

Five Million Yen: Chapter 19

by Daniel Harris

To read earlier chapters, click on my name above. It will take you to my home page where you will find links to all chapters and other stories. Alternatively, Google "Five Million Yen"

* * *

Ben took the downtown number 6 Train to Broadway-Lafayette and changed to the F Train to Brooklyn. Schlepping the contrabass clarinet was no fun, but neither was finding a cab to go to Brooklyn in rush hour. The same Rasta-man was on the F Train with his folded tables, scents, incense and Rasta literature. Was it a coincidence? Ben saw that the Rasta-man was avoiding his gaze. Was this dude a police tail? There was one way to find out.

He exited the train at Borough Hall Brooklyn. The Rasta-man *also* got off. This was not good.

-I think Lieutenant Harold Smith has a tail on me, thought Ben.

He schlepped his horn to the uptown platform and boarded an uptown A train. The Rasta-man followed him, dragging his unwieldy cart up the stairs and back down to the uptown platform. He *just* managed to get on the same train as Ben, but not in the same car.

-This guy must be an amateur, Ben mused.

Ben exited the A train at Fourteenth Street. He looked toward the front of the train. The Rasta-man was dragging his cart off the train. By the time Rasta-man got off the train and to the transfer stairwell, Ben was well on his way to the L Train platform.

At Fourteenth Street Ben took the L Train to Union Square and boarded a 4 Train. At Nevins Street, Brooklyn, he changed to the southbound 2 Train. He exited the train at Grand Army Plaza. No sign of the guy.

Ben walked down Plaza Street West, past the Montauk Club and down Prospect Park West to Third Street. He checked the sidewalks

for Rasta-man. He was not to be seen. Ben turned right on Third Street and went to the pay phone on Eighth Avenue and Third Street.

At the pay phone, he fished the receipt Augie at the smoke shop gave him out of his wallet and called the number.

The phone rang six times.

-Allo?

-This is Ben.

-Ah, Ben, Gringovitch here. What's up, he asked in his funny Russo-Anglo accent.

-I couldn't get in the house earlier this morning and got this number from Augie at the Smoke Shop.

-Interesting. I'm here and will wait for you to arrive. Where are you?

-Eighth Avenue and Third Street.

-I'll be waiting for you on my stoop.

-OK. See you soon.

Ben picked up the contrabass and walked downhill toward Gringovitch's house.

At the corner of Seventh Avenue, he saw Austerlitz idling in front of the Brooklyn Cigar Shop.

-Christ, thought Ben, there are tails all over the city,

-Hey Ben, that's a pretty big case you're carrying, called out Austerlitz.

-Schlepping horns, the reed players' nightmare. Usually it is multiple horns and no cabs.

-What's in the case?

-A contrabass clarinet.

-What is that and who would want such a thing?

-Only a few people, but they are connoisseurs.

-What did Zoë think about this instrument?

-Actually, she liked me to put the bell on her *mons* and play the lowest notes.

The vibrations gave her a real charge. It works dressed or undressed.

-I bet you miss those days?
-Women who need stimulation are a dime a dozen.
-Touché.
-I gotta keep movin', Austerlitz.
-I'll be keeping an eye out for you.
-Thanks. One feels pretty vulnerable carrying this much weight down the street.
Ben crossed Seventh Avenue and went to Gringovitch's home. Gringovitch was sitting on his stoop.
-Did I see you talking to Austerlitz?
-Yeah, but I think that guy is poison, so I didn't say any thing, just an exchange of pleasantries.
-Good move. He's the enemy, Ben. He's working for the NYPD *and* Zoë's attorney. Mums the word with that two-faced S.O.B.
-Not only him, I had to give the slip to a Rasta-man who was tailing me on the train.
Ben explained his route to Gringovitch's house.
-Ben, I'm glad you're showing some street smarts. Arris will be pleased to know you are not the ingénue he thinks you are.
-I'm getting good at smelling rats. Slava, said Ben, using Gringovitch's familiar name, I have some good news for our project. I have been hired to play a duo-concerto in Monte Carlo and have to be there like yesterday. I hope that fits into our other plans.
-Sounds like it could work perfectly. When do you need to be in Monte Carlo?
-I have to rehearse with the composer on Saturday, so I should be there Friday.
If I remember, the direct flight leaves around seven in the evening, this means leaving Thursday night, today is Tuesday, so I'll have to be on a plane by Thursday night.
-Unless Arris has a problem, it should work out perfectly.
Gringovitch put his arm on Ben's shoulder and steered him to the front door of his home.
-Let's have a drink and get some food. Arris will be here about nine tonight.

-Sounds good to me. I had the worst fish and chips at Herlihy's a couple hours ago. I tasted it, but couldn't eat it.

-Yeah, some of those Irish pubs serve some of the worst swill. Beer they usually get right.

-Listen, I need to do some practicing. I have an appointment with my repairman tomorrow morning,

-No problem. Let's have a drink and break some bread. We can jump in my car and go to Gage and Tollner in downtown Brooklyn for some real food. I usually eat there on Tuesday nights, so they'll have a table for me. When we return, you can practice until Arris shows up.

-It's a plan.

* * * * *

Arno Aghajanian sat at his desk looking at the artwork on his wall. It was the finest collection of Armenian art in private hands in North America. Soon he would add a Gorky painting to his collection, the *Unfaithful Wife*. It was the perfect picture for a celebrity divorce lawyer in Hollywood.

"Double A," as his friends called him, was tall with muscular shoulders and arms. He kept in shape with daily workouts at the gym, and when not wearing a suit, he kept his shirts unbuttoned and wore heavy gold chains around his neck. He was handsome in a dark Transcaucasian way. He had full lips, large dark eyes and prominent refined nose. Double A was a well-known Hollywood playboy lawyer. He had a reputation as a fierce competitor in law court and on the racket ball court. Even though he was in his mid-thirties, he had never married. As he told people, he knew how to divorce women, but not how to marry them. Rumor had it that Double A had bedded every one of his female clients

-Mr. Aghajanian, said his receptionist on the intercom, Ms Zoë Bontemps is here to see you.

-Send her in.

Zoë was the hottest property in Hollywood. Arno was hoping to sue her husband for a lot of dough. Zoë's husband, Ben Clarone, was a big time free-lance musician in New York City. Like most

musicians, he most likely had piles of cash in unreported income, which could be tapped, or used as blackmail to get a good settlement for Zoë and a good fee for himself

Zoë entered his office, her high heels sinking into the thick Persian rug. He stood up and in a pretense of courtliness, escorted her to a comfortable chair opposite his desk

Zoë was shorter than he remembered, about five-two. She had a perky bosom and a short skirt, revealing good shapely legs. You could tell she had been a dancer all her life from those muscular legs. Her cool green eyes were set off by her black hair which was cropped close like in the TV series, and her high and prominent cheekbones lent her face a quality of intelligence and good breeding. She wore a floral print dress and multiple gold bracelets on her wrists. There was a single large pearl on a gold chain around her neck. She still sported a big Zircon on her ring finger. Her scent was light and had the right musk to get a man's attention.

-So, Zoë, what brings you here today?

-Well, I think you are going after Ben too hard.

-Hah! You *are* suing him for extreme cruelty and physical harm, aren't you?

-I don't know that I can say that in court.

-Hey, this is a divorce case, not a tea party. It's not about love or regrets.

Arno looked at Zoë and his eyes followed the curve of her legs as far up her dress as he could see. He liked what he saw. Zoë noticed his eyes and crossed her legs tightly in a flash reflex of female protectiveness.

-Well, sure I know Ben has cash income, but that is the thing that we counted on to go on vacations and have some enjoyment in our lives. He kept it in the freezer. He called it his frozen assets. To keep me from taking it, he froze it in Tupperware containers filled with water, which froze the hundred dollar bills in ice.

-But, you also said he had sexual relationships outside of your marriage.

-Yes, that's true, too, but then so did I. I don't think he knew even half of my infidelities.

-So you had some kind of "open marriage?"

-No, to most people we were a happily married couple.

-What about when he beat you up because you had an abortion?

-Well, I had to do that. I didn't know if it was his child or someone else's.

-You know Zoë; you are making my job difficult.

-I know, but I just signed a new contract with NBC, and I don't need Ben's money any more.

-Well, I'm not the lawyer you need for an uncontested divorce in New York City.

-No, you don't understand. I want Ben to suffer, just like he made me suffer, but I don't want it to get ugly.

-Ugly is what makes my life happy, Zoë. Ugly is why you are getting a divorce. Ugly is why you came to see me. Ugly is what we all go through in a divorce, even if we try to make it nice-nice. Ugly is the other side of love, caring or parenthood. Ugly is what you need to get a divorce. Show regret in the courtroom, and the judge will remand you to counseling. It will be two years with shrinks, councilors, and psychotherapists, sitting in a room with Ben trying to be pleasant, but hating each other. Is this what you want? You are a STAR! You don't need this guy and you don't need the anxiety. You have a new life as a free woman making millions of dollars. You are a celebrity. Ben is a non-entity. A jerk.

-Well, he *was* my husband. It wasn't *always* bad.

-From now on, it *was* always bad. It was brutal. It was hurtful. Don't forget that.

Arno regarded Zoë's legs with lust on his mind.

-You can sleep with him, but as far as the law is concerned, he is a monster.

-The sex days are over.

-No buts, or ifs, or ands. It is a *war* between you and him. I am your battle commander.

-You make it sound so cold.

-It is cold. It is final. Don't even have regrets. This guy made your life miserable.

Zoë started to cry. Aghajanian took a box of tissues out of a desk drawer and went around his desk and put his arm around her, giving her a tissue.

-Easy, Zoë, divorces are difficult, but it is something I can help you get through. Time is a great healer. You need a drink.

-I don't drink. When I drank, I would laugh when we had sex. My drinking made Ben crazy. He would be furious. Zoë was sniffing and snorting into the tissue.

-Well, from my experience, you could use a good martini. I know just the place.

-I've never had a martini.

-It will cure what ails you, and since we are not going to have sex, it will do you good. Laughter is rare in divorces.

Arno, put on his suit jacket and lifted Zoë out of her chair and escorted her out of his office and into his red Ferrari.

* * * * *

Lieutenant Harold Smith hung up the phone. He had just heard interesting news from Paul Austerlitz, a small-time private investigator in Brooklyn. Ben Clarone, he was told, was staying at the home of the well-known artist Anatoly Gringovitch.

Gringovitch was a major young New York artist on the cusp of a big international career. Smith attended the opening of his solo show at the Tarzanian Gallery two years ago. It was Gringovitch's thirtieth birthday and the booze was flowing. Smith didn't drink because of the meds for his melanomas, but he remembered that all the paintings and sculptures had "Sold" badges.

Austerlitz suspected something was up when Gringovitch threw him out of his house earlier that day. Strange, because they had been good friends, and played cards with local Brooklyn people a few of nights a month. Apparently, Gringovitch and Clarone were boyhood friends in Chicago. Also, Clarone was carrying a huge

musical instrument case. It was big enough to contain more than an odd clarinet or saxophone.

The real kicker was that Austerlitz had gone up to Gringovitch's painting studio and seen three paintings. The paintings were in gouache, a medium that was not normal for him. He was an oil painter and sculptor, and had no history of using gouache. Furthermore, it looked to Austerlitz like Gringovitch had painted over some oil paintings.

Lt. Harold Smith's phone rang, interrupting his ruminations on this intelligence from Austerlitz.

-Manly here.

-Ah, my good Rasta friend. What's up?

-I saw your guy Clarone on the train. I think he's wise to me because he gave me the slip. He took the F train to Borough Hall, Brooklyn then doubled back to Fourteenth Street on the A train. I lost him there.

-Was he carrying anything?

-A large case. Looked like a musical instrument case.

-Thanks, Manly. From now on, if you see him, do not...I repeat, *do not*...try to tail him.

-Yes, sir.

Smith hung up. Sometimes street eyes could be more trouble than they were worth.

The phone rang again.

-Smith here.

-Claude Mulvihill, here.

-Ah, Detective, what do you have for me?

-I'm at the office of the medical examiner. Rodney Stickins apparently was tortured and hung. There were rope burns on his wrists. The body had severe internal injuries made prior to the dead body being thrown from the bridge. The doc thinks Stikins might have been sodomized with a large wooden object, like a baseball bat. The cause of death is hanging with multiple internal injuries. The M.E. estimates the time of death was about twenty-four to thirty-six hours ago.

-Ouch, not a good way to go.

-Sounds like our guy Big Stinger's work.

-Thanks, Claude. You had yourself a day. I know you didn't enjoy your boating excursion this afternoon and I can't imagine watching the M.E. perform an autopsy was too appetizing.

-Not one of my better days.

-Thanks for staying with this. We should meet tomorrow morning. Maybe the Vice guys will find Big Stinger for us tonight.

-I'm going for beer, so I'm now off-duty, unless you need me to do something.

-No, I'm about to call it a day, myself. See you here tomorrow morning.

-Good night Lieutenant.

To be continued.

