

The Nude Pianist: A Novel:

Chapter 9

by Daniel Harris

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Michiko stood in front of Steinway Hall on West 57th Street. She had spent all morning and most of the afternoon practicing. Tomorrow Steinway would install her best piano in one of their basement rooms. She was furious with herself. Her address book and calendar were in her purse which was who knows where. The piece of paper she had written down Frank's telephone number had been on the table next to the phone in her loft. It was removed along with all her belongings. She no longer lived on Greene Street.

When she telephoned her agent last night he had moved swiftly. Taking her to the Hilton on 53rd and Avenue of the Americas. Today Pro Piano had moved her pianos from Greene Street to Steinway Hall. Tomorrow she would practice on her familiar instrument. But now, she desperately needed to contact Frank. She needed his comfort. He probably needed hers. She wondered whether he had contacted Angelique Brody. Now Angelique Brody...there was someone she could ask. Maybe she would have a number for Frank.

She walked west on 57th to the offices of her agent, Meyer Artists Management. Hazel, the receptionist, a middle-aged woman, recognized her.

—Michiko, you poor dear, she said, what a horrible ordeal you suffered last night. Have a seat. I'll get you some tea.

—It was very scary at the time. I'm over it now though, said Michiko. I wish I had asked the police to see if they could find my

handbag. My marked up copies of the Rachmaninoff, date book, address book and my wallet were in the handbag, including a copy of the orchestral score marked by Maestro Silvestre.

—Where were you mugged?

—Right in front of my loft on Greene Street.

—I think that's within precinct one. The station house is downtown by the Holland Tunnel. Do you want me to telephone them? Maybe they have your handbag and wallet.

—I guess. But could you find a telephone number for Angelique Brody? She's a lawyer who handles painters and sculptors. Maybe she has the telephone number of Frank Martin. He's my neighbor who saved me from rape and maybe worse.

—Let me see what I can find.

Michiko stood and walked to the window that looked out on 57th Street. It was only three-thirty yet people were queuing in front of Carnegie Hall for standing room tickets to a Vienna Philharmonic all-Mahler concert that night. In her mind she imagined people queuing for one of her solo concerts.

—It will happen, she said to the hallowed hall across the street. It will happen.

—Michiko, I found the number.

—Great.

—Here it is, said Hazel handing Michiko a slip of paper. I'll call her office. You can pick up the extension on the table in the corner.

—Office of Angelique Brody, said a pleasant voice with a slight borough accent.

—This is Michiko Mita. I'm trying to reach Frank Martin.

—You just missed him. He was here until fifteen minutes ago. He and Ms Brody went to the Yale Club. Would you like me to call her?

—Will it disturb them?

—I don't think so. They are celebrating Mr. Martin's success. Hold the line.

Finally, she might be able to speak with Frank.

—Miss Mita?

—Yes.

—Hold for one minute more.
—Hello? said Frank.
—Frank, it's me. Michiko.
—Michiko, where are you?
—I'm at my agent's office on 57th Street.
—Hop a cab and meet me at the Yale Club. It's at the corner of Vanderbilt and East 44th. It's across from Grand Central. I'm having a celebratory drink with Angelique Brody. I'm going to be rich, Michiko. Can you believe it?
—I'm so happy for you, but I need to shower and get dressed. I just finished practicing. Will you be there in an hour?
—We'll wait for you.
—Thank you, Hazel. I reached Frank. He was a real hero last night. I'm going to meet him at the Yale Club.
—I called the precinct, said Hazel. They have your handbag and wallet. You will have to go there to claim them, though. The property office closes at four, but is open tomorrow from ten to four
—I *have* to see, Frank, said Michiko. I'll retrieve my wallet and handbag tomorrow.
There's something about this Frank, thought Hazel. Michiko turned all soft and feminine when Frank answered the telephone. Not like Michiko at all.

Frank and Angelique Brody were waiting in the lobby for Michiko when she hurried through the door of the Yale Club.

—Is that her? Angelique said, pointing to Michiko.
—Wow! Look how beautiful she is, said Frank. He had never seen her dressed up before. She was wearing a beautiful teal suit, a scarf with a butterfly motif, and stylish blue heels. Her hair was wound around her head in an intricate French roll. He felt definitely outclassed. He had on jeans and a work shirt, over which was a Yale blazer, jacket and tie being required for admittance and loaned to him by the club. He wore a Yale tie, also courtesy of the club.

—Frank! Michiko ran to Frank who enveloped her in his arms. Michiko stood on her toes and clung to Frank gathering strength from his hard body. She was laughing and crying at the same time. Frank buried his face in her neck and breathed in her perfume. They stood like that for a long time. When they pulled apart, Angelique handed Michiko a tissue.

—Are you going to introduce me, Frank, said Angelique.

—Of course. Angelique Brody, meet Michiko Mita, a new superstar of the classical music world and the love of my life. Michiko may I introduce Angelique Brody, my new lawyer and art councilor.

Michiko blushed when she heard Frank say "love of my life."

—Frank tells me you are an award-winning pianist, said Angelique.

—Yes, said Michiko, but second prize.

—Which competition?

—The International Tchaikovsky competition.

—Wonderful! What an excellent way to begin a career.

—Thank you, said Michiko in her professional voice. But what about Frank? I've only heard hints of what has happened in the past few days.

—You know interrupted Angelique, it is too loud in the grillroom. I know an excellent Italian restaurant off Madison Avenue. I'll treat you two to dinner. We can tell you all about the new *wunderkind* of the art world there.

At the restaurant, Frank again had to borrow a jacket and tie from the establishment. The *maitre'd* recognized Angelique and ushered the trio to a quiet corner table.

Angelique had advised Frank to never mention prices or money, so the conversation concerned Frank's art success, possible future and his one man show at Aster Gallery to open Thanksgiving weekend. Michiko was impressed, but concerned that this high-powered woman and Elaine Aster were taking advantage of him. She had fired two previous agents before settling on the Meyer Artists

Management. Agents were necessary, but she expected absolute loyalty and unconditional service for their fees.

—I forgot to tell you, said Frank, Maestro Silvestre telephoned me last night and offered to pay me another \$1000 for the painting.

—Why is that? Angelique asked.

—He felt that it was unfair that I wasn't able to sell the painting directly to him, especially since I didn't have a signed contract with Elaine when he said he would buy the painting.

—That is very generous of him, said Michiko. Maestro Silvestre had told Frank on Wednesday evening that he would pay \$1000 over any price that Elaine Aster offered. They shook hands on it. Maestro is a man of his word.

—Frank you didn't tell me, said Angelique.

—He telephoned last night. I didn't think it important.

—That's good news for you, but I would keep mum about it. If Elaine hears you collected side money, she will cancel your contract. As you know, she wants a piece of every cent you make.

The food arrived and all attention and conversation concerned the food.

—Dessert? ask the waiter.

—None for me, said Angelique. Bring the dessert cart for my guests.

Michiko chose tiramisu and Frank had a cannoli. After dessert, Angelique said she had to leave for home. She called her limo, which arrived while they were saying thank you and good-bye in front of the restaurant.

—Frank, don't forget, Elaine's people will be scheduling photographers and publicity people next week. They will probably dress you. Take heed of what they recommend. They are professionals. You will have to have a better wardrobe. No suits and ties, but expensive hip downtown clothing: leather jacket, expensive casual shirts, and decent slacks. You get the picture.

—Yes, but that's not really me.

—I know, but play along. It's all part of the image of a successful downtown artist.

She raised the window of the limo as it pulled into Madison Avenue traffic.

—I don't like that woman, said Michiko.

—I don't know if I like her either, but Maestro Silvestre recommended her, and I needed someone to help me with Elaine Aster.

Frank didn't like negative talk.

—What do you want to do? It's only eight o'clock.

—I want you to hold me all night.

Frank panicked. There were no sheets on his mattress, no food in his refrigerator, the garbage cans were full of empty whiskey bottles and his loft was filthy from his two-month binge.

—Where did you want me to do this, asked Frank.

—We'll go to my hotel.

—Don't you have guards watching you?

—No, silly. I'm just another girl with a boyfriend in New York City.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Frank flagged a cab and they went to the Hilton.

Michiko's room was actually a small suite with a living room and separate bedroom with a king size bed. There were two bathrooms. Michiko ordered a bottle of champagne from room service.

The night was like a honeymoon. In retrospect, it was their honeymoon. Michiko discovered the pleasures a man can give a woman and Frank discovered the passion and tenderness Michiko could bring to love making.

Totally spent and happy, the lovers were aglow in their passion and love. Worries and fears slipped away as they slept in each other's arms.

They were awakened by the telephone at nine in the morning. Michiko answered. It was her parents in Los Angeles.

—Yes, mother, said Michiko for Frank's benefit and resumed speaking in Japanese.

Frank opted for a long hot shower.

They ate breakfast in their room. Frank had steak, eggs, pancakes, English muffins and coffee. Michiko ate half of one of Frank's English muffins with tea.

—What's our agenda today? Frank asked.

—Well, I have to practice. They are installing my piano in a room at Steinway Hall today. I should be done around five. What are you going to do sweetheart?

—Now that Elaine Aster has taken all of my new paintings out of my loft, I should give it a good cleaning. I also need to buy linen for the bed and some food.

—Do you have enough money?

—I have four hundred dollars. More money than I've had in months. But what about your wallet?

—I forgot, I have to go downtown to claim it.

—We should do that after breakfast. I'll go with you.

To be continued.

