think so."

Sandy smiled in hearing this.

"You're right, definitely *not* our final attraction. Just our last stop before supper."

Carrying our hardhats, we returned down the same stairs. Sandy locked the exterior door and we got back into the car and headed east.

"Is it far?"

"No. A couple of minutes."

Soon we turned right and drove to a business/light industrial area off the main road that I wouldn't have imagined being there. But as we approached, I could see the building stand out among the other mainly two-storey buildings. It is a five-storey, two-square-block, multi-purpose development that is still under construction.

"Is this commercial and residential?"

"Yes, that's the whole point of it. To provide housing for people who will be working in the commercial space and providing services to the area with the government offices. So one can work and live in the same location."

"So your dad's group designed this?"

"Yes."

"Mary would love this. Living and working in the same place, as if in the post-automobile era."

"Interesting that you should say this, because I think the *pre*-automobile era was actually the inspiration. Its goal is to be a largely, self-contained village or community for living and working. That's why it is called the Urban Village—aiming for the best of both realities."

"Amazing."

"The assumption is that people living here won't have cars because it is just two blocks off the bus route. That's why there is no parking for residents."

"Very daring."

"Yes, fairly."

We walked toward a main door.

"Hardhat time," Sandy said.

I love the way putting on a hardhat seems to instantly turn Sandy into an architect.

"What kinds of commercial businesses will be in here?"

“Commercial? Well, a mid-sized grocery store and bakery, plant shop, a yoga studio, health food store, naturopath’s office, credit union, clothing store, café, childcare centre, and a seniors’ centre. These are all at street level.”

For a few minutes we wordlessly walked on the cement floor between metal studs and looked around. As impressive as this all seemed to me, I could tell that it meant much more to Sandy in terms of where it all had come from and what it is to become. One minute he was looking at the still-open ceiling showing heating ducts and electrical conduits, the next he was noting something about the walls or the floors.

“This segment is attached to the building on the other side of the street by that glass overpass with these stairs and that elevator. It is the seniors’ daycare centre we are in now. The internal walls will be put up soon to separate its dining room, lounge, library, nurse’s office, craft room, etc. This is the fun part of any project, when you can finally see daily progress as the building takes shape.”

“So this is the lounge?”

“Yes, to here,” he said, walking to a row of studs.

“The second floor will have various offices for government services, and the housing is on the upper floors including one complete floor which will operate as a housing co-op.”

“Wow, so is this project partially funded by government?”

“Yes. That’s why there has been such a lot of red tape, and why I’ve spent so much of my time at the permits office, as well as dealing with a lot of details.”

“What incredible co-operation that must have required.”

“True, and political will.”

We continued to walk on the cement floor but in an area with large windows facing north.

“These are to be artist studios with lofts. The walls and interior stairways will also go in here this week. Just a second....”

Sandy climbed back through the metal studs of the three identical spaces. He was looking intently at the floors and moving some rubble aside with his foot in the centre of each floor.

After a couple of minutes he came back toward me.

I said, “Sandy, I’ve just noticed the time.”

“Oh, you’re right. We should be on our way, so we don’t hold up supper.”

Once back in the car and heading back to West Van, I said, “Thank you for showing me the Village. Seeing it has given me so much insight into what you’ve been involved with in the past year.”

"Yeah. Otherwise I guess it can be hard to imagine. I'm just surprised I never thought to show any of this to you earlier."

"Well, your Dad only recently offered me a job...."

"But still, just out of interest...."

"Yes, if I had known last summer, I could have understood why you were working such long hours."

Sandy turned off Taylor Way, so we were almost there.

"Don't let me forget to take your luggage into the house after all of this."

"I'm glad of the reminder, as I had momentarily forgotten about it too."

As Sandy drove down the driveway, he said, "Looks like Simon and Sue are joining us for dinner."

"That's their car?"

"Yes. Mom was thinking of asking them."

Simon greeted me at the front door in a way that was warmer than I expected. He was in a suit and with a big smile. Does he always wear a suit (I've never seen him any other way)?

I was confused when he said, "I understand you may be joining us when you return from Japan."

Without thinking, I responded, "Joining you?"

"At the studio."

"Oh, are you...."

Carrying my suitcase and a carton past us, Sandy said, "Erika, did I never mention that Simon is Dad's partner?"

"Oh, I somehow missed that."

Sandy continued toward his room.

"I knew you were close, long-time friends...."

Sandy's dad stepped forward and interjected, "Yes, long-time friends and we've also...."

"Put up with each other as business partners for nearly 35 years!" Simon laughed.

"Have you?"

Returning from his room, Sandy gave his dad the envelope he'd picked up at the office. His dad received it without comment beyond saying, "Oh, right."

Sandy's mom came out of the kitchen and greeted me and led me toward the dining room, saying, "Dinner is ready, Erika. And you remember Sue."

"Of course. Hello, Sue."

As this came out, I realized I am finally comfortable in using adults' first names.

"I'm happy to see you again, Erika. I've thought a lot about you since Sandy's night in the blizzard. Through all that

media coverage.... Well, I've been wanting the best for both of you."

"Thank you so much. It was certainly a terrifying experience."

In a pale mint green sweater and matching slacks, Sue again reminded me somewhat of an older version of Lynn, Sandy's sister-in-law.

I asked, "Are you involved in the studio at all?"

"No. I was a teacher originally, but I let my credentials lapse after I quit work when our first child was born. I never went back to it except for doing a bit of substitute teaching at a local private school. The volunteer work I did that related to my kids' lives was always enough outside-the-home activity for me. Sandy and Victoria may have told you that I was primarily the parent travelling with them to their music competitions, for instance."

"Oh, so you were the one who accompanied them."

"Yes, mostly. And now I am glad to be free to travel with Simon whenever he goes somewhere for business or pleasure."

From the living room, I could see that the dining room table was set with beautiful, formal-looking dishes that I hadn't seen before—a little intimidating. But the food seemed so inviting.

"Sandy, dinner is on the table."

"Yes. Coming, Mom. Just want to wash my hands."

I said, "I hope we haven't kept you waiting. We dropped in at the studio and then toured the project."

"Oh, the Village. Did you! I'm glad," Robyn responded.

"Yes, it was fascinating. And the studio is so appealing with all its natural light."

Sitting down at the dining room table, Sandy's dad said, "Well, it's good that you've seen the office and studio before deciding if you really want to work with us, Erika. As for that offer of an employment letter that I mentioned.... Well, Simon and I decided that you might as well have it now to take away with you."

He handed me the envelope that Sandy had carried to him from the studio.

"Oh, how thoughtful of you."

"We've put Simon's name on it in case you need me as a reference for something else."

I was touched.

"This might just save some time by not having to contact us to ask for it," Simon commented.

Robyn lit the candles. The spread on the table looked and smelled delicious. There were sautéed vegetables, a fish and seafood dish, a potato cheese casserole, and an organic greens

salad with cashews, and, on the sideboard, a chocolate mousse dessert.

As Sandy sat down, addressing everyone, he said, "Sorry for the delay."

Simon commented, "So you've showed Erika the studio and the Urban Village...."

"Yes, given her the basic tours."

"They are both wonderful. Now I'll be able to imagine them during conversations. And the project in North Van, well, that is totally inspirational. You must feel so good to be breaking new ground like that."

"Well, we just hope the end result will justify all the project's challenges."

Sandy dared to say, "Dad, I've warned Erika that much of the work at the studio will be routine. But I'd like to be able to take her on some site visits to keep her from thinking the job is all photocopying and making trips to the permits office."

Simon quickly stated, "Luckily Erika is coming in at a different stage of the project than you did, Sandy. And frankly I hope that we will never again need so many permits as was required of the Village complex."

Sandy's dad answered, "But I have no objection, Son, to Erika doing site visits, as long as the regular work doesn't suffer unduly."

"Naturally. But she'll need a hardhat for visits," Sandy stated.

"Of course."

"And, well, we tried on Andre's old one and it fits."

"Okay, but he wore that a long time. It may not be strong enough for much longer. We should be able to come up with a new one for Erika," his dad responded.

"Oh, good," Sandy said, turning to look directly at me. Smiling, he raised his eyebrows and mouthed the word, "Pink?"

Becoming more serious, Sandy faced his father in saying, "Dad, I know you would rather not discuss work details at the table, but in case I don't talk to you tomorrow...."

"What is it?"

"Well, I noticed a couple of apparent oversights at the project."

"And what are they?"

"One is the location of the nurse's office. I thought you and Simon wanted a sense of openness around the stairway in the lounge of the seniors centre."

"Yes, that's right."

"We do," Simon confirmed.

"Well, the studs now show the nurse's office directly under those stairs rather than back against the east wall."

“Well, that’s something that needs to be corrected immediately.”

“And another thing. There are no electrical outlets in the centre of the floors in the artists’ studios.”

“Well, that’s an oversight too. As you know, we planned them to be there.”

“Yes.”

“I’m not sure what hours you are planning to put in this week, Sandford, but can you follow up on these errors as soon as possible? We need these details to conform to the plans before the work in those areas proceeds any further.”

“Of course.”

When all of us were finished eating, Sandy asked, “May Erika and I be excused from cleaning up so that we can go in the hot tub one last time before she gets on the plane to Japan?”

“Absolutely,” his mom responded.

Sandy and I got up from our chairs.

“Thanks so much for including me in this wonderful dinner.”

“You’re quite welcome, Erika.”

I was surprised by Sandy’s intention. As we walked toward his room, I commented, “Really, Sandy. The hot tub? On such a full stomach? Is that okay?”

“Sure. I can be your lifeguard and you can be mine. Besides, we won’t be in water over our heads.”

“But above the hips?”

“Yeah. Too bad for me, eh?” he joked.

I followed Sandy into his room to retrieve my bathing suit.

He handed it to me and then smiled sheepishly in showing me a peach-coloured bathrobe saying, “This should look good on you... ”

“Oh, it’s lovely. Some more of your bonus money?”

“I’m not saying anything more. Just that it’s here for you to use and will be waiting for you when you get back.”

“You got it specifically for me?”

“Yes, to replace one that fell out of favour.”

“So what became of the white one?” I laughed, purposely making this difficult for him.

“I assume it is now being used by someone who appreciates it much more than you came to.”

“You gave it to Goodwill?”

“Something like that.”

I reached to take the robe from Sandy but he held it beyond my grasp.

“I’ll carry it to the hot tub for you.”

“Sandy!”

“And no oversize towels,” he said, as he walked away carrying it, his bathing suit, and his blue robe (another memory—of my cuddling into it that painful night when I slept alone in his bed after the blizzard).

“Meet you out there when you’re in your swimsuit. Oh, and you can use these flip-flops....”

Once I had changed into the bathing suit and tied my hair up, I went out onto the deck with an average-size towel around my shoulders. Sandy was waiting in the hot tub being obvious about watching me approach. The two bathrobes were in a pile within reach of the tub.

“Hey... nice,” He said looking at my legs and smiling. I laughed.

“Now, was that so bad?” he asked, as I climbed down the steps into the hot water and sat beside him.

“Enough, Sandy.”

“Okay. So you are not as shy as I first assumed you are.”

“Sandy, you’re the one who knows how to blush.”

“Not fair. People with light skin are at a disadvantage. And besides, I don’t blush very often.”

“Really? I think I am in a better position to judge that,” I teased.

Becoming more serious, I asked, “Where did you change?”

“Oh, that’s a shower room just inside that door.”

“I never noticed it. Is there access from inside?”

“Yes. The door is next to the downstairs stairway.”

“Oh, I probably assumed it was a closet.”

“If so, it’s a fairly pleasant closet. When we are done here, you can shower there instead of in the bathroom.”

Sandy moved closer and put his arm around my shoulder.

“How’s the temperature? Not too hot, I hope.”

“I like it this hot. Not quite making my toes tingle.”

“I hope some other time we’ll make your toes tingle.”

“Sandy!....”

“Oops. Bad taste?”

“Yes.”

“Forgive me?”

He smiled playfully.

While I wanted to relax, I couldn’t help thinking and mentioning all the tasks I have to do before boarding the plane for Japan.

“So you and Sumi and Noboru are all going on the same flight.”

“Yes, we have recently arranged that.”

“Should I be worried about you sitting more than eight hours on a plane with Noboru?”

“Sandy, you know that is a non-issue now. The three of us going together should make it fun rather than just something that needs to be endured, or dreaded even.”

“Dreaded?”

“Yes, for taking me away from you.”

“Briefly only.”

“Yes, but still....”

When my finger tips became puckered from the hot water, I said, “I should get out before I melt.”

“Okay.”

We both climbed out of the hot tub. Sandy put his arms in his robe without closing it and helped me with mine.

“Hey, you look good in peach.”

“I like this robe. Thanks for getting it.”

I turned toward the exterior door of the change room.

“Shall I come in and help you with the taps?”

“Are they tricky?...”

“Well, they’re a little different.”

“All right then.”

Inside the door, Sandy turned on a fan and the overhead red heat lights that extend, like the vanity and mirror, the entire the width of the room—a room a lot bigger than I expected. Two cushioned chairs held the clothes Sandy had on earlier, and shelves containing some beach treasures enhanced the room’s nautical theme. Small high windows extended along the south wall. Sandy closed the door behind us.

“You are right. This is a nice space,” I said. “A hairdryer too. Someone’s really been thoughtful in designing this.”

“Yeah. It’s good.”

In the middle of the room there was a single, freestanding chrome shower fixture with several taps at different heights. It had its own drain in the middle of a two-metre-square base defined by a raised, ankle-high, tiled edge to keep the water from flooding the rest of the stone floor.

“Liquid soap, sponges, shampoo. Oh, and shaving equipment,” he said, putting these on a stainless steel shelf within arms reach of the shower taps.

“Are you ready?”

I wasn’t sure what Sandy was intending. If we would shower together. It was not as if we were in the house alone.

Sandy helped me off with my robe and I stepped onto the blue-tiled shower floor. He turned on five taps for me, at ankle, knee, hip, waist, and shoulder levels.

“For washing your hair, you’d want to use the overhead spigot as well.”

“I didn’t get it wet, so I won’t wash it now.”

“Sure.”

I stepped into the overall spray of the shower. It felt so good.

“And is this something we can do together?”

“Well... I guess....” I smiled.

He took his robe off and stepped into the tiled area of the shower with me.

He put some liquid soap on a large sponge.

“May I?” he asked, ready to wash my back.

“Okay.”

I turned my back toward him.

While my bathing suit is cut fairly low at the back, Sandy touched the shoulder strap and said, “Shall we get rid of this?”

There it was. Was I ready for total nudity in the daylight? Now, or not until after I am back from Japan....

“Your parents....”

“Won’t be the least concerned.”

“Okay, then.”

Without facing him, I let Sandy push aside the straps of my suit and slide the rest of it down. Then I stepped out of it.

He sponged my back and then proceeded to do the backs of my legs.

“So are you going to do the rest yourself?”

I smiled and turned around slowly.

“Good,” he said, apparently appreciating how I look or the fact that I wasn’t being shy.

After he had soaped my front side too, he encouraged me to face toward the taps to be rinsed. He stepped behind me and kissed the back of my neck.

When I was rinsed, he asked, “Now, do I get some help too?”

“Okay.”

I put some liquid soap on another sponge and repeated what he had done for me—washing his back and then sliding his suit down so he could step out of it. When I finished doing the back of his legs, he turned around for me. I tried to do exactly what he had done for me, but I did feel a little awkward.

I made lather with the shampoo and then helped him wash and rinse his hair. We took turns sharing the greater portion of the spray of the shower. I could have stood there in the flow of the water indefinitely but after a few minutes I said, “We must be using a lot of hot water.”

“Yeah, I don’t generally have all the taps on. It’s just to be special for your first time. When my grandfather found this

antique fixture, no one was too concerned about water conservation."

"It is unique."

Then Sandy said, "I'll be here a few more minutes while I shave and dry my hair."

It was my turn to say, "Is that something we could do together?"

"Well, I suppose we could try."

With both hands, Sandy started to put foam on his cheeks.

"Hey, now I can take over."

"Really...."

Facing towards me, he could not see in the room-width mirror as I spread thick foam all over his face. I added large foam points to his ears, so that he looked like a cross between Santa Clause and an elf with oversize ears. I began to giggle. I turned him around to face the mirror.

He laughed too and, with a bit of a scuffle, he retaliated by plastering three large patches of foam on me to look like a bikini, then he proceeded to draw shoulder straps on me.

"Ah, very realistic. But now I need more rinsing."

"Okay. But look, we have to get serious before all the foam drips off my face."

"Right."

"So you can do this?"

"Well, I've watched my dad and my cousin shave."

"Okay. Give it a try."

As I slid the razor edge down Sandy's face, he stated, "Nothing is going to happen if you do it in that direction, Erika."

"Oh, yes, upward. Now I remember."

"It isn't a matter of just remembering...."

I made a few swathes through the foam on Sandy's cheeks, but we kept laughing.

"Look, this is dangerous if we can't be serious."

"You don't trust me."

"I trust you in everything important. But I'd just as soon not need more Band-Aids. My fingers have used up my quota for this month."

"You're right. How are they?"

"Pretty good."

He spread his fingers to show me the almost imperceptible raised skin where the blisters had been on both sides of his hands.

I watched Sandy as he continued to shave.

"You're almost done?"

"Yes, just a bit more rinsing."

We helped each other with that and then got out and stood directly under the warm, red lights over the vanity. Sandy dried me and I dried him.

I asked, "Do you remember when you got your ski jacket for Christmas, and I questioned the warmth rating of the hood?"

"Yes, you said I should test it to see if it could really withstand minus 30 degrees."

"Oh, oh!"

"So I had to spend the night on that mountain to test it."

"I hope that's not why, but the hood must have worked because you didn't get any blisters on your ears."

"Ah, but there is no such conclusive proof, because I was also wearing a wool toque underneath the hood."

"Oh, yes. The light grey one. Now I remember. Then I hope we will never know."

"Thank you. I agree."

Looking in the mirror and directly at each other, well, we did become comfortable with being nude together.

I got into the peach robe and flip-flops and returned to Sandy's room to get dressed while he dried his hair. I could hear Sandy's dad and Simon still talking at the dining room table. Robyn and Sue were finishing up in the kitchen. Apparently no one cared about where, or with whom, I had had my shower. After getting back into my grey corduroy slacks, flowered blouse, and light rose cardigan, I sat at Sandy's desk looking through some architectural books—one of them on contemporary Japanese architecture.

Sandy entered in his robe carrying the clothes he'd been wearing earlier in the day. He dropped them into his laundry hamper.

Seeing that I was flipping through the Japanese book, he said, "Have a look at the photographs toward the end of that text, Chapter 8, I think. The houses."

He located clean clothes in his dresser and, with his robe untied, he proceeded to put on underpants, jeans, and socks.

"Yes, check those reproductions especially. Some of the them show the work of the firm of the architect who is coming to UBC for that talk."

Then, removing his robe, he put on a tee shirt, tucked it in, and then added a pullover.

"I haven't seen any of these pictures before."

"Several of them are in Western Japan."

"Yes, where some of the terrain is like West Vancouver."

"Exactly. Where houses hang over cliffs and perch on the sides of mountains like here. But that studio is into other work as well now," Sandy commented.

"Such as?"

"Urban design."

"Oh, wow. There's diversification."

"Well, that's like Dad and Simon's studio—continuing with individually designed homes as well as doing the development you saw today."

"Yes, so you're right."

After Sandy had gathered up the materials he needed for the weekend, we emerged and talked again briefly to Sandy's parents and Sue and Simon.

"So how was the hot tub?" Sue asked.

For an instant I could not think back past our intimate, shared shower.

"Oh, wonderful."

"Yes. Very relaxing," Sandy added.

"Would the two of you like to take some of the left-over fish and salad to eat tomorrow, so they are not wasted?" Robyn asked.

"Oh, sure."

We followed Robyn into the kitchen. Out of the fridge, she retrieved containers she had already filled.

"I don't want to suggest that that the two of you are not perfectly capable of cooking for yourselves," Robyn said.

"That's true, we are teaching each other what we know. I'm certainly glad that you have brought up Sandy to be so comfortable in the kitchen."

"Mom, Erika's also glad that you taught me to do my own laundry at an early age."

"Yes, you have Sandy so nicely domesticated," I laughed.

"I always encouraged the guys' independence," Robyn responded.

Sue came to the kitchen door and said, "Darren and Simon are saying we should be on our way, Robyn."

"Yes, I'm almost ready."

She asked Sandy, "Will you and Erika be here for a while?"

"Maybe an hour. We just want a chance to play a couple of pieces that we have been practicing."

"Oh, I wish we all had time to stay and listen. I hope the two of you will play something for us when you return, Erika," Robyn commented earnestly.

"Well, Sandy and I have compiled an extensive list of pieces to work on alone so we can play them when we are next together, whether that is here or in Japan."

"I'm so glad," she said.

Sandy and I walked to the front door with the four of them. Knowing that they would not see me again before I leave

for Japan, Simon and Sandy's dad each shook my hand. Then Robyn hugged me and said, "Have a safe trip and get back soon."

I was moved. I realized that my year in Canada has also made hugging other adults much more comfortable for me than when I arrived.

Robyn lightened the mood by adding, "I have the feeling that Sandy may be somewhat difficult to live with until you return."

"Mom!" Sandy protested, laughing.

After we closed the door behind them, Sandy went directly to the piano. I brought out my flute and music from my bag and joined him there.

"So what shall we start with?" Sandy asked.

"Well, this Bach sonata is probably the one I know best, so perhaps we should start with that one to build up our confidence."

"Okay."

Right from the start, Sandy and I sounded so much better than when we had played together previously. We had each begun to anticipate how the other would approach a passage—with sensitivity to its mood and timing."

"Wow. It's amazing what a little practice can do," Sandy said.

"Yes, and that was fun."

Even after we went through a couple more pieces that we didn't know as well, we felt like we were making a lot of progress. When we decided that we should stop for the night, I think we were even on a high. What is about playing music together that is so relaxing and at the same time so stimulating?

We gathered up our things and got ready to return to the apartment. Back in the car, I admitted to Sandy that I was somewhat glad that Simon and Sue had been at the house when we were saying goodbye to his mom and dad.

"Otherwise I'm not sure I could have dealt with the intensity of my gratitude."

"Gratitude?"

"Yes, to your dad for offering me a job. For assuming that I'll be able to do the work and fit in."

"Oh, you'll be fine. I just hope you don't get so bored in the first week that you'll be wishing you were back in Japan working with your mom and uncle. I'd be apologetic about the duties, except I know that you will learn a lot just by keeping your eyes open as I have."

"And as I did today. That was so insightful. But why didn't you ever tell me that Simon and your dad are partners?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't realize that no one had mentioned this."

"I felt so ignorant not knowing that they've been working together all those years."

"I can't remember what I've told you about how they started out after they graduated in the early 1960s. Dad worked for a major architectural firm putting in longer hours than he wanted, while Simon scrambled just to pick up bits and pieces of projects, despite having been the top of their class."

"So there was discrimination against Asians as professionals then?"

"Yes, unfortunately there was. And when Dad and Simon started families, they both wanted to be able to choose their time commitments and the clients that they took on. So they decided to go into business together."

"I guess this explains your dad's easy acceptance of me as an Asian when he otherwise seems fairly conservative."

"Sure, but attitudes in general have changed a lot since then. Society is more inclusive. It's not just because Dad has had a close association with one Asian family that has paved the way for his comfort with you."

"When I first came to your house, I saw that framed photo on the piano of the two families, but I hadn't gotten so far as wondering who the Asian kids were. I realize now that Simon, missing from the picture, was probably taking the photo and those are their kids. Simon and Sue's."

"Exactly. While we were growing up, both families spent a lot of time together. But I wasn't as close to Susan and Simon's sons as my brothers were, because I was so much younger. But as you now know, despite our age difference, Victoria, their youngest, and I had that very close relationship, partly because, well, being a girl, her older brothers would just as soon not have anything to do with her."

"And was this similar to how your brothers treated you?"

"Yes. Exactly. To them I was just a nuisance to have to deal with, since they knew I would only slow them down."

"Were you ever shy with Vicky?"

"I don't remember ever being so. You're not really shy with a sister. She was always around. But I admired her so much I was willing to do anything just to get her approval and keep her attention."

"Such as?"

"Oh, doing a painting and giving it to her. Letting her choose what video we were going to watch. Sharing my Halloween candy with her. Once I even helped her clean her bedroom at a time that Mom couldn't get me to clean my own."

“Really! And what did Vicky do for you?”

“Well, she gave me all her books and puzzles when she was done with them. My favourite teddy bear was one that originally had been hers. And, from when I was very young, if our parents took us all to a restaurant, the two of us would sit together and share food. Also, when our parents each took a car somewhere, I always chose to ride in the same car next to Vicky.”

“So were you ever timid with her?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“What about when you first started performing with her. Were you shy then?”

“Originally I nervous of the audiences, but because I didn’t want to let Vicky down, I had to be my bravest and act bolder than I really felt. Then eventually I just got accustomed to performing. The confidence to do that came fairly easily because performing was always a positive experience.”

“What about your dad. Is he shy?”

“Not professionally, but in some personal circumstances he is.”

“Could this be where some of your shyness is from?”

“Is this what this discussion is about, Erika? That you think I am shy?”

“In some situations. You are not shy when we’re together, and you’re not shy as a performer, but”

“Are you surprised that I am not shy with you?”

“It’s the range that is a surprise. You’re comfortable intimately and as a public persona. But some interactions in between you’re shy about.”

“Okay. So have we completely analyzed this now?”

“Sure,” I laughed with him.

“Look, there’s that view that’s never boring.”



Looking west out over the ocean from the Lion's Gate Bridge, I agreed. "Yes, that view is gorgeous."

Seeing that Sandy wanted to change the subject, I said, "You know I am very touched that your parents seem to accept me as your girlfriend with the potential to be in your future."

"And why wouldn't they accept you? They know you are the reason I am still alive."

I didn't bother trying to refute this again.

"Besides, they haven't exactly been overjoyed with the other women I've dated. They've seen them either as aggressive, materialistic, or unhealthily dependent and having little in common with me. Whereas.... Well, they realize you've been good for me and assume you could continue to be in the future."

"Really?"

"Yes, really," he said, reaching over and taking my hand. "You have helped me see my future clearly. Mom and Dad worried when, before meeting you, I didn't know where I wanted to be six months in advance. They credit you with some decisions I have made— decisions they approve of."

"Even if I don't deserve that credit."

"You deserve some of it, Erika. Besides they just plain like you. More honestly..., well, they are *very* fond of you."

That comment touched me. I had to blink a couple of times to make sure no tears gathered.

It was beginning to rain. It seemed intimate to be alone together in the warm car. Just us. I wished that could go on forever.

Despite convincing myself not to let Sandy be affected by my despair about returning to Japan, I kept thinking about how I would be feeling if I didn't have plans to return. And what would happen if for some reason I couldn't return? Well, this finally got me weepy.

Sandy was surprised. Squeezing my hand, he asked, "What's wrong?"

So I had to tell him about these thoughts.

"Er, why are you doing this to yourself? To us? You are coming back and we will have frequent contact until then. We will stay busy, so the months will go by quickly."

I was surprised at my raised voice as I reacted, "Is that what you are feeling, Sandy? That the time will go by so quickly that you won't even notice that I am away?"

"Look, Er, I am just trying to get through this as you are. You know I won't feel this separation any less than you will."

"I'm sorry, Sandy. I don't want to take this out on you. But don't you have any irrational fears?"

"Of course I do."

“Like what?”

“About potential visa problems, changes in travel regulations for students between our countries. Stupid stuff really. We can’t worry about problems that are not likely to occur and that we don’t have any control over anyway. We have to have some faith. Yes, faith. But even so, I probably have more issues to worry about than you do.”

“You do? Like what?”

“About your Dad’s influence in not approving of us as a couple. Of your getting back to Japan and realizing how much your country means to you and changing your mind about returning here.”

“Oh, Sandy, you don’t really think I could do that, do you?”

“I hope not. But I won’t be totally relaxed again until we kiss on your return at Vancouver airport.”

Well, this admission had me weeping more by the time Sandy drove into Leah and Larry’s parking space at the back of the apartment.

“Erika, please. Don’t make this more difficult for us.”

Sandy undid his seat belt and moved to my side. The rain had become a noisy downpour on the roof of the car. It felt good to stay close in the warm, enclosed space, during the deluge. When the windshield wipers no longer kept pace with our breathing, Sandy reached back and turned them off. The constant stream of water on the windshield reminded me of being under Niagara Falls looking out, but in this case we weren’t looking out.



APRIL # 4—Hearing Sandy’s Plan

Visuals: photographs of North Shore mountains, marine gas station, totems, footsteps on the beach, herons in their nests

After we got up on the grey Saturday morning and had eaten breakfast together, Sandy and I decided to walk around the seawall.

“We need to take this opportunity to get some exercise in the clean ocean air,” Sandy said.

“Yes. You can never ever get tired of being on the seawall.”

We started on the Coal Harbour side choosing to go the full way around Brockton oval (no short cuts!), although I did get off the seawall momentarily as I took more pictures of the totems against the snow on the mountains.



We walked passed the little mermaid sculpture and toward Lumberman’s Arch, where Sandy and I had taken Noel to play in the water park early in August. Near there we found

a bench to sit on that faces toward the North Shore. Sandy was unusually quiet. I wondered if he was remembering that pleasant summer day. At that time I hadn't noticed the industrial plant across the water. Also we sat there holding hands, the mountains insisting upon being noticed, as if we could ever ignore them now.



We silently watched the waves move up the sand. Apparently Sandy was struggling with whether to tell me what he finally divulged when we got to the other side of the seawall.

As we reached the viewpoint area with the five benches on the southwestern side of the seawall, one point beyond the outdoor pool, he said, "I feel this is a special place for us, Er. Do you remember?"

"Yes, of course, I do. This is where you first put your arm around my shoulder."

"Yeah."

"But you needed to wait until I had a near brush with death to do that," I laughed. "What if that cyclist hadn't come along? Would you ever have touched me?"

"I certainly wanted to."

"And after we recovered from that near miss... as we were ready to leave.... Well, the way I responded about your having to go back on tour, you, well you seemed to get mad at me."

"Mad at you? Not mad at you! Mad at myself for being in the band. For feeling that I couldn't get to know you because of that."

"I wish I had known that at the time. I was hurt in feeling that, well, that you thought I was accusing you of going away again too soon."

"Then I really am sorry about that."

"And you went quiet on me."

"Because I was in turmoil. I felt so attracted to you, but I still thought I needed to ignore my feelings."

"Ignore them?"

"I was thinking of all the potential problems that our relating could bring over the long term."

"But these went away?"

"The potential problems? No, they didn't go away. Erika, you should know they are still with us. Differences in cultural expectations. The likelihood of not having two supportive families nearby. Maybe having to share kids with relatives on two sides of the Pacific with all those trans-Pacific flights...."

"But you still feel it's worth it...."

"Yes, it's worth it because the feelings are still with us. When I acknowledge how strong my feelings are, well, I feel I need to see where they take us. And maybe I recognize some other force. Something bigger than us that needs to be played out."

"This reminds me of something that Mary told me about her marriage that she went into reluctantly. She said that she was just weak enough not to be able to say no to marriage. But she was strong enough to get out of it within a few years. She recognizes that fine balance between being weak and being strong as the force that was needed for Daphne to be born."

"Well, I can relate to that, although I hope the outcome isn't the same, at least about separating later," Sandy said.

"I've read in one of Mary's astrology books that says Cancer men tend to mate early and they stay mated forever."

"Good. So that should help."

"Yeah, that's reassuring. But do you think the force drawing us together could be our family needing to be born?"

"Perhaps."

I smiled that he would admit this.

"I hope that is what it is." I added, "But you know, Sandy, if we do have kids together, they won't likely look like Noel."

"I realize that. I hope they will look uniquely ours."

I was glad that he was able to say this.

Sandy paused as if his mind had switched to thinking about something else. Slowly he said, "Erika, there is something else I want to talk to you about. I have wanted to postpone telling you, but I can't seem to wait any longer."

"What is it?"

"Well, you recently said returning to Vancouver will be your commitment to me. To provide time to see if we can make a future together."

"Yes. That's how I like to view coming back. A commitment. I hope you see it that way too."

"I do. It's just that it's been bothering me that you are the one making all the changes in your life. I have been wondering how I can show a similar commitment to you...."

"Sandy. Are you forgetting that you already quit the band and have gone back into architecture?"

"But I'm not sure that counts, because initially I wasn't doing that for you, at least not just for you. That was as much about wanting a more balanced lifestyle in general. So let me tell you about something else."

"All right."

"You have been the one learning language, learning about Canadian culture, being estranged from your friends to be here, going a long period without seeing your family...."

"Sandy, you know I want to be here with you."

"I know. But recently I've been trying to figure out some way that I can do the same for you, and I think I have something of a solution now."

"A solution? I haven't known there was a problem."

"Well, the one-sidedness of all this has been bothering me. Recently I remembered that UBC's architectural program offers an opportunity to study international design. It is credited as an off-site course, and it is set up so one goes to work as an apprentice in a studio in another country."

"Oh, Sandy. Are you thinking of this?"

"Well, I've talked to my advisor to see if I could have a chance of getting a placement in Japan."

"Japan. Really, Sandy, Japan? You'd be willing to spend some time in Japan?"

Tears came to my eyes.

"Well, that's what I've been looking into. To see if a Japanese firm might accept me. My advisor has been helping with this."

"Really! And does that seem possible?"

"It's looking good. Seems something could be worked out. I haven't wanted to say anything before knowing for sure that I have an offer. But I can't seem to go on any longer without mentioning this possibility."

"Oh, I wish you'd told me about this sooner, Sandy. This is so exciting. When could you do this?"

"Most students taking the international design option are in the host country between January and May. But it is possible to do it in a summer. I'd like to postpone graduating for a couple of months so I could do it in the summer a year from now, as my last course."

"Wow. It has never occurred to me that you might come to my country."

"Well, I've been thinking this could be my way of starting my commitment to us now at the same time as you are. By planning to start the exchange a year from now, I would postpone one course this coming fall. That would give me more

time to work and make money through the school year to finance my time in Japan next summer."

"Sandy, this would be so wonderful, if we could be in Japan together then."

"Exactly. We could have some of this summer here together in Vancouver and some of next summer together in Japan."

"Then you could spend some time with my sisters. They would love to get to know you after all I've said about you."

"And I'd love the chance to get to know them."

"But what about graduating with your friends? By postponing that last course, you wouldn't be able to do that."

"You are more important to me than my classmates. Besides, having taken time out, I'm no longer with the group I started with. It's not the way it used to be during Dad's day, when everyone started at the same time and then walked across the stage together at graduation."

"This is so exciting! Are you really willing to do this, Sandy? I've never thought that you might come to Japan."

"Actually, making arrangements about this with my overly busy advisor was the reason why I was late for your birthday party. I feared that you would expect me to explain the circumstances then."

"I simply forgot to ask because it turned out that you didn't miss that much of the dinner."

"Well, I am embarrassed that it has taken me this long to consider visiting Japan. I've been to Europe so many times without ever thinking of going to Asia. Now I really want to spend some time there. Especially if you could show me around."

"You know I would love that. And then it makes sense if I work the end of this summer here with you at your dad's, then I could work with my mom next summer while you are also in Japan."

"Sure. And although I can't expect to ever be beautifully bilingual as you are, I hope I can learn at least a bit of your language, something that hasn't occurred to me up to now."

"You mean being able to say something more than 'Moishe, moishe, ichodacimous, and okonomiyaki?'" I smiled at him.

"Yes, exactly. And while I may never be able to speak well, I believe I have the capacity to learn to read and write in Japanese because I love the look of your characters so much."

"I could help you with this as well as the history of Japanese architecture."

"I'd like that."

I smiled at his response because I had offered to teach him something about Japanese architectural history last June, admittedly in an offhand manner and with the discussion being interrupted, but Sandy hadn't considered this then.

"Maybe... maybe I could even get to know your dad a little better. Perhaps sometime he might come to approve of our being together."

"Will it hurt you, Sandy, if he never comes round to that? If he never becomes fond of you in the way that he should feel fond of you? And if he never appreciates how good you are for me?"

"I know that may be impossible for him. Japan is not like Vancouver with its diverse mix of people where it is not unusual for a Canadian to marry someone who wasn't born here."

"Remember, my Dad has never lived outside Japan. That's why he's so conservative compared with my mom."

"Yes, after living in London, your mom must know that anything is possible with couples."

"Mary told me about a friend's mother. Initially she was slow in warming up to her blonde daughter's black husband. But after the mother and son-in-law had a chance to get to know each other, she came to totally love and accept him. And as for grandchildren, well, it seems grandparents will always love their grandkids whatever their colour."

"Of course."

"Interestingly, her second daughter married an Asian man. Again, skin colour of the grandkids wasn't an issue. As for her son, also blond, he proceeded to marry a fair-haired Irish woman and they produced three blond boys. The grandmother is so proud of her cluster of diverse 'United Nations grandchildren'."

"So it took the first generation to have their bond accepted," Sandy concluded.

"Yes."

"But the initial reluctance provided for a broader experience later."

"Absolutely."

"And we'd be up for that?" Sandy asked.

"For sure. Now tell me more about coming to Japan."

"Well, I may get a placement in the firm of a Japanese architect who studied at UBC in the 1970s. He's now the senior partner of the studio whose work I showed you in that book."

"Have you had a response to this already?"

"Tentatively only. One of the more recent partners is going to be a guest speaker at UBC on Thursday. Will you be able to come to that?"

“Thursday? That’s the morning of my grad ceremony.”

“But the lecture is in the evening.”

“Oh, perfect. Because of course I’d love to come.”

“Good.”

“So tell me again. You’d be willing to come to Japan....”

“Oh, Erika.” Sandy laughed at me at me for needing this reassurance, “Haven’t I said this often enough now? Why does this sound so unexpected? Seems to me this is the least I can do for you. Especially because you seem willing to give up your country for me.”

“Sandy, I need you more than I need my country. You are my home.”

He smiled and squeezed me around the shoulders. Then we became subdued in realizing that we were going to be saying goodbye at the airport on Saturday.

We sat quietly on the bench, holding hands, looking out at the ocean and watching the incoming tide swirling around our favourite large rock. As always, some seagulls were shrieking overhead.

When we got up to walk back to the apartment, we went via the tennis courts next to the heron rookery. We stopped and watched the huge birds as they glided into their nests now relatively quietly. Still sitting on eggs, they are yet not greeted by the racket that their babies make when one of the parents returns to the nest.

In watching these birds, I thought of the cyclical aspect of nature and how a whole year has gone by. The herons look to be exactly as they were last year at this time when Mary and I watched them the day I landed in Vancouver. Has life gotten any easier for them, harder for them? Have they been content?

Or have they suffered any devastation this past year— death of a mate by a predator, loss of babies through interference with or damage to their nests, or destruction of their migration habitats by oil slicks or drained waters?

Or is everything really the same for them? Can I just not imagine what they have struggled through?



For me, this time in Vancouver has been life altering. Despite having to endure the trauma of Sandy's near death ordeal during the blizzard, I have experienced a year of tremendous love—offering wonderful possibilities that I could not have imagined a year ago.

In arriving at the apartment, Sandy and I were pleasantly weary and a bit warm from our walk around the seawall. So, after sharing a sandwich and some tea, we decided to have a bath. I knew that we would have the place to ourselves, as Mary was not to be back until the evening.

I filled the tub with fragrant bubble bath. Sandy helped me undress and I did the same for him. We laughed a lot in the fluffy suds. After we rinsed off and dried each other, we went into my room to have a nap. It seemed so indulgent to be in bed together in the daylight. This has created a wonderful memory for me. Despite the distractions of each other, we did finally go to sleep. Entwined.

I'll hold onto that feeling of our closeness until I return from Japan.





APRIL # 5—Morning Graduation Ceremony

Visuals: photographs of the school exterior and interior, Mary's spring door decoration

Graduation day. Yes. It finally arrived. And Sandy became part of it!

He dropped in at my school on his way to UBC. I was delighted, as he hadn't promised to do this. And he looked so good in dress pants, shirt with a button-down-collar, a V-neck sweater, and a tie even! The other surprise was that Claudia also was present, tastefully dressed as usual in one of her signature hats that always look like they are made especially for her that nobody else could wear so naturally.

Sandy took photos of me and some of my classmates receiving our certificates from Barry. Our class did very well in receiving awards. In Noboru's words, "We really cleaned up."

It was no surprise that Sumi won the speller-of-the-month award because we had all seen her triumph at the recent lunch-hour spelling bee. Nor were we surprised when Noboru won the idiom-of-the-month award because we were aware that he knew, and submitted, the meaning of each of the colourful expressions that had been posted daily on the bulletin board in the lounge.

Slightly more surprising was that Song got the award for best photograph. It was a beautiful shot of our school's sister campus in Toronto. It shows the exterior of the building in the early morning light of a glistening, newly fallen snow. Song had taken it on her 12-hour stopover in Toronto during her travels with her parents to Prince Edward Island and Niagara Falls.

The director, in giving her this award said, "Usually we just consider photographs of school activities, but this one is of such professional quality that we decided we couldn't ignore it. In fact, the director of our Toronto campus is hoping that Song might give them permission to use this image in their

promotional materials. Perhaps a career in translation could be combined with freelance photography, Song?"

"Yes, yes," we all said encouragingly to Song, who is so modest about her photographs, even though they are generally so much more striking than those by the rest of us.

"And speaking of translation," the director said, "our translation award goes to Erika Yamishiro."

My mouth must have fallen open, but there was much supportive clapping.

"Yes, Erika," he said, in extending his hand to me to have me come forward to receive the certificate.

After shaking my hand, he turned to the audience, saying, "Her surprise comes from her modesty. She only joined the class six months ago when her teachers assured her that her language level was sufficiently advanced to be able to take on translation successfully."

More clapping.

"I want you all to realize that translation is not just about replacing one word with another having the same basic meaning. A translator, like a poet, needs to choose a word, words, that have similar associations as the ones in the original language. Often this requires rewriting entire passages to give the same effect. And Erika has shown her ability in doing this in so much of her work."

In my embarrassment of having been singled out in this way, I took a moment to recover my focus after rejoining my classmates.

Bae's name. Yes, Bae was being recognized now. He stepped forward and flashed his still almost shy but impish (why is that the only word in English that appropriately describes it?) smile. An award in writing humour!

The director explained this by saying, "This is a new award we have just created, because Bae's writing has made us realize that anyone who can manage humour in another language has an advanced capability in that language. I would like to say, also, that in giving this award to Bae, as was the case with Erika, the judgment was not based on just one piece of writing. Bae's consistently witty point of view has been expressed in all his stories and essays."

He added, "Bae's classmates have been treated to some of these stories, as Barry required everyone in the class to read some of their work aloud. I've heard that most recently Bae had many of you in stitches while reading a behind-the-scene story of the preparations for a class birthday party in a smoke-filled kitchen, as informed by a classmate we have also mentioned."

"Song," several of us said in unison, as she smiled.

But then there was an EVEN BIGGER surprise. It was about a “school hero” award, which the director explained has only been awarded three times in the history of the school.

“The decision on this required some consideration of the exceptional nature of recent circumstances.”

When they announced Sandy’s name, I was stunned, and totally excited.

Well, our whole group was cheering wildly. Other students were clapping as hard as they could too, because almost everyone had seen some media coverage and had heard about our guys surviving on the mountain in life-threatening conditions. Wow. I felt like I was losing my balance. And of course my eyes were blurry as the director said, “Sandford Gibson, please step forward to accept this award.”

When the tumultuous cheering subsided, the director said, “Of course, in normal circumstances, we would only consider awarding this to someone attending the school, but in this case we couldn’t ignore the person who last month saved the lives of two of our students.”

Sandy was smiling and only blushing slightly as the director put the medal around his neck. And of course several of us took pictures. The director called Sebastian and Noboru to come forward as the students whose lives Sandy had saved “while putting his own life at risk.” Then, the director called Sumi, Marina, and me to join them. He recognized us for “keeping a vigil on the mountain while waiting for the guys to be found.” Cameras flashed. I was glad to have such pictures taken of the six of us, as we certainly had not taken any photos of us during the ordeal.

When Sandy was back at my side with the rest of my classmates, I whispered, “You never told me you would be getting this award! How long have you known?”

“A few days,” he responded, seeming to enjoy the fact that he had been able to keep the award a secret.

As if this wasn’t all enough, there was yet another announcement that gave our class a jolt.

After waiting for everyone to calm down, the director said, “Now I need to share with you some mixed news—mixed in that we always take pride in the success of our students and teachers. But we regret such news if it takes associates away from us. In this case we have had to accept the resignation of one of our most popular teachers—Barry Lambert.

A gasp went up amongst the gathered students.

“Barry is leaving?”

“Barry....” The director said in extending his hand to have Barry stand by his side.

“Yes, Barry is resigning to take on international prospects. And those endeavours involve the one of our most promising graduates, Claudia Lin, and her new English-language school in Taiwan.”

“Claudia....”

We all turned and looked at Claudia without knowing exactly what this was about.

With Claudia and Barry standing at the side of the director, he explained that Claudia had just bought a building in Taipei to establish her long-planned, English-language school and that Barry would serve as associate director to help set up the school, recruit staff, etc.

Cameras were flashing and again my eyes were misting up, as I was so proud of her.

“While we are always delighted to hear of the successes of our graduates, we would rather they didn’t involve taking away our best teachers,” the director joked, smiling at Claudia. “Still, we wish you both all the best in undertaking this new school. I certainly hope you will maintain contact with us for a long time to come in reporting on the progress of your school.”

More clapping as they returned to stand with the rest of us.

“And as for staying in touch after you leave the school, we really do want to know how your studies here have expanded your life and contributed to your success. Here is a case of one such success that I’d like to share.”

The director was holding some newspaper clippings and a printed program of some kind.

“It is from another graduate of the advanced class. Se-Eun Moon....”

“Oh, Se-Eun,” our group responded with interest.

“Since leaving several months ago, Se-Eun, along with another Korean high school teacher, has managed to initiate an English-language, touring, drama troupe that travels to various high schools in South Korea. The group addresses such social issues as bullying, teenage pregnancy, drugs, excessive drinking, etc. This program lists the schools of the tour and here is proof of the glowing media coverage that the troupe has received so far.”

“Wow, she’s done it,” we were saying amongst ourselves. “Good for her.”

“So we do have some rather high expectations about what our graduates might accomplish, especially from our advanced class.”

More clapping. With this, the director announced that graduation ceremony had come to a close. Students started to mill around. Only then did we manage to get Claudia off to a corner and barrage her with questions.

"You bought a building for your school already?" we all asked as a rhetorical question, amazed that she had managed to do this in just the few days that she had recently been back in Taiwan.

"Actually my uncles found a place that they thought was too good to pass up. So yes, I went home and looked at it, and was pleased with it, so I signed the papers. Buying the building has started the school a little earlier than I was intending."

"And Barry?"

"Yes, Barry has agreed to go on ahead of me to get some tasks undertaken while I am still finishing my program here."

"Wow."

"But look. Let's talk more about this at the grad dinner."

"Oh, great! You are coming..."

"Yes. Barry has asked me to accompany him as his 'date' for the evening."

"Oh, wonderful. And to the dance as well?"

"Yes. To the dance as well."

For some reason I felt exhausted by the time the crowd of students taking photographs, exchanging addresses, and writing in each other's autograph books finally began to disperse.

Sandy had been standing patiently by, talking with some of my classmates and receiving congratulations from other students and staff.

As everyone began to put away their cameras, I walked downstairs with Sandy. I was very proud to hold his hand despite recognizing that he is now not just my hero.

"I can't believe you didn't tell me when our director informed you about your hero award."

"I thought your graduation might be more memorable if there was an added surprise."

"It most definitely has been memorable."

"And you have certainly done well, Erika, with the translation award. I remember your doubting if you should even be in that class when you started in October. What did you say when wondering if you were ready to do translation? You said that successful translation is proof of the highest proficiency in the language."

"Well..."

"So I am glad to share a personal memory of your ceremony. It is generous of the school to recognize me despite not being one of their students."

"But you certainly deserve that, even though I never even knew they had such an award. May I have a look at it?" I asked as we reached the outside door. Facing Sandy I held the gold, coin-like disk hanging on its blue ribbon around Sandy's neck.

"Pretty nice."

Being this close, Sandy kissed me.

"So about tonight. The lecture. Can you make your own way out to UBC?"

"Yes, of course."

"And meet just before 7:00 pm in the main lecture theatre, main floor, of Lasserre, the architecture / fine art building?"

"Sure."

"Okay. See you then."

He hugged me around the shoulders, "It's been fun."

"Yes, it has been fun. Definitely more fun than I had expected!"

When I returned upstairs to the lobby, some students were still milling around. I picked up my daypack, and I told Sumi, Song, and Juliana I would see them at the graduation dinner tomorrow night. I was glad that the conversations were relatively superficial—focusing on such concerns as, "Will you be wearing the same outfit to the dinner as to the dance?"

I heading for the door, I was struck by the fact this is my last day at the school. That I won't have another class. That there is no reason to return to the building. I can't believe this is real.

There are so many friends and classmates whom I will never see again after tomorrow's graduation dinner and dance. That I will never again be able to confide in, resolve problems with, or share events with. I was reminded that this has also been the case with Sabine, Daniel, and Se-Eun.

Could this be true now for most of the rest of us, whether our departure is this weekend or a couple of weekends later? I am in a state of denial. I can't stand this. But I have to force myself to reduce my feelings otherwise I won't be able to cope at all in parting. Is this situation practice for having to say goodbye to Sandy on Saturday, even if our separation is to be temporary?

The glass and metal door to the building shut behind me with a click.

I went home to continue my packing before getting ready to head out to campus. In my room I was stepping around half-packed luggage with clothing draped over chairs and the bed and gifts that needed to be removed from their boxes to make them fit into my suitcase. Also schoolwork, souvenirs, and tourist brochures were strewn about waiting for me to decide what to keep and what to get rid of.

I also agonized over what I should wear to the lecture. I want Sandy to be proud of me. I got into my best grey wool slacks, a deep rose cashmere cowl neck sweater, and my black business jacket, and put on a little more makeup in addition to

my blush and lipstick. Of course I am still constantly wearing Sandy's pearl-drop gold necklace.

Mary arrived home just as I finished dressing.

"Oh, you look so pretty."

That comment made me feel good.

Together we had a quick supper she had made previously that just needed reheating. She still has preparations for the art installation opening tomorrow night.

"Getting all my small constructed panels hung together, and straight, to look like one huge surface is much more challenging than I ever imagined. And this is despite working with an expert installer. But, I'm sorry. How was your morning graduation?"

"Oh, really so much fun. Much more than I expected."

"Why was this?"

I told Mary about Sandy's hero medal. She was delighted. And she was also very happy, but not so surprised, about my translation award.

"I knew you all along that you are better in English than you seem to realize, Erika."

"You are just very generous toward me."

"No, that has nothing to do with this," she reassured me.

"Your English is excellent. It was good to start with but you've learned so much this year."

"Thank you for saying so."

"Some of that comes from having a Canadian boyfriend and spending part of your time in an English-speaking world rather than just with your international friends."

I laughed and said, "Apparently there have been a lot of benefits from having a Canadian boyfriend! Speaking of.... Sandy and I will be coming to your opening tomorrow night between the graduation dinner and the grad dance."

"Oh, excellent."

Mary explained that several of her friends and relatives coming from out of town for the event plan to "wine and dine" her after the opening tomorrow night so she will stay overnight at the hotel with her sister.

"Now I must dash back to the site, so I'm not there all night. I'd like to think I might get home in time for an adequate sleep, so I can look halfway decent for the event. I've actually bought a new outfit—my first one in several years."

"Oh, terrific. I really look forward to seeing you there. Good luck with the rest of the installation."

After Mary left, I wondered if she has arranged to stay at the hotel with her sister tomorrow night partly so that Sandy and I can have the apartment to ourselves on my last night in Vancouver.



APRIL # 6—Attending the UBC Architecture Lecture

Visuals: photographs of exterior of Lasserre building and of the glare of sun in its lobby

In heading for UBC campus I walked to Granville Street, as a Davie Street bus never came along. I worried about not getting there on time because I had left later than I intended. When a Number Four UBC trolley came, I got on. After a few minutes I was thinking it was taking forever. There seemed to be a stop at every corner. And when the bus broke down going along Fourth Avenue, I was in despair!

The driver told us all to get out and wait for a replacement vehicle. In getting off the bus, the crowd of passengers gathered on the sidewalk. Two male university students who were acquainted greeted each other. Apparently these guys hadn't noticed each other on the previous bus. They began to talk and then compare some answers to their homework. Sounded like they were probably in engineering.

These guys looked a bit younger than Sandy, but were about the same build and colouring. In fact one of the guys reminded me a lot of Sandy. In associating them with Sandy, I assumed they would be particularly pleasant guys. When we all filed onto the replacement bus, I sat down behind them in one of the few empty seats, so I was within hearing but was not in their sight.

After a few minutes of silence the guy who reminded me most of Sandy startled me when he said, "Last night I drank like a f..king fish."

(Wow. I've never heard Sandy swear.)

The other guy responded, "Oh, yah. At the Pitt?"

"No, upstairs at the Gallery."

"Sometimes it's fun getting drunk, isn't it?"

"Yah, it is."

"Who were you with?"

"Well, at first there were three of us. Dansworth, Johnson, and me. Then that Heather from our class came along. You know the one?"

"Mass of long, cork-screw curly, auburn hair?"

"That's her."

"Well, she joined us. She and I talked a bit. That was nice, so we went back together on the bus."

"To her place...."

"Yah."

"Is she hot?"

I knew as much from their attitudes as from their words what they were talking about. There was a rather long pause. I waited to hear the answer.

"Well, she's getting over breaking up with her boyfriend."

"Oh, so she's vulnerable," the other guy said with a touch of enthusiasm.

Again the guy who reminded me of Sandy didn't respond immediately. Then he said, "I was bad."

"Oh?"

Then after another even longer pause, as if with considerable thought, and perhaps needing to confess to someone, he added, "Last night I was real bad."

"Really?" the other guy asked with increased interest.

"It's not something I can tell you about on the bus."

"Then you can tell me about it as soon as we get off the bus...."

I wish I could have heard the rest of that conversation. Why did I have the feeling that the guy had forced himself on the girl? Had he said he had too much to drink just so as to not feel responsible for his action? (Sound familiar? I was thinking of Noboru at the Halloween party.)

I was struck by how unexpected this conversation was and I ended up considering whose behaviour was more immoral—the first guy who had acted in a way that he knew was wrong and felt guilty about, or the other guy who was condoning predatory behaviour as male sport and excitement.

I was thinking about how lack of a meaningful connection can bring out the worst in individuals and how a loving connection can bring out the best. Specifically I was thinking about Nicole's "cheapness" before she felt cherished by Fernando, and about Daniel's insensitive aggressiveness until he felt loved by Song, and Bae's inferiority complex and awkwardness before he created a wonderful friendship with Song. I also remembered Barry's loss of good judgment with the apparent end of his close friendships with Se-Eun and Claudia that resulted in his juvenile behaviour at the Irish pub. It is

reassuring to think that Barry will now be working closely with Claudia in a role that will require him to be the most mature and responsible version of himself.

I ended up hoping each of the guys on the bus will experience a loving bond and become a more honourable man. Does this confirm what Sandy told me about my Pisces trait—that I am always assuming, and hoping for, the best in people?

Finally the bus arrived at UBC bus loop and I walked quickly across campus. As a result of the delay with the bus, I arrived at the fine art building, entered the large lecture room, and spotted Sandy just as the introductions began. I slid into the seat beside him near the front. He was wearing a dress jacket (instead of the sweater) over the shirt, tie, and slacks he'd been wearing at my graduation ceremony this morning.

He smiled at me and whispered, "You look so good!"

"You do too," I said, as he squeezed my hand briefly just as the lights went down.

The Japanese guest speaker began his illustrated talk immediately. It was good that there were so many slides in his presentation because his English was far from perfect. Still he provided such a valuable overview of the fascinating work that he and his firm are doing in Japan, that I felt proud of him for being Japanese. And besides that, he disclosed how they are working, with a Canadian firm, on an urban renewal project in downtown Vancouver, just east of Granville Street.

During the discussion period following the lecture, Sandy asked a question that was well received and created an interesting debate about international cooperation on architectural projects. But soon the students began filing up the aisle of the large lecture room proceeding toward the door out to the lobby.

Quietly I said to Sandy, "Your enquiry was well received, but I thought you might have asked even more questions."

"I didn't need to, because I had lunch with the speaker today."

"You did?"

"Yeah. Vincent arranged my meeting with him. And I have some good news."

"You have?" I smiled expectantly.

"Yeah. His firm is willing to host me for my international design course."

"Really? You know this already? That you have a placement with them in Japan?"

"Yes, Erika. He says the senior partner in the firm who attended UBC in the 1970s is still grateful for having had such a positive experience. He also acknowledges the benefits his firm

has enjoyed from the working connections initiated at that time."

"Incredible."

"Besides he has dared to say they would be glad to have access to a Canadian perspective in their studio...."

"This is such wonderful news!"

"And to have a native English speaker working on that shared project with the Vancouver firm."

"Sandy, I can't believe this! It all sounds perfect."

I reached for his hand.

"Yeah," he smiled almost sheepishly. "So you'll show me around Tokyo...."

"Of course, I will."

"And I'll get to meet your sisters and spend time with your family next summer."

"Just think.... A summer there together next year...."

I couldn't stop smiling as we emerged with the rest of the audience into the lobby that was filled with the glowing light of the setting sun. With large windows facing due west, the pink-golden sun was bright to my eyes after the darkened lecture theatre. Vincent was there in conversation, but he spotted Sandy and me and came toward us through the crowd.

He said, "I am pleased that you have decided to join the department in September, Erika."

"I certainly look forward to doing so."

"And I understand we have you to credit for Sandy's sudden interest in Japanese architecture."

Sandy and I looked at each other and laughed.

Sandy said, "Actually, for my interest in all things Japanese."

Then Vincent said to me, "I assume you are pleased about Sandy's placement."

"Yes, he's just been telling me about it. It sounds wonderful."

"I'm sure he's made the right choice."



“Choice?”

“Has Sandy told you he actually had two offers?”

“No, this is all news to me until now.”

“Well, our speaker’s firm is the one Sandy has chosen to go with. Their studio should be ideal because of the cooperative “live and work” project they are doing in Vancouver. It is similar in some ways to the Urban Village project that Sandy has been working on with his dad for the past year.”

Distracted in seeing the speaker walking toward us, Vincent addressed him, “Ah, Mr. Matsumoto, let me introduce to you to Erika Yamishiro.”

Sandy and I were still holding hands, so apparently he assumed I am Sandy’s girlfriend in saying, “Miss Yamishiro, I understand from Mr. Gibson that you are the main reason for his wanting to do his work-study with us in Tokyo.”

Sandy smiled at me. Without letting go of his hand, I answered, “Sandy would like to become familiar with Japanese culture, architecture, and my family, so I suppose I have provided some motivation.”

“And you intend to become an architect also?”

“Yes, I hope to. I will start the architecture program here in September. I had been accepted at the Art College of Tokyo, but I’ve decided to study at UBC instead.”

“Ah, very good.”

The head of the architecture department came forward and drew Mr. Matsumoto and Vincent away by reminding them about the time of their reservation at the faculty club.

Mr. Matsumoto apologized to us for leaving hastily.

Sandy’s class friend whom I recognized from the New Year’s party emerged from just behind us.

In greeting him, Sandy said, “Steven, you remember Erika...”

“Yes, of course. Hi, Erika.”

“Hello.”

“Gibson, did I overhear correctly that you are going to be doing a work-study in Japan?”

“Yes, a year from now, with the firm where the speaker is a partner. I just found out today that they’ve accepted me.”

“Oh, how I envy you. I would love to do something like that. But Marilyn would never agree to it.”

“Well, I wouldn’t have thought of applying if were not for Erika. She has broadened my horizons.”

Looking at me, Steven asked, “And did I also hear that you will be taking architecture here in the department in September?”

“Yes. Sandy has broadened my horizons too,” I laughed.

“What a commitment!” he commented.

"Yes. Studying here is my commitment to Sandy."

"And the international design program is my commitment to Erika."

"You two are a-MA-zing!"

I tried to remember whom Steven had been with at the New Year's party—which woman was Marilyn? A wife or a girlfriend? One of the more materialistic ones? Could she have been one who seemed to think that Sandy was wasting his time with me? If so, I hope Steven might tell her of this encounter so she'll realize that Sandy's knowing me is as much a benefit to him as my knowing Sandy is a benefit to me.

Why does having someone acknowledge this seem important to me? I guess I don't want to seem like I am just taking advantage of Sandy as a Canadian.

Once we were in Sandy's car driving along Chancellor Boulevard, Sandy said, "Wow, it's been quite a day."

"Yes, receiving your placement has made all the difference in our dream of being together. In Japan as well as here."

"Yes, starting this September I will adjust my assignments around preparing for Japan."

"And besides making adjustments to our studies and work...."

I paused because I couldn't get myself to say what was forming in my head.

"You're thinking we could alter some other intention?"

"Yes."

"So am I. Go ahead and say it. I would like to hear you say it first."

"Well, I heard each of us use the word *commitment* in our conversation with your friend Steven."

"I realized that too as we walked away."

"Commitment, Sandy. That is what has been so important to you."

"I know. Now we've arranged to do everything we possibly can to prove our commitment to each other."

"Everything but," I said in remembering Sandy's phrase.

He looked at me and smiled at the reference.

"Exactly."

"Well?" I asked.

"So do you think we could make this as a commitment now too, rather than waiting until you return from Japan?"

"I'd like to as I will feel even more certain about our promise to be together when I get back, if we share this ahead of time."

"All right. We're certainly ready."

“Definitely ready,” I smiled. “Tomorrow night we will have the apartment to ourselves.”

“So tomorrow then.”

“And what could make my last night here more memorable?”

“I certainly want this experience to be memorable....”

“For both of us.”

“Yes. For both of us.”



[To read the next chapter, return to the Table of Contents and click on Second APRIL DIARY ENTRIES 7-11.pdf