

Five Million Yen: Chapter 16

by Daniel Harris

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-Ben, I tried to get you out of here before Austerlitz could serve the subpoena.

-Don't fret, Augie, I have been expecting this since I came home on Saturday night. Zoë probably wants to get out of our marriage as soon as possible. To tell you the truth, our marriage was getting pretty tiresome for both of us. I was paying all the bills, and she was working in Off-Off-Off Broadway shows for handfuls of nickels. It was sheer luck that the show she was in was picked up by NBC and became a TV hit. I'm sure she's making quadruple, or more, than what I can make in a year.

-Well, it doesn't make it any easier to live your life.

-Tell me about it. I have no place to call home. All my ID's were stolen and now Austerlitz has served me with a subpoena. I wonder who he works for, and how he connected me so quickly to this neighborhood. I smell a rat.

-Well, Austerlitz and I go way back, but Austerlitz plays both sides of the street.

-Guys like that get shot in the back.

-You got that right.

-Well, I have to keep movin'. I still have to play gigs and make money.

-Good luck, and remember any friend of Gringovitch's is a friend of mine. Don't forget, you are in my art film project.

Ben left the store and headed to the subway. The F train was the slowest train in the subway system, but it was closest to where he

was. He took the F train to Borough Hall Brooklyn and changed to the A train. At Fulton Street he changed to the uptown 4 train. He exited the train at Grand Central and walked to the AT&T complex. He asked for a booth to call Monte Carlo. He gave the girl the number for Jean-Claude Lyon. It seemed like forever before the phone rang.

-Allo

-Jean-Claude, ici Ben Clarone.

-Ah, Ben.

-What's up? Heather said I should call you ASAP.

-I believe you know the Austrian composer, Hans Hausenstockmann?

-Did you know that I premiered Hausenstockmann's *Concerto of Extensions* for multiple clarinets two years ago in New York?

-Hans mentioned that when we were discussing who to contract to take over the contrabass clarinet part.

- Hausenstockmann gave me the impression that he thought I played the *Concerto* too "jazzy" for his taste.

-He was very enthusiastic this morning about your performance. This new composition, *Constellations*, is a concerto for double bass, but the contrabass clarinet acts as the double bass's shadow, compatriot and occasional adversary. A Sancho Panza-like character, though don't tell Hans I said that. He doesn't want any comparisons with Richard Strauss's *Don Quixote*. We need a virtuoso contra-bass clarinetist for *Constellations*. Originally Arno Donax was booked, but he was injured in a motorcycle accident this morning and is in hospital.

-That's awful. Is he badly hurt?

-He is still in a coma, but they think he will live.

-He is a virtuoso performer. Was the part written for him?

-Yes, but you were Hausenstockmann's first choice. The politics didn't work out.

-Well, I'm free, so if you can come up with the money, I can play the gig. What are the dates? What is the pay?

-We will buy your air tickets, pay your hotel and per diem. I'm afraid you will get regular orchestra pay plus a 30% soloist fee. You will only be playing the Hausenstockmann, so it is not bad. You'll probably leave with around 10,000 francs. At the current exchange that is about two thousand dollars.

-Sounds very acceptable.

-Hans Hausenstockmann would like to have rehearsals with you Saturday and Sunday, October 30 and 31. You should probably be here by the 29th. The concerts are November 12th, 13th and 14th.

-That's tight. Today is the 26th I have a small issue to clear up. Can I confirm with you later tonight, or tomorrow morning?

-Bien sûr. We very much want you to perform the premiere. The great bassist, Serge Nobokolov, is guest soloist for the bass part.

-This sounds like a wonderful opportunity. Do you think Hans is OK with me playing it?

-As I said before, you *were* Hausenstockmann's first choice, but Arno is local and the regular utility clarinetist with the orchestra, so the orchestra board offered the job to Arno.

-I hope there won't be any issues with an American jumping in at the last minute.

-Well, Arno was having some issues with the part and Hausenstockmann was making a lot of changes. That is why he wants you to be in Monte Carlo as soon as possible.

-Call me as soon as you can confirm. If you can't make it, give me some names. It is a very difficult part.

-Jean-Claude, I won't let you down.

Ben hung up. Jesus, he thought, how difficult can my life get?

He paid the girl and asked for another booth to call Tokyo. It was eleven o'clock at night in Tokyo. He thought he would chance it.

The phone rang in Tokyo.

-Allo?

-Hidenori Matsuoka?

-Is this Ben Clarone in America?

-Yes, my friend. I hope it is not too late.

-Ah, no, for you, never too late.

-What do you need?

-Have you cashed the check we gave you?

-No. Actually it was stolen from me. I don't know where it is.

-Good, it was for the wrong amount. We owe you another half million yen.

-That's good news, but what do I do? All my ID's have been stolen from me; I have no bank account, and am crashing with a friend in Brooklyn.

-Ben, open a bank account and give me the number, we will wire transfer you the money. We loved your work for us, and want to make sure you are properly compensated.

-It will take some time. I have to establish an address. Otherwise the banks will not open an account for me. I will call you when I have a bank account. The joint account with my former wife is inactive.

-Yes, we read about your problems in the papers. Zoë is very popular in the fan magazines here. Is it true, that the police arrested you?

-No, I was held for a short period of time. I don't write the papers. I don't live the life they write. I loved my wife. Then she became famous and everything changed.

-Yes, fame is difficult.

-Shouldn't you stop payment on the original check since it was stolen from me?

-Yes, we will. It will also go on an international list of lost and stolen checks.

I have a gig in Monte Carlo, so I won't be back in New York until the middle of November.

-I'm sure the national bank will be happy to wait to pay you.

-Yes, but I sure could use the money.

-Don't worry, as soon as you give us an account number, you will receive the money in three days.

-Thank you, Hidenori. I look forward to resolving all these money issues. I really enjoyed being on tour with you and the other

musicians. It was a difficult tour, yet there were no personal conflicts — amazing to me.

-I was surprised myself. With all the travel difficulties and the fatigue, I thought for sure there would be some angry situations. Your professionalism and self-deprecating good humor saved many situations.

-Well, I think sometimes people became a little formally polite, but nothing boiled over.

-Ben, I must tell you. Toshiko, the woman who translated, was heartbroken to see you leave. After we left you at the airport, she cried her eyes out all the way back to her home. You know, Ben, she comes from a rich traditional Japanese family. Her family would not approve of a relationship with a *gaijin*.

-Toshiko is a wonderful woman, but not my type, and she certainly knows all my bad habits. I did nothing to encourage her, only some innocent flirting to smooth over difficult moments.

-Let us hope so. If she gets a big belly, it will not be good for her.

-As they say in America, I didn't dip the pen in the company ink.

-I have to sign off, Ben. My wife, Aki, and I are leaving for Hawaii for a well-deserved vacation first thing in the morning. My phone will be forwarded to my office, so when you have a bank account call and one of my staff will notify our bank.

-Thank you for all your efforts on my behalf. You are a most excellent friend. Please give my best wishes to the charming and gracious Aki, and have a wonderful vacation in Hawaii.

Ben hung up the receiver. He paid the girl and checked his watch. It was a little more than an hour until he had to meet Dan Arris at Fenelli's. He entered a local phone booth and called his service.

-Musicians' Service. How may I help you?

-Heather, you're still answering the phone.

-Yes, Ben, it is a Tuesday from Hell.

-Anything new for me?

-Yes, a Lt. Harold Smith, NYPD, dropped off an envelope for you. He said it contains a form from the DA's office that will allow you to get a replacement passport and Driver's license immediately.

-I'll be right over. I'm calling from Grand Central.

-OK. Ciao.

Ben started walking towards the Times Square Shuttle. He saw a passport photo shop and entered.

-How soon can I get passport photos?

-Five minutes.

-How much?

-Five dollars for four.

-Let's do it now.

Ben wished he were wearing a suit.

-Say, you don't have a shirt, suit jacket and tie I could use for this photo?

-We've got you covered. There are suit jackets, shirts and ties on that rack over there and a changing booth next to it.

Ben picked out a conservative navy blue suit jacket, white shirt and tie. He put them on in the changing booth, smoothed his hair with his hands and sat for his photo. After the photo shoot, he changed back to his street clothes and only had to wait a few minutes.

-That will be six dollars and thirty cents.

-I thought you said five dollars.

-A dollar for clothing rental and thirty cents to the governor.

-Ah, yes, death and taxes.

Ben looked at the photos as the clerk made change.

-You have a very handsome passport photo, the photographer observed.

-Yes, thank you. You did a terrific job. The suit jacket is tops, but the tie leaves something to be desired.

-What's a tie anyway?

As Ben walked up the concourse to the Times Square Shuttle, he looked for his trumpet-playing friend from yesterday. He didn't see him, or the man he kicked in the groin. That could have been a real serious confrontation.

Ben changed to the uptown Broadway IRT local train and got off at 50th street. He crossed Broadway, entered the Brill Building and

took the elevator to Musician's Service. Heather was sitting in reception. Her switchboard was aglow with hold lights. She saw him, picked up his envelope and handed it to him while still taking down messages. Ben blew her a kiss and ran to the elevator.

Ben walked over to Seventh Avenue and 49th street and caught the downtown Broadway local R train. No way the pokey R train would get him to Prince Street on time. He would be late to meet Arris. He arrived at Fanelli's. The bar clock said 1:15PM

He looked for Arris among the patrons. There were a few artist types and professional drinkers at the bar. Only two tables had customers. Arris was not among them.

Ben took a table and ordered a bottle of Bass Ale. He started thinking about how he would have to hustle up to the Passport Office at Rockefeller Center. Probably wait in line for the rest of the afternoon, but he would be able to call Jean-Claude in Monte Carlo tomorrow and accept the gig. He would also have to get his contrabass from Bright Star recording studios. It was going to be a busy afternoon.

Arris walked into Fanelli's just as Ben was ready to order another Bass Ale.

-Sorry I'm late, Clarone. Traffic in Brooklyn was snarled. Did you order anything to eat?

-No. I was about to order another brew.

-Forget that. Just pay up. My car is outside.

Ben left a fin on the table and followed Arris out the front door. Arris's car was parked half on the sidewalk on Prince Street.

-Just get in.

Ben opened the passenger side and slid into the car. The car reeked of White Castle grease. There was one of those boxy leather Samsonite briefcases on the middle of the front seat.

Arris snapped open the case and extracted an envelope. He gave it to Ben.

-Here are your *bona fides* for the identity of Benjamin Adoyan. You have a New York State Driver's License, Illinois Birth Certificate, and a US Passport. There is also an open Pan Am round-

trip ticket: JFK-Nice-JFK. The Corsicans in Nice don't ask too many questions. This time of the year, the only passengers to Nice are the super-rich, their children or grandchildren.

-Your people have been busy.

-Old Soviet KGB guys who know how to work. Everything is false, except the airline ticket. Try not to lose these. Capice! If your photo had been in the papers today, that Bass Ale might have been your last.

-Easy, Arras. We are all in this together. Things are going to work out better than you think.

-Don't let me down, Adoyan. I can have a very bad temper.

-Don't worry, my friend.

-I'm not your *friend* until the money is in my hands. Now get out of the car. Gringovitch is expecting you at his home tonight. You may be using that ticket tomorrow night. And start calling yourself Adoyan.

Ben got out of the car and waited for Arris to pull away and turn downtown on Broadway. He walked over to Broadway and took the uptown R train to 34th Street, where he changed to an uptown D train to 47th-50th Street Rockefeller Center. At Roc he walked through the lower concourse until he reached the stairway up to the Passport Office.

The scene there was not as crazy as he anticipated. There were a few pleading cases, but a short line. He presented the form he'd gotten from Lt. Smith. His case was assigned to a grandmotherly Jewish woman who asked a few questions and took two of the photos he proffered.

-You can wait, deary, or come back in two hours.

-I'll come back.

-Don't be late. We close at 4:30PM.

To Be Continued.

