

# Five Million Yen: Chapter 27

*by* Daniel Harris

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Ben decided that he had better use the bathroom before meal service started. He unbuckled and walked up to the front of the cabin where the first-class bathroom was. There were two people ahead of him. He stepped into the galley to keep the aisle clear. A woman's medium-sized handbag was open on the counter. The initials embossed on the side were CA.

It must be Claudia's thought Ben. He didn't know Claudia's last name, but the only other stewardess in first class was Monique. Ben looked down the aisle toward the rear of the aircraft. Claudia was still in the tourist section, and Monique was attending to the elderly lady and her daughter. Ben discreetly peeked into the handbag. A crumpled up Western Union telegram was inside on the top. Ben checked the aisle again. The other passenger waiting was looking out the porthole in the hatch. Ben snatched the telegram. He quickly smoothed it out:

SENDER: D ARRIS, MAIN BROOKLYN NY  
RECIPIENT: CLAUDIA MONSCHAUD OPS PANAM WORLDPORT,  
JFK  
CM STOP EYES ON BC STOP FOLLOW BC ACTION NICE STOP  
PARIS RITZ SAT STOP DA

Ben felt a chill run through his body, and quickly crumpled up the telegram and put it back in the handbag. He was next in line for the bathroom. He walked over to the hatch and looked at the dark sky. The lights of coastal New England were fading off behind the airplane. The Canadian Maritimes loomed ahead.

-*Sei avanti?* (Are you next in line?), asked an Italian man in an Armani suit.

-*Sì, mi dispiace stavo fantasticando* (Sorry, yes, I was daydreaming).

-*Per favore, posso andare prima?* (May I go ahead?)

-*Non c'è problema. Vai ora, per favor.* (No problem, go ahead, please).

-*Grazie mille.* (Thank you very much.)

Monique walked into the galley, turned and saw Ben staring out the porthole

-Mr. Adoyan, what are you doing up here?

-Waiting to use the bathroom.

Monique noticed Claudia's handbag on the counter. She picked it up and put it in a cabinet, which held another handbag. She closed and secured the door.

-You should take your seat, she snapped at him, we are going to start meal service. You didn't choose a meal. Did you want the halibut or the Tournedos Rossini?

-Gotta go with Rossini.

-I think the halibut is better, but choose what you wish.

-I'm sticking with Rossini. If you run out of the tournedos, I'll take the halibut. I'll be last to be served, so whatever you have is fine with me.

The Italian man left the bathroom. He gave Ben a nod and mouthed grazie. Ben noticed he was now very pale.

Ben went in the bathroom. He noticed there were bloodstains on the toilet and in the basin.

-No wonder that guy was a little pale, thought Ben.

Ben took some paper towels and cleaned up the blood and washed the surfaces with soap and water. After using the toilet, he washed his hands three times.

There was a knock on the door.

-Occupied, shouted Ben.

-It's Monique. I hear the bathroom needs cleaning.

-I took care of it, said Ben, opening the door to the bathroom.

Monique gave it a good look. She had on rubber gloves and had some cleaning supplies.

-You didn't need to do that, Ben. We have the tools to take care of these kinds of emergencies. Signore Legno is a very sick man. He told me the bathroom would need some attention. But, thank you for your help.

Monique started cleaning the bathroom. That's what Ben liked about the Dutch; they liked things clean and orderly, but not Prussian orderly. Ben turned and went to his seat. When he got there, Ida was snoring softly into *Breakfast of Champions*.

Ben had no sooner sat down than Claudia and the tall stewardess with the perky breasts came into first class. They went to the galley and started preparing the trays for the first class passengers. The overhead lights came on and Claudia made an announcement over the PA that meal service was beginning and passengers should return to their seats and remain there until after the meal service.

-I am seriously screwed, thought Ben, processing the shock of the telegram. Arris has hired Claudia to tail me every step of the way in Nice. Who knows if this guy Gabe Benjamin wasn't also working for Arris, or maybe even Gringovitch. Hell, this old lady Ida might be a set-up, too. One thing he knew for sure, he had two paintings that had to be delivered or he wouldn't get back his contrabass clarinet. The gig in Monte Carlo was looking more impossible by the hour. He knew the contact in Nice was compromised, so he probably wouldn't be able to get the *Liberté* portion of the 100 franc note. Who knows if this guy Al Sidran in Marseilles was OK? If he showed up in Nice on Friday night without an instrument, there would be some serious questions. Yes, he could borrow Arno Donax's contrabass clarinet,

but it was one of those metal ones that looked like a paperclip. It was even called a paperclip model. Hausenstockmann would love the rich sound of Ben's rare wooden contrabass. Ben needed all the points he could get with that condescending German maestro, especially in the first few days until he had the notes under his fingers.

Monique was pulling the food cart down the aisle with her back to him. She would kneel down and hand the trays to the tall stewardess from tourist class. Claudia was following behind with carafes of wine. There were sixteen first class seats, and they were all occupied. Ben noticed that Signore Legno, the man with the problem in the WC, was not eating and had a small oxygen bottle in his lap with a tube to his nose.

Monique looked very good from behind when she kneeled down to get a tray. Ben knew that all the stewardesses were supposed to wear girdles, but it sure looked like Monique was not wearing one.

-Jesus, Ben said to himself, I am one horny dude. I haven't waxed the hound in weeks, actually months, and it's going to my brain. Monique was next to him in the aisle serving the row in front of him. He could smell everything about her. It was all good.

Without warning the plane hit some turbulence and dropped about fifty feet. That was followed by a sharp jolt to the right. There were some screams and "Oh My God"s. The pilots put the nose down sharply and banked off to the left. The plane bounced around a few more times and then the flight smoothed out.

-From the P.A. there was an announcement from the first officer. We apologize for that bit of turbulence, but it didn't appear on our radar. Clear air turbulence can be difficult to spot. Please keep your seat belts fastened and remain seated at all times. Again we apologize for any discomfort you may have experienced.

The meal was a bust. The passengers who had been served found their meals on themselves, the floor and on their seats. The four meals for the passengers who hadn't been served, were also on the floor.

Monique's right leg was caught under the cart. The tall stewardess was trying to move the cart off of Monique's leg. Claudia was on the floor holding her right ankle. Ben saw his opportunity, unbuckled, stood up and lifted the food cart off of Monique's leg. Monique pulled her leg out.

-Thank you, Mr. Adoyan. I think I will be OK. There is a small cut, a ripped stocking and I'll probably have a bruise there tomorrow.

Monique was putting on a good show. Ben could see that putting weight on her right leg was painful.

-Ice it right away, Monique, and put some peroxide on that wound.

Two women in the first row were attending to Claudia who could not seem to stand. The tall stewardess went to the galley and telephoned the cockpit for assistance. The flight engineer left the cockpit and began examining Claudia's ankle.

Passengers began collecting their errant dishes and glasses, brushing and wiping off food and drink and generally cleaning. Monique and the tall stewardess began collecting the dishes, spilled food and drink. It was obvious Monique was in pain, but she wasn't about to leave her duties. The flight engineer had sat Claudia down on one of the crew jump seats.

Ben spotted some dishes and glasses that the girls had missed. He picked them up and took them to the galley.

-Officer, I think Claudia would be more comfortable in my seat. I don't have a problem with sitting in tourist class. She even knows the woman sitting next to me.

-That's most kind, young man. What do you say Claudia?

-At least I will be out of the way. Celia can help Monique in first class.

Ben and the flight engineer helped Claudia hobble back to Ben's seat. Ben took his backpack out of the overhead bin and headed into the tourist section. Ida was already mothering Claudia.

Food service in tourist class hadn't started when the plane hit the turbulence, so they were just beginning service. Ben grabbed a

couple of pillows out of the first overhead bin, threw his pack under a seat and made a nice three-seat space for himself.

-Excuse me sir, would you like a meal?

-Actually, what I really need is a cup of coffee and a pen or pencil and a pad of paper. Do you have anything like that?

-Coffee is no problem. I'll see if I can find paper and pencil.

-No hurry, we have seven hours to go.

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Gabe Benjamin opened the envelope that was stuck in the door of his office when he left for the airport. It was from Anatoly Gringovitch.

*Gabe-*

*I know you are going to Nice tonight. Could you keep an eye on my friend Ben Clarone? He has two paintings of mine, Big Wave and Life Forms, which he must deliver, one to a party in Nice and another to a party in Marseille. There is a third, The Red and The Black, which I will be bringing myself. This is new work for him. Any assistance you can give him would be appreciated.  
Best, Gringovitch.*

Gabe had to sort this out. How would Gringovitch know he was going to Nice? He only knew himself this morning. He was to scout locations for a film about a Formula One driver who lived in Monaco. He had the script on his lap. It was over two hundred pages, way too long for an action script. He needed to read it several times to understand the types of the locations he needed to find.

Gabe's lodgings in Nice were at the Hotel Beau Rivage in the old quarter of Nice, but close to the bus station and a modest walk to the train station. The bus would give him a better idea of the roads and the terrain. There was no money to rent a car, but he needed the work and he had to get away from the ex-wife, current wife and all the children.

Gabe had told the stewardess that he wanted to talk to Ben. Her name was Claudia and she knew whom he was talking about. That foxy musician Ben, thought Gabe, he probably boned her on some previous flight.

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The stewardess came back with the coffee and a pad of paper and a pencil for Ben.

-I'm sorry, I could not find a pen.

-This pencil is perfect.

Ben itemizing a list:

Friday

1. Pick-up contrabass clarinet in Paris, Friday immediately after lunch
2. Take afternoon flight to Nice from Orly Ouest.
3. Meet Jean-Claude Lyon, rent car, check into studio at Villa Arson
4. See if Jean-Claude has my music for *Constellations* so I can see how difficult it is.
5. Check instrument for travel damage and prepare more reeds.
6. Eat and crash.

Saturday

1. Rehearse with Hausenstockmann. Where??
2. Undelivered picture??????
3. Isabella Sanitizzare??...

Ben put down the pencil and had a sip of coffee. What started as a straightforward delivery job was getting complicated very fast. If he couldn't deliver the painting to Yolande, he was supposed to take it to Paris. But was he to deliver it to anyone? And what did he get for proof of delivery? Arris never specified that. What if the guy in

Marseilles hadn't received his portion of the 100 franc note? Arris couldn't have mailed them much before Monday evening. It would be Thursday morning when he arrived in Nice and only late afternoon Thursday when he arrived in Marseilles. What if he had two pictures and no proof of delivery? Could he still get back his contrabass in Paris? What was he to do with the two pictures?

Didn't Gingovitch say, "Don't worry, there is no hurry"? Easy for Anatoly to say, but Arris was a tough cookie. He might come after me. Ben was also sure Claudia would contact Arris and explain that she could not tail me because of her sprained or broken ankle. Would Claudia have to take a medical leave and would she crash at Isabella Santizzare's home in Nice, or would she fly back to New York? If Ida were staying with Isabella, then probably Claudia would fly to New York. The planes are not exactly full this time of year, so there would be plenty of room on a return flight for her. Did Arris have a backup person for Claudia?

The permutations of possibilities were giving Ben a brain ache. There was not much he could do until the plane landed. He decided he would go to Yolande's restaurant on Avenue Clemenceau and see what compromised meant. Once he saw what the situation was, he could develop a plan. He would play it straight, just as Arris had outlined. No matter what, he needed to get his contrabass and be prepared to play his gig with the Monte Carlo Orchestra. All this thinking about the pictures made him nervous. He decided to check on them. He went up to the first class section and checked the first class oversized luggage area. The two paintings were securely wedged in behind two large suitcases. Some first class passengers were eating meals that had been brought up from tourist class. He noticed Ida was asleep, but Claudia was sitting and had a bag of ice on her ankle.

-Claudia, how is your ankle?

-It hurts, but the ice numbs it pretty well, replied Claudia.

-How are you going to get home to New York?

-I'll have to see what they say in Nice, but they may send me to hospital for an X-ray. If it's just a sprain, I will fly back to New York



on the Friday or Saturday. Unfortunately, I will have to use unpaid medical leave. If it is broken, I will get some Workmen's Compensation.

-That's a bummer. Don't they have some policy if you girls are hurt in the line of duty?

-Dream on. This dream job has almost no benefits outside of a good salary. We are always tired because we have so few days off in a month. I've been on the New York-Nice-New York route for three months, and the only day I get off is Tuesday when there is no flight because the plane makes a once-a-week trip to Buenos Aires.

-Glad I'm not the plane, it gets no rest.

-Ben, you know what management says, "A plane in the air makes money, a plane on the ground is an expense."

-Sounds like they think the same of the flight crews.

-No, the flight crews follow government regulations about rest time. Not so us coffee-or-tea girls.

Ben wanted to ask her a question, but didn't know how to broach the subject.

-Ben, why are you traveling under the name Adoyan? I know you are Ben Clarone. Are you doing something you shouldn't be doing?

Ben was taken aback. He hadn't expected such candor. Since Claudia was friendly with Ida, he better stick to his story.

-Claudia, I had all my ID stolen in Lima, including your New York telephone number. The consul had a copy of my birth certificate, which had been deposited with them by Peruvian authorities for a traveling artist work permit. My mother's maiden name was Adoyan. My father, Ignacio Gallodoro Clarone, never married my mother and was killed in World War II. My birth certificate gives my family name as Adoyan. Professionally, I do business as Ben Clarone and that is how I am known. The passport office issued my passport using the name on my birth certificate.

-That might explain it. Because I know for sure that you are known as Ben Clarone.

Ben put his hand on her shoulder. It was warm and boney. Not a lot of flesh there.

-So how is it you know Dan Arris?

Claudia stared straight ahead. Then she motioned for Ben to put his ear nearer her mouth.

-I use to be married to him.

That would explain the initials on her handbag: CA.

-But, why is he asking you to tail me in Nice?

-Why do you say that?

-I saw the telegram. Your purse was open on the counter when you went back to tourist class. So why are you ordered to keep eyes on me?

-I guess Dan Arris doesn't trust you. I also owe him big time.

-What do you mean? You owe him big time.

-Someday, Ben, I will explain it. But I know that if you are involved with Dan Arris you are doing something that is probably illegal involving art forgery. Arris is a master forger. Last time he was caught he got off lightly because they put him to work counterfeiting Soviet currency. That's when we split up.

-So how are you going to tail me now?

-I'm not. You are going to take me with you where ever you go.

-I can't do that.

-Don't be too sure.

-But I need my contrabass clarinet for my gig in Monte Carlo and I need it in Nice by Friday night.

-When we get to Nice, I will telephone Arris. I will take a sick day and you will go with me to hospital. I will get a diagnosis and then you will take me with you where ever you go. Even to Paris, where you know I'm meeting Arris at the Ritz.

-I don't know about that.

-Well, Ben, we could finish what we barely started over the Atlantic at the Ritz.

How would you like that?

-The Ritz sounds a little pricy for me and I have to be in Nice at 5:30 Friday night with my contrabass clarinet. That is the most important thing to me.

-Ben, trust me, Claudia knows best.

Ben didn't know what to do. He needed to ditch Claudia. Maybe some Pan Am employee would take Claudia and Monique to hospital and Ben could disappear. She sure couldn't chase him around an airport. On the other hand, she knew he was traveling with a false passport, so she could really mess up his life if she opened her mouth. On the other hand, Arris would probably break her legs if she interfered with the delivery of the paintings. Ben also knew, once he was in Nice, he could easily become Ben Clarone as far as authorities were concerned.

-Ben, don't forget to see Gabe Benjamin. He wants to talk to you. He's about halfway down on the port side of the airplane. You should go, or people will think you are trying to hit on me.

Ben stood up and found he was facing Monique.

-How is the patient, Mr. Adoyan?

-Oh, I give her a ninety per cent chance of recovery. How is your leg?

-It hurts, but it feels better when I keep moving.

-They always say Dutch women are the toughest women on the planet.

Monique smiled at him but did not reply.

-Can I have a word with you, Monique?

-Yes, we can step into the tourist section.

Ben held the curtain and they stepped into the transverse aisle at the front of tourist class. Ben went to the exit door at the end of the aisle.

-Monique, Claudia says management may take the two of you to hospital for X-rays.

-Well, maybe her, but I can't afford to take the time off. I plan on working on this plane when it returns to New York tomorrow. I'm not senior like Claudia.

Monique was leaning against the bulkhead and into Ben's left arm. He could feel that firm warm breast.

-If you want my opinion, Mr. Adoyan. We both will probably end up flying back to New York. Claudia may not work, but she most likely will be on the flight.

-Well, I hope you both will be OK.

-Oh, I'm sure.

-Well, if you are stuck in Nice, I will be performing with the Monte Carlo Orchestra at a special concert in two weeks. I will be staying in Nice at Villa Arson. I will have my own atelier there.

-Ah, thank you, but we rarely get to stay in Nice for more than a few hours. Sometimes we get our day off here when there is no flight. But that only happens once or maybe twice a month. Usually we are in New York.

-Well, I can get you a ticket to the concert. It will be a real gala since it is a world premiere. You can wear some glad rags and have a splendid time. Get all glammed up, like a princess.

-How can I reach you?

-If you call the main number at Villa Arson, they will connect you or take a message if I am not there. I will call you. It would be terrific if you could come to the concert. I 'd be very proud to have you on my arm after the concert at the reception.

-I hope I'm not the last minute substitute for Claudia since she broke her ankle.

-Never. Never.

-We'll see Mr. Adoyan, or Mr. Clarone, or whoever you are.

-Just call me Ben, he said.

She slipped through the curtain, back into first class.

To be continued

