

## ***APRIL # 7—The Graduation Dinner***

*Visuals: photographs of buildings and cherry trees near restaurant and the spread of Chinese food*

Our graduation class dinner was delicious, fun, and revealing. Sandy and I waited briefly at the entrance of the Chinese restaurant as the others arrived. In anticipating Sandy's and my plan for later that night, I yearned to put my arms around his chest under his jacket and feel the smoothness of his dress shirt and tie. Instead we held hands and stood close, smiling, enjoying our secret.

Once everyone had arrived and we were all seated, one tasty dish after another was brought to our table and placed on rotating circular centre so we could all easily share each platter. I was particularly pleased to see Claudia and Barry together, as I was anxious to hear more about how they will get started on Claudia's school. But the general banter among the others took its own direction.

"Oh, Bae, you are being too generous again," Song responded to some comment in a small group discussion that I hadn't heard.

Bae tried to say something to counter this, but Song interrupted.

"Actually, I have a fun story about Bae that I meant to tell at the birthday party but...."

"About Bae?"

"Well, actually about his family."

"About his dad, who we'll never forgive?..." Juliana commented.

"Including his dad."

"Then tell us," Nicole urged.

"Well. I met them," Song said.

"You met them? Where?" Noboru asked.

"In the airport when I returned to Korea with my parents."

"How?"

"I saw this long-limbed man with his back to me in one of the lineups. I was sure he must be Bae's dad because he looks so much like Bae. Same physique. Just without Bae's endearing expression. His dad is too authoritarian to have that, but still there was no question of the resemblance. My parents were amazed that I would just stroll over to a stranger and address him, but I did."

"Good for you," Barry commented.

"You actually talked to him?" Sumi asked.

"Yes. I told him I am a friend of Bae, and he admitted that he is his father. And then Bae's mom and sister introduced themselves."

"No way!" Noboru exclaimed.

"Yes, this is true. I met them all. So I proceeded to tell them how popular Bae is with all his classmates here because he is so kind, generous, and has such a wonderful sense of humour."

"Good for you to set them straight on this," Sebastian said.

"Sense of humour!" Bae's dad exclaimed. He seemed not to like this idea," Song said, smiling through her story.

"Of course Bae's dad wouldn't want to hear any of this, because he knows Bae would have to be happy to reveal his sense of humour. I take it that happy isn't what Bae's dad wants for his son," Juliana stated.

"His mother was pleased though and said, 'Ah, then Bae's back to his old self!'"

"Have you heard this story already, Bae?" Adrian asked.

"Yes. Song told me about it as soon as she returned. She even smuggled a note back from my sister who had been 'discouraged' from communicating with me."

"Not only that," continued Song, "but also after Bae's Dad left on his plane, I stayed behind and went for tea with his mom and sister."

"Stayed behind?"

"Well, I convinced my parents to go on home without me, saying that I would follow on my own. They trusted me to do this after my having been their tour guide across Canada."

"So tell us about his sister and his mom."

"Well, are they obviously missing Bae so much. And they feel wretched about his dad's attitude, and they asked me to reassure Bae that they do not share his dad's opinion."

"Which we expect Bae has realized all along," Juliana added.

"Well, I have been hoping," Bae responded.

“Could Mom and Sister now love the messenger?”

Claudia asked smiling.

Song seemed embarrassed at this, but said, “Well, they were very kind and urged me to come and see them once Bae is back. Of course I accepted that invitation.”

Bae and Song smiled at each other.

“Definitely something to look forward to,” Song concluded.

“Good stuff,” Adrian added.

There was a quiet moment, so I reached in my handbag and brought out a piece of paper.

“I have some entertaining news too that I received a few days ago,” I said unfolding the printout of an email.

“Who’s it from?” Pierre asked.

“Sabine, but not just.”

“Not just?” Noboru asked.

Sandy looked curious too since I hadn’t told him about this.

“Guess.”

Everyone was looking around expecting someone else to come up with the answer.

“Daniel?” Song asked.

“Yes.”

“No kidding. They’ve stayed in touch?” Juliana asked.

“Well, they said they would, as they are from the same country, so that shouldn’t be much of a surprise,” Fernando said.

“Still, it’s nice to know it does happen,” Barry stated.

“So what do they have to say?” Juliana prompted me.

“Okay, I’ll read it, because they say it’s okay to share it with all of you, although I wonder if it is something that, the next day, they might have regretted sending.”

“What do you mean?” Song asked.

“Well, they may have been a bit tipsy.”

“Tipsy? I can’t imagine either of them being tipsy,” Noboru asserted.

“What did Sabine’s homestay mother used to call her?”

“Her conservative banker daughter,” I answered.

“That’s it,” Marina confirmed.

“Well, for the sake of Sebastian, Pierre, and Adrian, who never met Sabine and only met Daniel briefly, we should say that Sabine and Daniel are both in banking and were, on first arriving in Vancouver, notable for their serious, responsible side.”

“Did I hear uptight?” Juliana asked.

“No, that’s not quite fair,” I said, mainly in defending Sabine.

“Daniel did become more relaxed in being here, thanks to Song,” Bae added.

“Yes, as did Sabine, due in part to Erika’s friendship,” Sumi added.

“Sabine was trying to ditch her boyfriend,” Juliana stated, as if that explained everything.

“Yes, and on her return to Switzerland she did manage that. Right?” Nicole added.

“That’s right,” I added. “She did, once she changed jobs. When she was working someplace else, she and her old boyfriend no longer had daily contact.”

“Just read it,” Juliana urged me.

“Okay.”

Dear Erika,

In sitting here sipping wine with my companion of choice, I am feeling a little nostalgic this evening, my first year anniversary of arriving in Vancouver. I was so glad to meet you, Erika, on our first day and to take our placement test together. And I was grateful to have you as my best friend during the rest of my stay.

Well, since breaking up with Hans and changing jobs, quite a lot has happened. I apologize for not being the correspondent I intended, but you may understand soon how life can get in the way.

Note: I just had to stop a moment due to the distraction of sharing a few more sips of red wine. A good year.

So I my new job is in international transactions in the Lucerne branch of the bank where (did I tell you?) Daniel is wealth manager, but he’s in the Zurich branch. Because of separate locations, we haven’t seen that much of each other at work. Sure, coming in or out of the occasional meeting at each other’s branch, but nothing with a lot of personal contact.

Well...(a few more sips) the Christmas party changed all that. A combined affair, the party was for all employees of the bank who could travel to it. It was a real gala, because the bank was marking its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary with special festivities where no expense was spared. Incredible food was available, and the alcohol flowed. At least that is how I remember it.

Part way through the evening, Daniel and I met. Over the punch bowl. Sure, we knew each other from being in the same circle of friends in Vancouver, but at that festive moment we seemed to see each other for the first time. Like pow! I saw him. He saw me. I think some mistletoe contributed to our shifted...ah, gaze. So, not to belabour this, we have been dating (dating is such an antiseptic word!) ever since. I never thought I could be in love again. Daniel, who is sitting here reading this with his chin on my shoulder, has just told me to say, “WE never thought we could be in love again.”

(Another pause for some more wine! At the moment, we are celebrating, at home, our four-month anniversary since meeting at that Christmas party.)

Daniel is also telling me to say thank you to Song for making him into such a “considerate, attentive, loving boyfriend,” so here it is. “Thank you, Song.”

Song blushed. We all smiled at her for looking so modest.

Also I really should be thanking Daniel’s homestay mother for helping him to become such an excellent cook. Cooking together is one of our favourite activities. Second favourite, Daniel has just clarified. And the third is skiing. We have managed to do lots of that too on the weekends in trying to live a more balanced lifestyle than we did pre-Vancouver.

“Notice they cleverly didn’t specify their number one favourite activity,” Marina laughed.

“Carry on, Erika,” Nicole uttered.

Daniel has also asked me to tell you all that he doesn’t really like sharing a bed with a Canadian teddy bear, but he’s glad he knows Talon’s history. When he named him that night at my going away dinner in Vancouver, he certainly didn’t know the bear would become a fixture in his life. He also didn’t realize that he might even be jealous of Talon for being able to sleep with me every night. But Daniel is grateful that this favourite bear served as an effective guard to keep Hans from ever getting back into my bed once I returned from Vancouver.

“Aw, cute. I’d forgotten about the bear. I’m glad he’s been that useful,” Marina commented.

I hesitated.

“Erika? Aren’t you going to carry on?” Sumi asked.

“Well, here it gets a little personal. I don’t think you all need to hear the rest.”

“Just read it,” Juliana insisted.

I looked at Sandy. He smiled not knowing something could be about him.

“Come on,” Noboru also demanded, so I continued.

I also want to apologize to you, Erika, for all the unfeeling advice I gave you regarding Sandy in telling you to avoid him and to give him up, saying he will only complicate your life. Now I know that breaking up with someone you truly love would not be easy, and separating could be a mistake you might regret forever.

At this Sandy commented, “Ah, a sympathetic, insightful lady.”

I smiled at him and responded, “Sabine continues”....

“Yes, go on.”

So if the two of you are still together, and I hope you are, since you looked so cute together and Sandy seemed like such a sensitive, creative, lovely guy, my advice is to embrace the complications. Work them out. They will make your life together something special.

Extraordinary even. And here I mean *special* in the Canadian way, not in the Swiss way!

In reading this, I was almost misty-eyed. Sandy smiled at me and put his hand on my forearm. I cleared my voice and continued reading.

Well, Daniel is now trying to draw me away saying that we should eat some of his delicious slow-cooking supper, since we have been imbibing on an almost-empty stomach most of this relaxing, at-home day.

But before I close, we want to wish the best of luck to each of you as the group scatters in returning home. At least I think most of you are planning to leave Vancouver in the next couple of weeks. Daniel and I still remember how miserable that was—having to part with cherished friends and leave Canada to return home to a structured, too-busy life.

Love to all, from both of us.

Sabine and Daniel

“Well, you can add this to your diary, Erika,” Juliana stated.

“Diary?” Barry asked.

“Yes, Erika is documenting our being here. Telling all our stories, keeping a record of our experience.”

“Really?” Barry asked with interest. “That could be very interesting as well as informative.”

“I’m trying to convince her she should transcribe and translate her commentary into English so it could be available to others, to let readers know what it is like being an international student in Vancouver,” Juliana added.

“An excellent role for our prize translator. Erika?”

“And with all those photos, Erika,” Noboru commented.

“I’d be willing to make some of the diary available to others, if I have time to do that.”

“Well, if you do create a version that we can share, I hope you’ll tell us, and tell the school too. International students considering studying English in Vancouver could be interested. And it could be a welcome souvenir for those who have already been here,” Barry said.

“So yes, if I do write it all out in an accessible, shareable form, I will let you all know.”

There was a quiet moment as a server came around and removed the dishes we were finished with and replenished our pots of green tea. In recognition that many of us will be going home soon, Barrie suggested that each of us describe how our experience of being in Vancouver has changed us.

“Why don’t you start, Bae, since Song has just given some insight into what you’ve had to deal with.”

**Bae:** “Well, I guess everyone remembers I was pretty depressed and uncommunicative when I arrived here. I never

thought I could get over the feeling of having disgraced myself in my military training. I thought the experience of failing to jump out of a plane on command would colour my personality, my life, forever, and not just in the eyes of my father. Now I have that in perspective and I see I can be accepted for other reasons."

(He smiled at Song in saying this.)

"My friendships here have been so encouraging."

(He was looking at Sumi.)

"I am grateful to all of you for this. I am also glad for the chance to go back to Korea with Song to see if we can continue to be supportive of each other. And now that my mother and my sister have met Song, I am hopeful that she can help me get accepted at home even by my father."

Everyone cheered.

"I hope so too, Bae," Barry said. Then he indicated that we should continue around the circle in telling our stories.

**Song:** "Well, in being here and meeting Daniel I learned how wonderful it is to love someone and be loved in return. Even though he and I had to part, I do not regret that experience as it enabled me to become a more affectionate and less shy person. But then all of you have helped me gain self-confidence. And now I will be going home with Bae, my best friend. I hope we can look out for each other—for a long time."

**Noboru:** "Well, I assumed that, once back in Japan, I would work for my dad forever, because that was where I could make the most money. The fastest. Now I hope working for him is just part of my past. Also I have learned that money is not everything. (Noboru smiled at me). On my return to Japan, I intend to try to live a more balanced, healthy life and make time to share with a partner, hopefully Sumi."

Everyone cheered here and smiled at Sumi.

**Sumi:** "You know I came here intending to study hard to be able to expand my career. I wasn't looking to find a boyfriend here because I thought that a boyfriend would detract from making new friends. But I have done both. Finding someone here to build a future with never occurred to me. It is wonderful to have Noboru to go home with."

"And maybe someday to go home to," Fernando added. (More cheering!)

**Juliana:** "As you might guess from my showing you my wedding video...well, all you loving couples have made me want to put some romance back into my marriage. I hope my husband and I can rekindle our original feelings. That now seems more important than being 'successful' at work, especially since my business partners have shown they can survive with less of my time than I assumed."

"I hope this works out for you, Juliana," Barry said. Some of us helped ourselves to pickings off the remaining platters or were enjoying another cup of green tea.

**Fernando:** "Well, I came here to improve my English."

"Which of course you have!" interjected Barry.

Fernando smiled in acknowledgment.

"But I have also met Nicole, and we hope we may become partners in medical practice and in life."

"Whoa," everyone murmured at once, smiling at them.

"So forgive me for actually looking forward to going home, with Nicole, even though I am going to miss the rest of you a lot."

**Nicole:** "Well, you all pretty much know I came here as a guy-crazy female looking to meet a Canadian so I could stay here forever. To get away from my life in Mexico. Wow. Am I admitting this!? My job as a practical nurse was mainly boring, but at least it's a start because it's in the medical field. Now I plan to take additional medical training so I can work with Fernando. And now he is the only guy I am looking at. Crazy about."

Everyone laughed. They smiled at each other and Fernando squeezed Nicole's fingers.

**Claudia:** "I too came here to improve my English specifically so I could start an English-speaking, primary school in Taiwan. I had no plans to do an MBA while in Vancouver and I certainly had no intention of buying a building for my school while still finishing my studies here. And as for finding an associate director, Barry, to help establish the school, well, to be doing this with a Vancouver friend is such a plus. And as for my personal life, so many of you have encouraged me to reconsider having a jet-setting boyfriend whose family doesn't approve of me. For the next couple of years, I expect to be too busy in establishing my school to have much time for him. After that, all I can say is, we'll see."

(More cheering.)

**Sebastian:** "Well, of course I came to learn language too, but with the option of doing my PhD at UBC. I wasn't intending to stay in Vancouver if the UBC placement didn't come with appropriate funding. But that has worked out. So here I am, committed to spending at least the next four years in this city, which I realize I love. A lot can happen during that time that could affect my entire life too. Meanwhile I particularly value my friendship with Marina and I'm glad her home city isn't far from mine."

**Marina:** "Since being here I have enjoyed meeting people from many countries. I now plan, while I continue my current job, to get extra training so that my career will involve travel,

languages, and dealing with people. Perhaps that could be in international banking recruitment, for instance. But that's just one idea. I hope, for instance, that my work will enable me to travel to Vancouver a few times in the next four years.

Otherwise I'll definitely be planning my holidays here."

"Oh, the Sebastian influence!" Sumi exclaimed.

Marina confessed, "Yes, I would like to spend time with Sebastian. And having lived in Vancouver once, I feel it will be easy to return. Perhaps I can even do some additional studies here."

**Adrian:** "You all know I have been rather slow in completing my Canadian pilot's licence. I am just finishing my final course, and I need to put in a lot of flying hours yet. But this delay has given me more time to study English and become closer to Pierre. And I have had a great time and have incredible memories to take with me back to Austria."

**Pierre:** "Maybe the experience of being here does not appear to have changed my life as much as it has for some of you. Adrian and I have been so comfortable in Vancouver's broad-minded, gay-friendly culture. Perhaps, in the long-term, immigrating here together is not out of the question. Technology managers, as well as pilots, do seem to be needed everywhere."

More clapping.

I had become a little nervous in realizing it was getting close to my turn to speak. So I was glad of a reason to delay as the server came to remove some of the remaining platters. Then Sandy smiled encouragingly and squeezed my hand at the side of my chair.

**Erika:** "Well, I acknowledge that being here has probably changed my whole life since studying architecture at UBC will put me on a different path than doing architecture at home. But most importantly, studying at UBC will give Sandy and me time together. My dream...." Sandy smiled at me so I completed my comment as, "Our dream is that we will be able to share work and life."

"Bravo," several in the group cheered.

The circle of comments was complete for our class. I was surprised that Sandy chose to say something.

**Sandy,** smiling at me again, stated: "I have enjoyed meeting all of you. Your willingness to live in an unfamiliar culture has inspired me. I am now planning to study in Japan next summer, something that I would never have considered without loving Erika. I hope I can bridge the cultural gap as well as all of you have. Thank you for making room for my significant connection with Erika, which I hope has changed my life too."

“Ooh,” several people responded while others were applauding. I smiled at Sandy.

“Barry, what about you?” Nicole asked. “We heard about your new plans today. A few months ago you said you couldn’t leave your mother in your sister’s care so going overseas was not possible for you.”

“Yes, my family circumstances have changed. Since realizing that my sister has chronic fatigue, we acknowledge that she needs care. So she will live at the condo with my mom where they will share a full-time caregiver. An inheritance my mother had not claimed became available in cash recently, so now there is enough money to hire such a caregiver.”

“Oh, excellent,” Noboru said.

“More importantly, my mom insists that I go abroad now, as she recognizes that this has been my dream for so long. She has commented, ‘What was the point of completing your education and getting all this experience if you can’t complete that dream?’”

“Wow. Wonderful that she is so understanding,” Sumi said.

“Besides she rather likes Claudia, approves of what she is setting out to do, and is pleased that I will be part of all that.”

“It’s good then that Claudia has bought the school so soon.”

“Yes, I am absolutely delighted to be able to get in on this endeavor from the beginning. And I appreciate that Claudia, as my employer (here he smiled at her), acknowledges my need to return to Vancouver at least a couple of times a year so that my mother doesn’t feel abandoned.”

“Nice boss you have, Barry,” Noboru commented. “Don’t we all wish we could do as well?”

Claudia responded, “In fairness I should say that coming and going between Vancouver and Taiwan will be part of the position anyway, as some of Barry’s job, staffing especially, can be done just as easily from Vancouver, since we will be looking to hire a fair proportion of native English speakers.”

At the moment that a server brought out a plate of fortune cookies, Sandy noticed the time and we knew that the two of us must be on our way to get to Mary’s event. He and I stood up saying we would see them soon at the dance.

“Hey, look, you can’t go right now,” Noboru asserted.

“But we are going to that opening of Mary’s art installation at the edge of Coal Harbour.”

“Awesome,” Bae said. “I’ll collect your fortune cookies for you.”

“Thanks, Bae.”



## ***APRIL # 8—Mary’s Art Installation Opening***

*Visuals: photographs of buildings in Coal Harbour and Mary’s artwork*

We could have walked to Coal Harbour, but we wanted to retrieve Sandy’s car from the expensive parking lot. Before heading west beyond Burrard Street, we circled around on some one-way streets. The car radio played a Bob Dillon song that apparently Sandy’s mom has had as a record since her university days. Sandy said he used to play it continuously when he first took up the guitar.

He said, “I’ve always been fascinated by the phrase, ‘We’re married and she’s my friend.’ That is an experience that I want to understand, being married to someone who is my best friend, and now I hope that person will be you.”

“Sandy, you I know I feel the same.”

He squeezed my hand.

In moving over slightly to get closer to Sandy, my foot touched a plastic bag.

“What’s this?”

I didn’t intend to be nosy, but at a glance I saw that it contained some CDs, bath gel, and several tea candles.

There was something about Sandy’s suppressed grin that made me realize what they were for.

To avoid admitting this, Sandy said, “I’ve almost finished our song.”

“Have you?”

“Yes, I’ve been editing it down so it will be stronger.”

“So how many verses are there now?”

“Now?... Ten, I think.”

“Ten still?!”

“Yes, as there is so much to say but, really, I’ve cut out a lot. And some of the verses I hope you will sing to me.”

“What about tonight when we get home?”

"I thought we have other plans for tonight," he smiled.

"We do. I was just momentarily unrealistic about how much we can do in one night."

"So what about singing it together tomorrow morning on the beach before heading for the airport?"

"Good idea."

"Then I can hear it while I'm getting some ocean air in my lungs to sustain me on the plane."

Sandy parked the car just beyond the new building. Evening was bringing on the royal blue sky of a pleasant night. We got out of the car and Sandy opened the trunk lifting out a bouquet of beautiful flowers. He shut the lid quickly.

"Oh, how thoughtful of you, Sandy. Mary will love them. So you've been to openings before.... I never thought about bringing anything, not even a card. But did I see more flowers in the trunk?" I added, without thinking.

Sandy seemed to be preoccupied in putting his car keys in his pocket or checking for something else.

Then I realized.

"Sandy. I did see more flowers, didn't I?"

"You don't need to know yet," he said.

"So they are for me, aren't they?" I teased him.

Again Sandy was holding back a smile.

"I'm so glad I've fallen in love with a romantic," I said.

At that, he drew me closer and we indulged in an unhurried kiss, standing there leaning against the trunk of the car.

"You make me feel like I'd like to go back to the apartment right away," I admitted.

"I do too. But if we did that, we'd be disappointing someone we care about."

"And who also cares about us."

"Yes, so let's go in."



Walking into the crowd of guests in the huge lobby of the new building, I could still feel Sandy's kiss as if it were visible. I was glad not be encountering my classmates at that moment, as

I felt certain that Juliana would perceive it and have no hesitation in saying so.

On both sides of the main entrance of the building, at ground level, there were ready-to-be-leased commercial spaces. In entering the front doors, we were struck by Mary's installation. What a beautiful piece! It was stretching the width of the longest wall of the lobby above marble floors. The impact of the relief was strong despite people milling around tables in front of it spread with wine, delicious-looking edibles, and an ice sculpture shaped as an oversize basket of flowers. Later I heard that Mary's nephew, chef Patrick, carved this.

Mary had shown me photographs of constructed wall pieces by Louise Nevelson that have been an inspiration for her. So at first glance, I understood what she had been attempting to do with the dozens of her individual framed tableaus brought together as one surface. But unlike Nevelson's wall units, which are made up formal, shaped objects, Mary's framed pieces each contain an image suggesting some aspect Vancouver's history. She accomplished this with her integration of assemblage (actual, historical objects), collage (transformed newspaper photographs and other printed ephemera), and paper pulp.

The glow of the painted, abutting frames was accomplished by a subtle shift of colour from left to right starting with frames that were a pale grey, transformed into a muted earth blue, and then became a pale mauve (not surprisingly!)

I could see that Sandy was totally engrossed and impressed by the installation too. At first we stood back and looked at the whole wall and then approached it within arms length to appreciate the details of the intricate, individually framed images.

I was so proud of Mary. I remembered the sign on her fridge: "A spotless house is evidence of a squandered life." Seeing all the artwork that Mary has made over the past year made me glad that she has something that she is passionate about—that she's not pre-occupied with keeping a perfectly organized, dust-free home.

Sandy and I held hands as we weaved our way through the crowd. We hugged Mary. Sandy presented her with the flowers, saying, "Congratulations. What an incredible feat representing Vancouver's history in such a dramatic way."

"Oh, thank you so much," she said smelling the flowers.

"The mural is even more beautiful than I could ever have imagined," I said.

"Ah, so you like it?"

"Yes, we love it."

Soon I was feeling that we shouldn't monopolize Mary's attention. But I set this thought aside in seeing Vincent and Mr. Matsumoto, the architect/speaker from the UBC lecture coming toward us.

"Ah, we meet yet again," Vincent laughed in recognizing us and Mary.

"Well, hello," Sandy said. "Glad to see you again, Mr. Matsumoto, Vincent."

"Indeed, a surprise!" said Mr. Matsumoto, seeming to suppress a bow.

Vincent introduced Mary to him and then commented, "Erika, I should have assumed you and Sandy would be here when I recognized Mary as the artist and your homestay mother."

"We are here at the invitation of the architects," Mr. Matsumoto apparently felt impelled to explain.

Sandy commented, "My father has said that Vancouver, architecturally, is a very small world."

"And of course he is right, Sandy," Vincent added, "Note the shared aim in integrating commercial and residential space, as in your dad's Urban Village and in Mr. Matsumoto's Pender Street project."

"It's just that the Pender Street development begins with existing, historical buildings," Mr. Matsumoto told Mary.

"While increasing the density and offering some new forms of housing," Sandy added.

"Exactly," commented Mr. Matsumoto.

"Perhaps it also will need some historical decoration," Mary said with a smile.

"An excellent idea, Mary," Vincent commented. "And we can see that you would be abundantly qualified to provide that."

One of the organizers reached Mary and apologized for drawing her away. The crowd became quiet as master of ceremonies introduced the architects and Mary. He talked about the accomplishments of the architects in completing the development and about Mary in creating the stunning historical piece for the lobby. The architects mentioned the kind of businesses that would be moving into the commercial spaces at ground level. He ended by inviting everyone to view the residential display suites upstairs.

At the conclusion of the formal remarks, I saw many members of Mary's family mingling around in the crowd. We re-met several of them. I was touched by how supportive they are of Sandy and me in our shared plans.

"Erika, Mary has mentioned that you are going back to Japan soon, but you will be returning before the end of summer vacation," said Patrick, Mary's nephew.

"Yes, I'm leaving tomorrow morning actually."

"But you're going to be in UBC's architecture department together," his sister said.

"Yes."

"That is so cool."

"Sandy, will be going into his final year in September and I will be going into my first year."

"Of architecture," Sandy clarified, as he munched on a croissant sporting something particularly fancy.

"That's great. While you are away, Mary is going to miss you so much, Erika," said one of Mary's nieces.

"So will you be staying with her when you return?"

"I hope to. At least first term. After that I may need to stay closer to campus if travel time is too long."

"Perhaps I may have an influence there," Sandy said, smiling at me. "I hope we may be able to do much of our commuting together."

"Oh, Sandy," I laughed. "We haven't even talked about where I'll be living after first term."

"Just scheming...." he smiled at me.

One of Mary's nieces asked Sandy and me if we had toured the display suites upstairs.

"No. Not yet."

"Oh, you must. I sure wish I had a chunk of change to buy one of these condos with the gorgeous views!"

Sandy and I went up in the elevator to the eighteenth floor that was available for viewing. We followed the red carpet to the display suites. It was surprisingly crowded and guests were standing around eating hors d'oeuvres and chatting. Somehow, Sandy and I got separated so, when I finished the tour, I returned to the lobby.

I was pleased to see Sandy talking with Mary again. I walked toward them. After exchanging some comments about the suites and how much we had enjoyed the opening, Mary asked, "What time will you be leaving for the airport tomorrow?"

"About noon."

"So could you be around for breakfast at 11:00?"

"That would be wonderful."

"We plan to get up early to go down to the beach, but we can certainly be back by then."

"Good, then I'll be ready for you."

"And now we should probably be on our way if we are going to do any dancing."

"Oh, of course. And you'll want time with your friends to say goodbye."



## ***APRIL # 9—The Graduation Dance***

*Visuals: photographs of downtown area in the evening*

Because the distance was short, we didn't bother re-parking the car. Instead we walked back to the dance. As we entered the large ballroom, we felt energized for having had this hike in the pleasant evening air.

Our group had taken over the back corner of the hall so that everyone could sit together, or at least gather there. But many were also on the dance floor. Sandy and I joined them there, but when the music became fast, we stepped to the side and looked toward the band.

"Do you wish you were on stage?" I asked.

"Not especially, even though they are pretty good. Now I am happier being here with you."

I looked at the dancers in our group and realized Noboru was wearing a three-piece suit that reminded me of when we first met. At a dance this attire was entirely appropriate, whereas in the classroom it had seemed extraordinarily pretentious. Sumi was looking elegant in a black, flowing, spaghetti-strap dress that showed off her beautiful (very fit) shoulders that she had hidden under a shawl during dinner. I had taken off the jacket to my dress that I had worn at supper—the outfit (black of course!) that Sumi had helped me buy (with much encouragement and laughter). I knew she would never forgive me if I went without exposing a little more of what was underneath.

As Sandy and I started slow dancing again, he put his mouth against my temple and softly said, "You look gorgeous."

I looked up and quietly said, "You are looking rather stunning yourself."

He added, "The pearl drop looks especially good on your bare skin."

"Bare skin," I said touching the necklace and Sandy put his hand there on top of mine.

When the band continued with another danceable song, one that I knew that Sandy's band had played, I said, "Do you know I never said goodbye to Leah and Larry."

"Well, they are still away, so that is not possible. But I do have an address for where they'll be landing soon. Maybe together we could write a note or at least a post card to them."

"I'd like to. But perhaps it is just as well that they are not around, as I might have been overwhelmed by gratitude to them."

"More gratitude, Erika. So why this time?"

"Well, without them we might never have got together."

"Really. I suppose that is true. They did invite you to that rehearsal."

"Not just invited me, but invited the two of us to come early so we would be forced to talk to each other, alone, before the others arrived."

"They did that?" he laughed. "On purpose? How do you know they did that intentionally?"

"Leah told me."

"She did?" Sandy continued to laugh. "But why would they do that?"

"Later she admitted they had been worried about you. That in the previous year you had become painfully shy or at least awkward around seemingly unattached young women. They hoped that due to our shared interest in architecture, we might hit it off and you might get over your aloofness or at least your uncomfortableness."

"Well, they were right."

"So do you feel manipulated?"

"Definitely not. If you hadn't immediately appealed to me, it would have been very easy for me not to have any further contact with you."

"As was almost the case."

"How do you mean this?"

"Well, hadn't you decided that you wouldn't have anything to do with me? Didn't they encourage you to call me that morning after Canada Day?"

"That's true they did, but only after they knew for sure how much I wished I *could* know you better."

"So what did they do to get you to phone me that morning?" I laughed.

"Do you really want to know?"

"Of course I do."

Smiling with some apparent embarrassment, Sandy said, "I don't know if I want to tell you this."

"Come on, Sandy. Tell me," I urged him laughing.

"Well, okay," Sandy laughed some more. "They were ready to leave, in the van, ahead of me. To go to the Tsawwassen Ferry terminal where we hoped to meet up."

He paused, so to encourage him to go on, I said, "Yes, so?"

"Well, Leah, as much the romantic as you are, Erika, told me to not follow with my car until after I had called you."

"Really?"

"Yes, and as she and Larry went out the door, she repeated this and then added, 'And don't be late for the ferry!'"

Sandy and I laughed together.

"So, you see, we really do have a lot to be grateful to them for," I commented.

"Yes, I suppose we do. They've been such good friends to me."

"In effect they helped you to do what they knew you wanted to do," I commented.

"Exactly."

"Maybe that's a role we can take on for each other."

"I'd like that," Sandy confirmed by kissing me on the bridge of my nose.

"The way you gave me advice on submitting my UBC architectural portfolio."

"And the way you helped me in becoming disentangled from a certain unwanted, former girlfriend," he commented.

"So that was a help?"

He smiled and confirmed, "Yes, it has all been good."

We drew even closer, our thighs touching again, moving as one. I knew that got us both into thinking about later.

Quietly he asked, "So you still want to follow through with our plan for tonight?"

"Yes, of course, I do."

"Just checking," he said and kissed me lightly on my forehead.

As the music stopped, I realized how much we had been in our own little world for those few dances, oblivious to everything around us.

I looked toward others of our group who had been dancing nearby. I realized Juliana was watching Sandy and me. Had she seen us talking and laughing together and then affectionately agreeing on something? Could she be observing, studying even, the attraction between us? Was she wondering how to develop or redevelop that feeling with her husband?

Certainly in the past few weeks I've been noticing the increasing chemistry between Noboru and Sumi. It is visible. Something beyond Noboru's constant attempts to be helpful to Sumi and even more than the closeness of Sumi being at Noboru's bedside every night during his hospital recovery.

The music became fast again. Sumi and Noboru headed back to the table to sit down, so Sandy and I followed them.

Getting settled there, they asked Sandy and me about Mary's installation. For a moment that seemed a long time ago already, but Sandy was able to start describing it, so I was able to join in with a few additional comments.

"Another fortunate aspect of the event was that we re-met the Japanese architect that Sandy will be working with in Japan."

"No way!" Noboru exclaimed.

"What a small world," Sumi commented.

Any further potential conversation about this ended when Noboru got a call on his cell phone.

After Noboru said hello, Sumi silently asked, "For Juliana?"

Noboru nodded his head to say, "Yes."

"I'll get her."

Sumi went to Juliana at the centre of the dance floor where she was group dancing with Fernando, Nicole, Song, and Bae (yes, Bae was doing quite well). Sumi and Juliana walked back toward Noboru. Wordlessly he handed the phone to Juliana, who took it away to find a quiet place to talk.

"What's this about?" Sandy asked.

Noboru explained, "She is hoping to get some news from home tonight to share with us, so she arranged to receive the call on my phone."

When Juliana returned she had a big smile on her face.

"He's coming on Tuesday!"

"Hooray!" Sumi responded.

"He?" Sandy asked.

"My husband. He's arranged to spend my last two weeks here with me. We are hoping that some of Vancouver's magic might brush off on us too."

"Wow," I responded. "That sounds like a new start to me."

"Yes, I hope so," Juliana said happily.

"Great news," Noboru said.

"I wish we could be around to see this," Sumi commented.

"I do too," I added, happy for her.

Juliana waved to some others of our group to get them to gather around to tell them too. They were all delighted for her,

as this suggests that her husband too wants to add some romance to their marriage.

Bae approached Sandy and me, saying, "Before I forget...."

He put his hand in his pocket bringing out half a fortune cookie with its paper fortune still in tact. The other half of the cookie had been crushed into crumbs that were mixed with lint from Bae's pocket.

"Not in the best shape," he confessed apologetically in offering us the cookie. "This is the only one I was able to claim for you. The rest of them were gobbled up by our greedy classmates."

"Oh, thanks, Bae. Is it an optimistic prediction?"

"Well, I can't see. You will have to open it."

I released the paper from the half cookie, unfolded it, and read it aloud:

"The two of you have chosen well."

"Oh, good, that sounds promising," Bae said.

"It does, doesn't it," Sandy agreed with a smile.

Juliana and the others soon drifted back to the dance floor leaving Noboru, Sumi, Sandy, and me alone again.

"Actually that's the second call I have received here tonight," Noboru commented. "So Erika, despite all the negative things you've said about cell phones always being out of battery, breaking down, or choosing not to work, etc., they can be useful."

"The other news?" Sandy asked.

"Actually the call was from Erika's dad."

"My dad?!" I declared somewhat alarmed.

"Relax," Noboru said touching my arm. "Your dad was trying to reach me, not you."

"He was?"

"Yes. His company has offered me a job."

"A job!"

"Yes, as IT manager in their new facility."

"They are expanding?"

"Yes, Erika, if you weren't so busy siding with your mom all the time, perhaps you would notice what your dad is accomplishing. He is, of course, one of the top managers with the most prestigious electronics firms in Japan."

"So he offered you this job?"

"Not just your dad. The whole management team, who I interviewed with when I was there."

"They met you? Interviewed you?" I asked incredulously.

"Yes, Erika. In your preoccupation with Sandy when he was in hospital and then convalescing at home, and I forgive you for that (he smiled at Sandy), you lost track of the fact that I was out of hospital for five days before I returned to school."

"Five days...."

"Yes. And during that time I made a trip to Japan to interview for three positions that your dad had arranged contacts for. One was with his company. The other two were also with top electronics firms."

"And you just happened to accept his offer...."

"Not 'just happened.' I considered all three in detail and chose his company because it seems to be a better fit for me."

"Well...." I exhaled to try to relax.

"Seems we will have a close connection back home after all."

I didn't know what to say, but I was spared from responding as Noboru added, "Another thing I haven't admitted...."

"Something else?"

"Yes. Once I got through all the interviews, well, I had dinner with your family."

"You did!"

"Yes, revisiting with your parents and meeting your sisters, even though Yoko was leaving for England the next morning."

"I can't believe this. You've done all this and not mentioned any of it to me?"

"And you wish I would have been more open with you?" he commented, smiling, aware of some irony. We were thinking of when he had confronted me with similar words, after I'd been accepted into UBC's architecture program without telling him immediately.

He added, "I wanted to communicate my decision on the offer before filling you in on the details, and I only did this in the last couple of hours."

"I'm surprised my sisters haven't said something."

"I asked them to give me a chance to talk to you first. Besides, I expect Yoko has been rather busy since arriving in England."

"Yes, I assume so. You met Kiri as well?"

"Yes, and I can't express how much she misses you, Erika—you, her big sister for those four years while Yoko was away, and your playing music together."

"And I miss her too, and I will get close to her again in the next few months."

"Anyway, as long as you are living here with Sandy, I am not going to let you totally abandon your family," Noboru

warned me seriously. "You always expect people to be the best versions of themselves, Erika."

"I do? I thought that was Claudia's role for us all? To keep us being the best person we can be. Do I have that role now too?"

"Yes, you certainly do. But I am available to help you be the best form of yourself too."

"All right. You can remind me if I ever seem to be ignoring my family, as long as that doesn't mean neglecting Sandy. He is my first commitment now."

"Of course. And another thing," Noboru added.

"What?" I almost demanded, not feeling up to hearing anything more.

"Your dad is going to meet us all on our arrival."

"No kidding. He has never done airport duty, or even met the bullet train, for Yoko or me."

"Well, maybe with me as a link, the three of you can improve your relationship."

"I'm not opposed to that," I finally said, thinking of the frequent stress between my father and me and the at-times intense conflict between Yoko and Dad.

After this exchange, I felt exhausted. I just wanted to be in Sandy's arms. Luckily the band was playing slow music again. The emcee encouraged everyone to get up, saying there were only three dances left and they would all be slow ones. Sandy and I joined the others on the dance floor.

The moment Sandy put his hand on my lower back I felt his healing touch calm me as if radiant energy was spreading out from his fingers. I remembered the first time I met Sandy at the rehearsal at Larry and Leah's. Then I didn't know how to interpret the awakened feeling I had experienced from Sandy's gentle handshake. I'm so grateful that Sandy's hands have recovered their seemingly magical power for me since his frostbite.

I struggled to keep out of my mind anything related to his survival on the mountain. I didn't want to spoil the moment of again moving as one to the music. I wished we could hold on to this closeness forever.

Sandy said, "So you and your younger sister used to play classical music together?"

"Yes, we did."

"So I have perhaps become the pianist to you that she was?"

"I hadn't thought of that, but I suppose in the previous five years she had been to me somewhat of what Vicky was to you."

"I guess I don't mind becoming your replacement piano accompanist," he said good-naturedly.

After the music stopped and the lights brightened, we were told to clear the dance floor. Everyone was silent, standing where we were as if struck immobile in knowing that this was the beginning of the end for us as a group. So many of us would be leaving immediately—Fernando, Nicole, Sumi, Noboru, and me; and within the next couple of weeks, Song, Bae, Barry, Marina, and Juliana.

A shiver of fear went through me in realizing that in the morning I would be standing in a lineup in the airport to get on a plane to leave Vancouver. It was upsetting to say goodbye to my classmates—so many hugs, promises... and tears. At least at that moment of parting, going home for the night was still something to look forward to.

All of us in our group went back to our tables and gathered up our things. In turning to disperse, to head for the doors, Juliana broke the gloomy mood in singling out Sandy and me and, without lowering her voice, said, "You two should go home and screw."

Those within hearing laughed. Sumi challenged her tone, saying, "Oh, Juliana. Could you be a little less crass?"

I felt a little embarrassed and did Sandy blush slightly? We just smiled without saying anything.

We left holding hands and walked back to Sandy's car. As we drove toward the apartment, one of the songs from his mom's collection that Sandy had played for me at his house some time ago was on the CD player. It was "I Can't Stop Loving You" by Ray Charles.

I was thinking, could there be a more romantic song than that? I guess I must have also said this aloud, because Sandy responded, "And do you know, he sang this song in a famous concert he gave in Japan in 1982."

"Really," I laughed in considering everything that Sandy was doing to make this night memorable for me. Personalizing it for me.

In arriving at the parking strip behind the apartment, Sandy took the plastic Shopper's Drug Mart bag from the floor of the front seat. We got out of the car. Earlier when I had mistakenly moved the bag with my foot, I had noticed Sandy's CD's, the bath gel, and candles, but when he asked me to hold the bag, I could also see it also contained a sealed telltale box. I smiled in realizing that Sandy had thought of everything.

He opened the trunk and retrieved the flowers.

"For you, Love," he said, as he presented the deep pink roses to me in the light from a streetlight overhead (the moon

must have been there somewhere too!). Wordlessly we smiled and then hugged.

In coming into the apartment, I was glad that we had the place to ourselves. Having been snacking all evening, Sandy and I decided we didn't need anything more to eat. But we knew we would bathe together.

I started the water and added the fragrant bath gel that Sandy had brought. I placed the candles in Mary's frosted candle cups, and Sandy lit them and placed them on the bathroom vanity and on the bedroom dresser. He put the CDs into the player in my room.

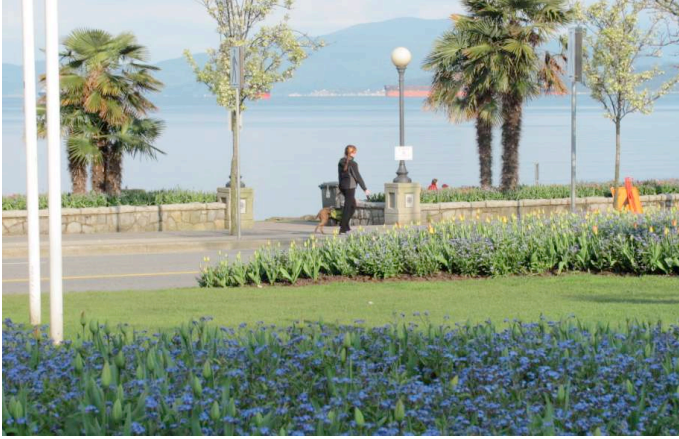
After enjoying the fluffy suds, we rinsed and dried each other. Sandy claimed the larger towel and then we laughed over his attempt to convince me that the one-towel-each rule was proof of equality. And yes, in this state, we still felt as attracted to each other as the first time I saw Sandy in a towel only.

We extinguished the candles in the bathroom and, after a couple of seconds of darkness while our eyes adjusted, we entered into the bedroom candlelight.

This is all I am going to say about our last evening together. Forgive me for being selfish, but I will remember that wonderful night forever, so there is no need to document it. Besides, telling others would diminish the memory for us by making it less private. We want to keep it as something that only we shared.

I'll just say Sandy and I certainly know we love each other. We are now even more committed to our shared future.





## ***APRIL # 10—Last Morning on Beach and Seawall***

*Visuals: photographs of beach early in the morning and images from around the seawall*

As I came out of sleep, I became conscious that Sandy had been gently kissing my face as a way to wake me up slowly. When I opened my eyes, I realized he had been propped up on one elbow watching me sleep. For how long, I wondered.

“Good morning,” he smiled.

“Yes, good morning.”

“It’s nice to see that you got at least some sleep.”

“Did you?”

“A little.”

“A little?”

“Well, it is not yet seven o’clock and, as you know, we were still awake in the light. So how are you feeling?” he asked.

“A bit early to tell, but we certainly had a nice night, didn’t we?”

“Yes, definitely a memorable night.”

“I wish it could go on forever.”

“I do too. But ocean waves are calling us,” Sandy commented with a reluctant smile.

“And your song.”

“Yes, even my song is waiting for us. But you’d like a moment longer in bed?”

“I would.”

“Okay, then, I’ll have my shower. Alone,” he said, pausing for emphasis. “You revive for a few more minutes.”

Wishing I had the energy to jump up and shower with Sandy at that moment, I soon heard the water running and drifted off to sleep for a few more minutes.

I wasn't aware of how long I had been dozing when Sandy came back to bed in his towel. He stretched out behind me and kissed the back of my neck.

"Your turn in the shower," he said encouragingly.  
"Think of the beach in the cool sunlight," he added.

Once I was on my feet, I kept my shower short. We were soon dressed for our walk and I felt significantly revived.

When we were in our jackets, Sandy and I leaned against the kitchen counter, and each other, as we shared a large glass of orange juice. Still feeling our emotions from last night, I was so drawn to him. How to move apart? I was already missing him.

"So you've got your guitar?"

"Yes. And you've got your camera?"

"Yes. And energy bars just in case...."

"So we're ready, Er."

"I guess we are."

We headed for the beach on the bright but quiet morning, the air smelling fragrant with unfolding foliage and new life emerging. The deepest pink cherry trees are still blooming along Davie Street, and blue-purple forget-me-nots and yellow-orange tulips are crowded into the flower border with the many local flags waving within sight of the beach.



Sandy carried his guitar in a soft case with a strap over his shoulder. We sat down on a log not far from where we gathered that August night when Sandy sang the first verses of his song to me with my classmates.

For a few moments there was not another person within sight and hardly a wave was visible on the surface of the water.

We began looking further out at the ocean.

"When we miss each other, we should think of this ocean, of looking across the Pacific..."

"Knowing that the water joins us."

"Exactly."

Sandy unfolded a copy of the song, asking, "Are you ready to sing some of the verses of our song to me?"

"Yes, if you show me which ones."

"The words in mauve indicate that you sing them to me and the last verse in blue we sing together."

"All right."

Sitting there together, our thighs touching, Sandy began strumming a few bars.

He looked directly at me and then began to sing.

*I like the path you've chosen.  
May I walk along with you?  
And if the way gets closed in,  
we could cuddle just us two.  
And when there's fairer weather,  
we could set out once again,  
to pursue our goals together,  
you're my beloved friend.*

*Yes, I'd like to travel side by side  
with interwoven hands  
for each other be a counsellor  
and together make our plans.  
We seem to have so much to share  
and I cherish my time with you.  
Discovering how to be a pair  
makes my life feel new.*

*You helped me through that blizzard,  
gave me strength to stay alive.  
You kept me going when it was  
a struggle to survive.  
I felt your presence and your spirit  
through the darkness and the strife.  
I endured the bitter cold knowing  
that for me you'll change your life.*

*I love to lie beside you  
and feel close throughout the night.  
You know how much I need you  
and yearn to share the light.  
To know each other further  
we've had to wait so long.  
I admit I sometimes feared  
we couldn't be that strong.*

*Now it's time for us to part  
as you make a visit home.  
Remember that you hold my heart  
any time that you feel alone.*

*Missing you will give me pain  
though your trip as planned is brief.  
Only when we meet again  
will my loss become relief.*

*Next summer when you take me home  
to introduce me to your friends,  
I'll let them and all your family know  
I plan to make amends  
for taking you so far away  
from your beloved land.  
We'll reveal our love's so sure  
that we have to take a stand.*

*Then I hope they welcome us  
and not become enraged,  
if you accept my ring  
so we can be engaged.  
We'll show we've made a promise  
because we care so very much,  
we are truly more than friends  
because there's pleasure in our touch.*

*Yes, someday I hope we'll marry  
to declare our feelings real  
to show the world we are one  
I've hoped that's how you feel.  
I too admit there have been times  
I feared we couldn't wait  
to let our passion speak  
though a shared life is our fate.*

*I never really dared to think  
that I could get along  
in someone else's country  
but loving you has made me strong.  
With you I have the courage  
to leave my ancestral home,  
to know we'll walk together  
means we'll never be alone.*

I joined Sandy in singing the last verse.

*In the next few months we'll make more plans  
For when our study's done  
And we'll ensure our journey there  
Together will be fun.*

*Yes, I like the path you've chosen.  
We'll share all until the end.  
We'll pursue our goals together,  
you're my lover and my friend.*

My eyes were misting and I guess I was struck quiet, because in the silence I finally heard Sandy say, "So you like it?"

"Yes, you know I do. It's beautiful. It reveals so much about us."

"Including the last line...."

"Yes, especially the last line." Smiling I asked, "When did you write that?"

"As you may have guessed, just the night we made our plan, but before it was true."

"But we were hopeful," I said, smiling at him.

"Yes, definitely hopeful. But that's partly why I didn't want to sing it to you before last night."

"I'm so glad it is now true."

"Yeah. I'm glad for us too. We waited for so long."

"Forever."

We both smiled at the ambiguity of this.

"Do you have any regrets about last night?"

"Definitely no regrets, Sandy. No one could be more considerate and loving than you are."

Wanting to lighten the tone a bit, I added, "I don't even regret loosing almost a whole night's sleep."

We hugged, sitting within sight of where Sandy had first put his arm around my shoulder.

After gazing out at the horizon again a few minutes, Sandy said, "Our song is probably too specific to be meaningful to other people."

"Are you saying Leah and Larry won't be able to use it with the band, for instance?"

"Exactly."

"But that's not important, is it? I love that it's so personal and does.... Sandy, did you mean it to be a proposal?"

"If everything goes well between us in the next year, Er, then yes, I hope you'll accept this song as my proposal to you."

"If *everything* goes well? Not even one fight?" I teased.

Becoming more serious than I expected, Sandy commented, "I don't want us to fight, Er, ever, because one of us might lose and I don't want either of us to lose. I want us to win and win together."

"You know I want that too, Sandy. Don't you?"

"Yes, Er. I'm sorry. I do know you want that too."

"Would you sing the song on a disc for me and send it to me?"

"I can do that."

"It will remind me of the good feelings of hearing it today."

"Are you going to need such a reminder?" he teased.

"No, you know I won't. But I will be able to listen to it whenever I am missing you."

"So how often do you think you will listen to it?"

"Probably every night before I go to bed."

"I guess that will be all right. At least that won't be like overwatering a plant."

We smiled in remembering his concern about that.

"Shall we walk to the five benches lookout?"

"Yes, let's."

We were quiet as we strolled along holding hands within sight of the viewpoint. When we arrived there we sat down and looked out toward the horizon. I dared to return to the previous topic where Sandy's tone had surprised me.

"Sandy, we did learn a lot from fighting, didn't we?"

"I suppose. It's just that I don't think we need to dwell on those times any further."



"It was about me needing to understand about you having trouble trusting."

"About how I *had* trouble trusting," he said, finally smiling.

"Right. Now you are more secure."

"Yes. Your love has made me feel secure."

"Now you're not afraid of my friendship with Noboru."

"That's right."

"In that way I suppose we should be grateful for your night on the mountain."

"A rather harsh way of learning that lesson."

"I know, Sandy, I'm sorry. I definitely wouldn't have wished for that ordeal just to accomplish that, but I am glad you did get over your suspicions of Noboru."

"I am too."

We were sitting staring at the large rock just beside the benches of the lookout—the one I have photographed repeatedly.

"Sandy, I want that rock to represent how we feel now."

"All right."

"And if we ever question how we feel about each other, we should visit this rock to remind us of this moment."

Going along with this, Sandy said, "Erika, I want to give you that rock."

"Okay." I smiled. "I accept it, and I give it to you too."

As much as this sounded like a childhood game, it was somehow reassuring to have this as a measure, something to hold onto on this day of parting.



Wanting to sit there for a few minutes longer, I brought out of my bag a postcard of the West End that I have an extra copy of and had put a stamp on.

"Oh, good thinking. For Leah and Larry, right?"

"You have an address for them...."

"Yes. They visited me in hospital, but I wasn't awake."

"Oh, too bad."

"Anyway, they left me a note outlining where they'd be staying on tour, and the dates, and where they would subsequently be taking personal holiday time from mid-April to mid-May."

"So if we write it now, you can get it in the mail in time for them receive it while they're on their holiday."

"Exactly."

Lightening our mood for the next few minutes, we joked about what we could say to them—admitting where their introduction to each other has led us, including last night.

"I thought that is just for us to know," I said.

"You're right. Although they will probably guess correctly about this by now."

"You think so? I did wonder what they were thinking that time we had Noel with us, coming back from the jazz festival, when they knew I'd stayed at your house overnight."

"Exactly, and that was so long ago."

So in deciding to be serious and in becoming more realistic about how little space a card holds, we simply wrote:

Greetings Leah and Larry,

Hoping your trip to exotic places is going well. You definitely deserve some quiet personal time with each other. We are feeling forever grateful to you both for introducing us. We've made some plans as a couple starting by being in architecture together at UBC in Sept. Can you save some time to spend with the two of us before the end of the summer?

Much love,

*Erika* and Sandy

Sandy put the card in his inside pocket. We stood up and continued to walk. We stayed silent. As we could have said so much, the quiet lapses both surprised me and at the same time reassured me.

Finally Sandy said, "Last night Noboru mentioned that your sister has gone to England to be with her boyfriend."

"Yes, she and Andrew are going to start spending more of the year together, doing some of their work in Japan and the rest of it in England. Together instead of separately."

"I hope that approach works well for them. But does that mean Yoko will be absent while you are back in Japan?"

"No, her current trip to London will be less than a month, and Andrew will return to Japan with her. I am really looking forward to meeting him, to see how they relate."

"You seemed to be irritated with Noboru last night."

"I was. Last night I just cared about you, Sandy. Just wanted to be with you. I didn't appreciate Noboru getting me to think about family. There will be time enough to face the reality of home once I get back. I just hope Noboru won't complicate my interaction with my father."

"Perhaps he can ease your relationship with your dad."

"If he can, I will be pleased."

"So you'll be glad to have Noboru around?"

"I hope so. I will if that means Sumi and I can remain close and the four of us can be friends."

"Certainly doing things with them will provide continuity with our time together in Vancouver."

"I'd like that. Look, your house is up there."

"It is. Seeing the site from here makes me regret being part of that destructive push up the mountainside. Our house was built there in the 1960s. Then no one foresaw such development."



Silent again, I said, "Sandy, you are being quiet."

"You must know how I'm feeling now."

"Now?"

"Last night has made parting even more difficult."

"It has. But I am counting on you to be the strong one."

"I'm trying, Er. But I'm going to feel so abandoned after you leave. When I am walking away alone."

Together we paused and hugged, just standing there while a couple of people walked around us.

When we started moving again, I said, "I never used to know what it meant when one lover said to the other, 'I need you.'"

"As I need you...." Sandy stated.

"I thought it sounded like a selfish thing to say. Like I need you to drive me somewhere or I need you to carry the groceries."

"I hope it means something different to you now."

"Yes, now it means so much more."

"It certainly does."

"And I need you," I stated.

"And I am glad because, as you know, I need you. And that's what will keep us together and...."

"Faithful to one another during our time apart."

"Exactly," Sandy agreed.

"But you're feeling down?"

"Of course, I am. Because you're about to get on that plane."

"And we're tired," I said squeezing his hand.  
"Yes. I kept you up."  
"Sandy, we kept each other up."  
"Yeah," he said, looking at me and smiling again.  
"Most definitely worth it."  
"Yes, we have wanted that for such a long time."



"Hey, look. Siwash Rock."  
"Amazing isn't it. To have survived like that for so long."  
"Enduring."  
"We may need some of that endurance to get through these next few months."  
"Please, Sandy, remind me how to do that."  
"I guess one way is to do things that will help us prepare for life together."  
"Specifically?"  
"Well, last night when we lost each other in touring the display suites, I had a further conversation with Mr. Matsumoto."  
"Oh, did you? And?"  
"He told me he'd like me to do some work for his firm."  
"Really! What could you do at this stage?"  
"He's asked me to become very familiar with the plans of the Pender Street project, so I can photograph the heritage buildings along those two blocks while the others, the dilapidated buildings, are being torn down."  
"Really. Photographing? This summer?"  
"Yes, to serve as his eyes and to keep track of how things are progressing. So he can minimize his Tokyo-Vancouver trips. Apparently he doesn't like to travel."  
"Could that by any chance mean a trip to Japan to meet with him?"

"It seems feasible that I could make at least one such visit while you are there this summer."

"Oh, Sandy. That would be wonderful!"

"Maybe I am getting way ahead of ourselves...."

"In what way?"

"I am wondering if you also could do a Japanese work-study project during your studies."

"As a reason to finance trips to Japan?"

"Partly. But also to develop Japanese connections that we could take with us into Dad's firm."

"Long-lasting connections...."

"Yes, so rather than just helping to perpetuate Dad's business, you could bring who you are into our professional life."

"I'd certainly like to do that."

In turning the corner around Prospect Point, we came directly into strong morning sunlight.

Sandy said, "Look at the bridge. It looks so simple. Delicate even."

"Somewhat deceptive, isn't it?"

Sandy added, "Trying to be true to who you are, who we are, won't always be simple, but at least this can be a goal for us."



"In your song you suggest we need to have fun along the way. As events unfold."

"Yes, so even where we have plans, we can alter them if other, better, opportunities present themselves. And I have an example."

"Already?"

"Well, last night you suggested you might not stay with Mary after your first semester."

"Due to long travel times...."

"But I said I was scheming."

"I remember."

“Well, maybe instead I should have should said I am dreaming.”

“About?”

“Well, Grant and Lynn took over the downstairs suite in my parents’ house to enable them to commute together....”

“Oh, Sandy, do you think we could ever do that! Live there together while I am still a student?”

“I don’t see why not. My parents have always tried to be equitable in their treatment of us three kids.”

“But without the pressure there seems to have been for Grant and Lynn?”

“A lot has changed socially since then about living together before marriage. That pressure doesn’t exist now.”

“I certainly wish we could speed up and get to the living together part.”

“For at least this summer, Er, we need to be patient.”



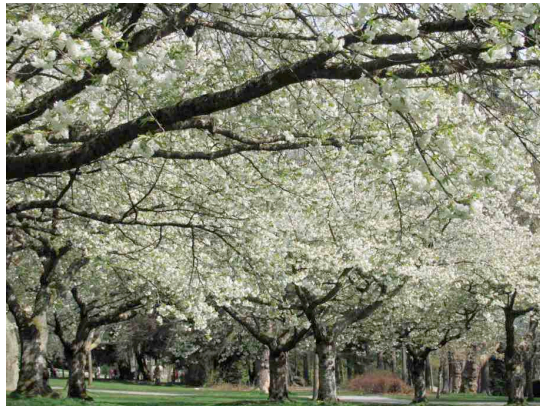
“Hey, as for speeding up....” I said, looking at my watch.

“Yes, to be on time for Mary’s breakfast, we should head back via Lumbermen’s Arch.”

“All right.”

We walked up the long, sloped lawn among cherry trees with their branches in blossom scenting the air. Several trees were standing in pairs seeming to make an aisle for couples to walk through as in some romantic memory.

As in our memory of this day.



At the top of the hill, we got to the Canadian Japanese Memorial, just out of sight of the aquarium. The stream flowing by, in some spots, is almost obscured by evergreens. I saw the towering structure with more appreciation this time than the last time we had walked this way and photographed it.

This decorative carved pillar commemorates the Japanese citizens, the soldiers, who fought for Canada in the First World War. It is so beautiful in the still morning light that illuminates the intricately carved details. It looks so clean. And the concept suggested by the inscribed words *Canadian Japanese* (or Japanese Canadian?) is so appealing to me.

But now I too am dreaming—way too far ahead!





## ***APRIL # 11—Final Breakfast with Mary***

*Visuals: photographs of Mary's breakfast, flowers from Mary's opening*

Sandy and I arrived back at the apartment, feeling energized.

In approaching the door Sandy said, "You look radiant."

"Radiant?"

"Yes, really. From our exercise."

"Despite our lack of sleep."

"Yes. Even so."

I smiled.

Mary almost had the breakfast ready. The aromas of bacon cooking and coffee brewing were intermingled. She seemed to be aglow with the accomplishment of the success of the opening for her monumental art piece.

"Good morning, Mary. So good of you to be cooking for us the morning after your amazing opening," Sandy said.

"No problem. I just had the best six-hour sleep I've had for weeks. For the first time in ages, I wasn't thinking about some detail of what I still had to do or worrying about how the installation would go."

"Such a large undertaking and getting it completed on time...." I commented.

"You must be so pleased with the way it all turned out," Sandy said.

"Yes, I was certainly relieved that there weren't any last minute, insurmountable obstacles or a major disaster."

"And you must be thrilled that so many people attended," I added.

"It's true. That surprised me. And I was especially happy that so many of my family came."

"Shall I finish setting the table?" Sandy asked.

"Yes. That would be very helpful while I tend these pancakes. And Erika, feel free to finish packing. I'll be a few minutes yet."

"Okay, I won't be long."

I returned to the bedroom, changed, and crammed into my suitcase the clothes I had been wearing since last night. I was glad that I had left the extra boxes at Sandy's house. Otherwise I certainly could not have kept within the airline's allowable limit.

When I returned to the kitchen, I was pleased to see how comfortable Sandy was (again!) in having (wordlessly?) located, and set on the table, the cutlery, cups and saucers, butter, milk, salt and pepper, teapot, and maple syrup.

When the three of us were seated, Mary said, "So you went to the beach?"

"Actually, more than that—we've walked a fair portion of the seawall."

"Oh, good for you. It's such a lovely spring morning."

"Yes, perfect."

"And I think I finally got some decent photographs of Siwash Rock."

"Yes, I imagine it would stand out best in morning light."

"You're right. It does."

"Are you totally packed?"

"Yes. I am now."

"So you must be looking forward to being greeted by your family and friends."

"Well, I'll start thinking about that once I'm on the plane and know I can't turn around mid-ocean. Right now I am more pre-occupied by having to leave Sandy."

"Of course, you are."

Sandy put his fingers over my wrist.

Mary commented, "It's just that I'd like to see your family in realizing how much self-confidence you've gained as a result of being here."

"You think my self-confidence has increased?"

"Of course, it has. Living away from home, using English exclusively, risking being an outsider, and being vulnerable as a result of all that...."

"I suppose it has, because I couldn't previously have imagined doing my architectural studies in Vancouver. But then I wouldn't have decided to do that without loving Sandy."

"And I wonder how they will like your Canadian accent."

"I have a Canadian accent?"

"Pretty much. Certainly you've lost the British accent that you arrived with."

"Another benefit of having a Canadian boyfriend?" I smiled at Sandy and said, "Yes, I'd like to have Sandy's accent."

"Erika, shall we tell Mary about the project?"

"The Pender Street project?"

"Yes."

"Sure."

"Well, Mary, Mr. Matsumoto, the Japanese architect who was there last night, has asked me to do some work for his Pender Street project starting soon."

"Really?"

"Yes, just as a small contract."

"Doing?"

"Some photographing. He wants me to document the development of the site to minimize his trips to Vancouver."

"Oh, excellent..."

"We're hoping that might include at least one trip to Japan for Sandy this summer while I am there."

"Wouldn't that be wonderful if the arrangement enables the two of you to meet in Japan?"

"Exactly."

"Also, Sandy has suggested that I plan to do an international design course in Japan in my program too."

"You two are really thinking ahead!" Mary added.

"Seems to be a natural impulse for us right now," Sandy agreed.

"And if you work on any projects in Vancouver that need a mural installation..."

"Especially with an historical theme..." Sandy added.

"Yes. Perhaps you might call on me."

"Of course we would, Mary. We'd love to work together with you!" he responded.

Despite this happy fantasy, I still had to say goodbye to Mary knowing that I will be away at least a few months before I return to live with her to start my architectural studies at UBC.





## ***APRIL # 12—Heading Home***

*Visuals: Photograph of the Reid boat sculpture, from back, showing hands paddling*

At the airport Sandy and I met Noboru, Sumi, Nicole, and Fernando. The four of them had taken a limousine together from the North Shore. Nicole and Fernando's flight was leaving first.

Fernando put his carry-on bag beside him on the floor while he checked for his boarding pass. Wordlessly, Noboru picked it up and carried it while the five of us walked to the departures level and as far as we could to the security check. Then Sumi, Sandy, and I hugged Nicole and Fernando. Noboru shook hands with them.

"Good luck to you all," Fernando said, silently receiving his bag from Noboru.

"Thanks, and good luck to both of you too," Sumi said.

"We hope that you become a wonderful medical team back in Monterey," Sandy said.

"Vancouver certainly has been lucky in helping us initiate that dream," Nicole said enthusiastically.

"I'm so glad you found each other," I added.

"If you ever get to our part of Mexico, please look us up and visit us, but not for medical reasons," Fernando said laughing and looking at Sandy.

"No chance of frostbite in our city," Nicole quipped with a smile.

"Nicole, I'm not sure I ever thanked you for being so good to my nephew Noel. Both of you have a wonderful way with children."

"Yes, I hope you get to use that to advantage," Sumi confirmed.

Fernando responded, "Noboru, I'll never forget the innovative bandage you made for Erika when she got the bee sting. Do you know that every workplace needs people trained in first aid? Maybe you should look into being able to provide that wherever you work."

"Thanks for saying this, but perhaps I can only help someone I care about."

"Don't assume this. I hope you will give it a try. Most places will even pay a bonus to their staff with such training."

"Really," Noboru laughed. "Then maybe I will look into this at my new company."

We waved goodbye to Fernando and Nicole as they headed toward their gate. At the very last point that they were visible to us, they turned back to see us and held up their clasped hands as a kind of wave, indicating their togetherness. Then they turned a corner and were gone.

Sandy and I returned to the giant First Nations canoe sculpture and just stood there behind it leaning silently against each other and the railing overlooking the arrivals level. I hadn't noticed the hands on the sculpture when I had seen it from this angle before. I wonder how long I will have this increased awareness of hands resulting from Sandy's threatened, frost bitten fingers?

With both his arms around my waist, I could tell his fingers were back to his "normal sensitivity," but not just to the sensitivity of others. Resting his hands on my lower back, his fingers were again radiating his soothing energy to me despite both of us feeling tired.

"I brought something I'd like to give you, but I am not sure that you will think that it is appropriate," Sandy told me.

I laughed in saying, "Could that be true? Because I have something I want to give you too, but I don't know if you will think it is appropriate."

"Really? So who's first?" he asked.

"You, since you mentioned it first."

"Okay," he said, as he somewhat hesitantly pulled from his pocket a small flannel pouch.

"So what is it?"

"Well, look inside."

"Sandy! It's your hero medal. You can't give me this!"

"I'd like you to have it."

"But it's too important for you to give it to me."

"Really? You won't accept it?"

"You need to keep this."

"If so, would you at least be willing to have it while we are apart?"

I considered and then said, "While we're apart..."

"Yes, I want you to have it as a symbol of endurance. That's what surviving the night on the mountain was about. And, as you and I acknowledged on the seawall, we need to hold on to that staying power to get through these few months apart. So will you accept it at least until we are back together?"

"If that's what it means to you, then I am honoured. How could I possibly say no to this? And perhaps it will be a little less obviously subversive in my dad's eyes than my trans-Pacific tee shirt."

"Certainly. It's for you to wear when you feel you need that extra bit of courage. No one else needs to see it. It's to put under something else. May I put it on you now?"

He put the ribbon around my neck, lifted my hair, and dropped the medallion portion down the front of my sweater.

"Hey, you are wearing your subversive tee shirt now, under your pullover, aren't you?"

"Yes, I already need all the help I can get."

"Good!"

We laughed.

"So what have you got in mind for me?" Sandy asked.

"Well, Mary was telling me about the tradition during her time at university of couples being "pinned," as a way of showing that they are committed to dating each other exclusively."

"I know about this."

"Yes, being a fraternity brother, I expected you would. But the tradition was that the fraternity guy gave the pin to the girl, right?"

"Yes, but we are capable of breaking traditions. Is this what you have in mind?"

"Yes, I'd like to. But the closest pin I have is the one I received from my university upon my graduation. I am wondering if you might wear it for me, to prove that we are a couple."

"Wonderful. I'd love to."

I took out of my bag a small kraft envelope containing the gold, red, and black pin.

"Oh, and it has Japanese characters on it. Perfect."

"May I put it on you?"

"Yes, of course. Can you tell me what the symbols mean?"

"Basically it says 'Open the door to new knowledge.' But it means so much more than just that."

"Well, I hope those symbols can refer to our opening the door to new knowledge of us as a couple, as well as of the world in general."

"Of course," I smiled.

We enjoyed the fact that I had to undo two buttons of Sandy's shirt to be able to put the back clasp in position behind the pin to attach it.

"So we are pinned?" I asked, smiling.

"Yes, definitely, we are pinned."

Sumi and Noboru approached us but, seeing that we didn't want to be disturbed, Sumi turned away saying, "So in about ten minutes we must head for the gate, Erika."

Encircling me in his arms, Sandy said, "I wish I were coming to Japan with you right now, Er."

"I do too. But I hope you are not wishing that because you see me heading off with Noboru and Sumi."

I was glad I was able to say this, at last, without a teasing tone in my voice.

"You know I trust you and Noboru. You have finally taught me not to be jealous of Noboru, and he has too."

"He has too?"

"Yes."

"Honest? You discussed this?"

"Not exactly *discussed* this, but you know that Noboru credits me with saving his life, Er. "

"He certainly does."

"Well, he has made it clear to me that you don't go after the girlfriend of someone who has saved your life."

"Oh, perfect."

"Apparently he feels there is some sense of honour in that."

"Good for him, as this seems moral and just."

Finally Sumi and Noboru came over to tell me we needed to leave. Still Sandy and I didn't move or respond.

Noboru commented, "So the two of you are finally wordless?"

Sandy smiled wistfully and said, as if just to me, "If so, there is still touch."

"Less than five minutes, then." Noboru stated, as they walked away again.

Continuing to lean against Sandy, I looked over the railing, down to the arrivals area. I could see international students, in the sea of colourful name signs, being met by homestay parents and by school representatives.

I commented, "I'm envious of students who are arriving now. Just starting their marvelous experience of Vancouver."

"But, Er, would you really rather be back at that time a year ago? Before we knew each other? When we still had so much to resolve between us?"

I had to agree that despite having to part at that moment, I would rather be where we are now—being comfortable together and being committed to a future together, even while having to survive at least part of the summer without each other.

So I concluded, “Yes, I would rather head into our future than relive our past.”

“I’m glad. So would I,” Sandy agreed.

Finally Noboru confronted us with, “Just time for that last photo.”

A person standing nearby offered to photograph the four of us. With Sandy’s arms still around me, the two of us were photographed with Noboru and Sumi standing beside us.

“So now it’s time for us to be on our way, Aunt Erika,” Noboru stated.

We all smiled at the reference this time.

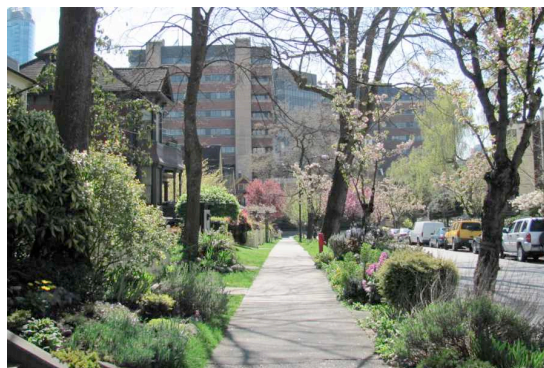
Sandy and I kissed again and, for an extra moment, we silently held our cheeks together.

Then, somewhat in a daze, I let Sumi take my elbow and steer me toward the security checkpoint, following Noboru.

At the last moment, I regained enough awareness to turn and wave to Sandy—our last wave before getting out of sight of each other.

Despite the immediate pain of our necessary separation, I realize what a wonderful year it has been. My memories of my growing affection for Sandy and my first experience of the city will last forever.

It is hard to leave Vancouver in springtime. Especially when you are in love.



[The End]