

# Five Million Yen: Chapter 18

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Detective-Sergeant Claude Mulvihill was seasick. He was in a New York City Harbor Police boat in the East River headed towards the George Washington Bridge. There was a good chop in the harbor, which became worse when the Police Boat reached the Battery. Fortunately, when they were well into the Hudson River, the waves became more regular and Mulvihill's stomach settled a bit. He hated being on the water, especially in small boats. He spent time in the Navy, but he was Shore Patrol and spent most of his time breaking up bloody bar fights between sailors and marines.

A man in a thirty-nine foot yawl had reported what he thought was the body of a man floating in the vicinity of the George Washington Bridge. Mulvihill could see a sailboat hove-to near the GWB. He was about to jettison a coffee, jelly donut and a slice of pizza any minute.

-You look a little green, Mulvihill, said the helmsman of the police boat.

-Yeah, well, I heard tell my grandfather retched his guts out all the way from Dublin to Boston aboard some 19th-century packet ship. It runs in the family.

Mulvihill couldn't hold it in anymore and let go over the transom of the boat. One of the regular Harbor Police sneered and handed him a paper towel.

-Thanks, said Mulvihill turning away from his companions to hide his embarrassment.

-Hey, Mulvihill, Admiral Nelson was seasick at the Battle of Trafalgar. You either can handle motion, or you can't. They say most of the astronauts get sick, too. Just stare at the shore, advised the helmsman.

The helmsman was a little guy with a big smile. He loved seeing some big bully cop sick in a little harbor chop.

The police boat pulled up close to the yawl. The commanding sergeant took the radio microphone.

-This is Harbor Police boat *Robert Fitzgerald* hailing sailing vessel *Finisterre*.

-This is *Finisterre*.

-Switch to Channel 20.

-Copy. Channel two-zero.

-*Finisterre*, can you point out suspected object. Over.

-Yes, it floats about fifty yards off my port bow. Over.

-Copy. Thank you. We will need to take a statement from you. Hold your current position.

-Copy. Will do. *Finisterre* out.

The police boat carefully idled up to the body. There appeared to be a dead man floating in the water. He was wearing a tan windbreaker. The windbreaker was filled with air and acted as a life jacket.

A police diver entered the water and secured a line around the body. Two officers hauled the body up to the boat and with the help of the diver got it aboard.

Mulvihill took a photo of Stickins out of his pocket and compared it to the face of the corpse. Rodney Stickins didn't look so pretty today. There was an ugly red scar around his neck. Stickins had been garroted or hung, and thrown from the bridge. This was no bridge suicide. This was murder.

The helmsman saw the body with its bulging eyes, black tongue and lacerated throat, and felt sick. He had seen many drowned people, but this guy wore the most terrifying Halloween mask he'd

seen. He turned away feeling squeamish and concentrated on helming the boat.

Mulvihill got on his radio and asked the dispatcher to patch him through to Lt. Harold Smith.

-Smith, we found Stickins. He was floating in the Hudson in the vicinity of the George Washington Bridge. He was garroted, or hung. It appears some of his bones are broken from the fall. Looks like it could have been a suicide by hanging, but the body is too beat up for a suicide.

-Mulvihill, stay on this. See what the coroner finds. Get back to me when you have any news. We need to know time and cause of death.

-Will do. I've got to get off this boat.

-I thought you were a Navy vet.

-Shore Patrol. None of this up and down stuff.

-Next time, eat ginger snaps instead of pizza and donuts. Ginger keeps you from getting *mal de mer*, advised Smith.

-Very funny, Lieutenant.

-No, really works for me when I take the kids fishing.

-I'm not one of your kids.

-They don't get seasick. They eat ginger snaps.

-Enough, already. I'll keep you current, Lieutenant.

The Harbor Police sergeant had boarded the yawl and was talking to the skipper. After ten minutes, he signaled the helmsman to bring the police boat along side. The sergeant hopped gracefully onto the police boat.

-*Finisterre* is going to City Island and the owner lives in Connecticut. I have all his contact information and statement. We'll FAX a copy to your office and the DA's office. Is this related to those SRO murders on the Upper West Side I read about in the papers?

-Yeah. This corpse is Rodney Stickins . He was a desk clerk at the SRO. We suspect he was an accessory to the murder of three people. The killers must have thought he would talk, so they shut his mouth for good.

-Looks like he put up a good fight, said the Harbor Police sergeant.

-If the assailant is the guy we suspect, poor Rodney here didn't stand a chance.

-Mulvihill, you look bad. You need to get on *terra firma*.

-You got that right.

-We'll drop you at the 79th Street Boat Basin. You can have one of your guys pick you up.

-Thanks. The sooner I'm off this carnival ride, the better I'll feel.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dan Arris sat at his kitchen table with a 100-franc French note, a new pair of pinky shears, Tuesday's *New York Post* and a small file. He took the file and changed the shape of three of the teeth in the scissors. He made a trial cut on the front page of the *Post*. Instead of regular triangles, the cut was totally unique, yet still razor-cut clean.

-I could be a pro scissors sharpener, Arris said to himself.



100 Franc Note (1994 Issue)

Arris took the pinking shears and cut the 100-franc note in half between the image of Delacroix and *Liberté* leading the people. He then cut the *Liberté* piece from just under *Liberté's* breasts and over the head of the people. The note was cut into three pieces, each a different size: Delacroix, *Liberté*, and the People.

Arris carefully put the pieces back together. They fit seamlessly. Clarone should have no trouble confirming the veracity of the identities of his delivery targets. Gringovitch should have bills of sale for the two paintings Clarone would take with him. There should be no customs problems either here, or in France. The French are very vigilant about art leaving France, they could care less about art arriving in France.

-*Perfectamente*, he said to himself. No surprise that he was an A art student. He was superb with detail work. An asset to his profession in the lucrative underbelly of the art world: trafficking in stolen and forged art pieces.

Arris put the picture of *Liberté* in an envelope addressed to: Yolande Esquirinchi, Chez Yolande, 7 Avenue Georges Clemenceau, 06000 Nice, France. He put the people part of the bill in an envelope addressed to, Yousef Al Sidran, 21bis Rue de la République, 13002 Marseille, France. The Delacroix portion would go to Ben Clarone. He would give it to him tonight with instructions. He hoped the jerk would not screw this up like everything else in his life.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ben paid the cabbie and entered Grand Central from Lexington Avenue. There was a crush of people moving into the station. He banged more than one knee with the big unwieldy contrabass case, even with three months practice moving through crowds with the case on his last tour, he couldn't avoid hitting clueless people.

The AT&T center was still open. He asked for a booth to call Monte Carlo. With horror he realized he had spent the dollar with the telephone numbers written on it.

-Excuse me, m'am, but do you have records of the calls made at this facility?

-Why do you ask?

-Around noon, I made a call to Monte Carlo, but I have lost the number.

-I'm sorry, but I can't help you.

-Are you sure?

-Yes.

-Can you give me coins for a local call?

-Go to Window 1.

Ben walked over to Window 1 and gave the girl a dollar. She gave him eight dimes and four nickels. Ben called his service.

-Musicians' Service, please hold.

It was Heather, still holding down the fort.

-Yes, how may I help you?

-Heather, this is Ben. I need the telephone number for Jean Claude Lyon in Monte Carlo.

-Did you lose that, *too*?

-No, I spent it. I wrote the number on a dollar bill.

-Ben! Heather growled. You are becoming a real flake. Hold on.

Ben realized he didn't have a pen. He saw that in the phone directory area there were ball point pens on chains. He dropped the phone, sprinted over to the directory area and ripped a pen off its chain.

-Ben? Ben? Are you there?

Ben pickup the receiver.

-Sorry, Heather, I had to get a pen.

-Here it is. 011-339-34-34-00-76

-Got it. Thanks, Heather. Things are tough now, I promise to be better.

-Just like you promise a dinner and a show.

-I'll keep that promise, too.

-You're not impressing me, Ben.

-Heather, I'm sorry, I know you've had a long day.

-Just remember to pay your bill at the end of the month.

-You're a tough lady, Heather.

-You ain't seen nothing yet.

-Ciao, Heather.

-Bye-bye, Benny-boy.

Ben gave the number to the overseas clerk. She gave him a booth.

-Yikes, it is midnight in Monte Carlo. I hope Jean-Claude won't be upset.

Ben could hear the phone ringing. A tape started to play. Ici Jean-Claude ....

-Jean-Claude. Ici Ben Clarone. I'm OK for Monte Carlo. I will call tomorrow.

He hung up and walked to the overseas clerk and got the unused portion of his deposit.

-And now, to the friendly confines of Brooklyn.

\* \* \* \* \*

Anatoly Gringovitch stood in his Brooklyn studio looking at the three canvases. They were no longer three paintings of the same subject. He had made three different paintings in the style of Gringovitch, using gouache. The gouache would wash off with water when they got to their destination. He picked up his Nikon F camera and took photos of all three paintings, individually and as a group. The real Gorky painting was over-painted with a picture inspired by Thoreau of the fight between the red and the black ants.

### The Black and The Red

Gringovitch checked the surfaces of the paintings. They were all dry. He then began packing them for travel. This was the worst part of the job. He wished he could use his assistant to do this job, but it was too sensitive. He had two of the paintings packed and he went downstairs. There was only one Balkan Sobranie cigarette left in the humidior. He got a set of keys from the kitchen pegboard and left his house, carefully unlocking and locking the locks in the order he had told Ben.

He noticed Paul Austerlitz walking up Third Street. Austerlitz ignored Gringovitch and stopped about two house downhill from Gringovitch's house and looked at his watch. Austerlitz then fussed with his right shoelace. Gringovitch didn't like the whiff of

Austerlitz's obvious tactics to avoid speaking to him, but he continued up to Augie's smoke shop.

When he arrived, there were the usual neighborhood suspects kibitzing about the Jets and the Giants.

-Forget the Giants and the Jets, the Yankees are New York's top turkey team, proclaimed Gringovitch entering the store.

-The Yanks are history, bro, said a skinny black man in a fedora.

-Yeah, the history of incompetence. Bunch of minor league ballplayers, retorted Gringovitch.

There was general and loud agreement with that statement.

-Augie, give me three packs of Balkan Sobranie cigarettes.

-Ok, boss. But I think I only have two packs left. More should arrive tomorrow.

-I'll take what you have.

-That'll be two bucks.

-Put it on my tab, I didn't bring my wallet.

-No problem.

Gringovitch took the smokes and left the store as the Giants/Jets arguments began anew.

When he arrived at his whitestone home, Gringovitch unlocked the doors in the order he had told Ben. The door didn't open.

-I wonder if Ben showed up while I was out and didn't lock the doors correctly?

Gringovitch played with the keys and locks for a good ten minutes until he was able to open the door.

He entered his home to find Paul Austerlitz sitting on the best chair in his parlor smoking his last Balkan Sobranie cigarette.

-What are you doing here?

-I thought I would let myself in to look at your art.

-You are not welcome here uninvited, Paul. You may be a friend, but not so much a friend as to enter my home uninvited.

-Aw, com'on Anatoly, you are not much of a host.

-Host, implies I invited you.

-Well, did you invite Ben Clarone?

-He is always welcome. We go back to grade school years.



-What's he doing here, Anatoly?

-I don't know what business that is of yours. But, for your information, Ben lost his Manhattan apartment when his wife left him when he was on tour. He's staying here until his pay for the tour is deposited in his bank. Why would you give a rat's ass?

-Because I'm working for Zoë's divorce lawyer. She knows he's hiding unreported income. You know, all freelancers, especially musicians, get a lot of cash and tips. She is suing for big bucks and extreme physical and mental cruelty. I served Clarone the subpoena this morning. You might tell your bumbling friend that.

-So that gives you a right to break into my home?

-I thought I might have a talk with Ben.

-Why?

-I have contacts that might know where his five million yen check is.

-I'm not sure he wants to hear that from *you*.

-Look, they don't pay much to serve a subpoena. If Ben gives me a piece of the pie, I can smooth things over for him.

-Austerlitz, you mean if you help Ben recover his check, you want a percentage and you might help him in his divorce.

-Not exactly, but something like that.

-Get the hell out of my house right now, you two-faced bastard.

-Easy, Anatoly. Don't forget there is still a Murder-1 arrest warrant out for Ben Clarone. You are harboring a fugitive criminal.

-That's been rescinded and you know it.

-Just checking your knowledge, my friend.

-I'm no friend of yours. Now get the hell out of my house. Now!

-Nice cigarettes, Anatoly. I'll have to remember next time I buy cigarettes to get Balkan Sobranie weeds from Augie.

-I said, get the hell out of my home.

Paul realized he had pushed one too many buttons. Gringovitch was getting red-faced and the vein at his temple was starting to bulge.

Gringovitch lifted Austerlitz out of the chair by the coat collar and half dragged and walked him to the front door.

- Easy, Anatoly. We're been friends a long time.
- You just might have put the last nail in the coffin of that friendship.
- You could regret this, Anatoly.
- Don't threaten me and don't darken my door again.

To be continued.

