

Five Million Yen: Chapter 3

by Daniel Harris

The story so far:

Chapter 1: Ben Clarone, a musician, has just arrived home in New York City after an exhausting three-month world tour. He is low on cash, but has a check for five million yen. Things are not as he expects

Chapter 2: After securing his horns, he finds himself in an uptown flop where all is not as it seems. After being robbed he sits in his room and deconstructs his life.

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You're a smart guy Ben. How did you get into this situation? Where did you screw up? Where was the chink in your armor? You who were so condescendingly smart all the time. You who had more technique. You who had better ears. You who scoffed at players less talented. You belittled everyone you deemed was not at your level. When you rehearsed lines with Zoë and she couldn't remember a line you mocked her for failure of memory. You abusive egocentric jerk. You, Ben Clarone, mister despicable. You are an ass, unforgiving, uncaring, mean, bullying jerk. That's what you were. No wonder you lost your wife. Not to mention you coming home drunk and obnoxious. Throwing hundred dollar bills around the apartment and saying,

-So when movie star, are you going to start making money and earning your keep? She hiding in the bedroom; and you laughing and cracking open another bottle of Jack Daniels. You got her pregnant and she aborted. You had a three day drunken rant about killing a son. The neighbors called the police, but Zoë refused to

press charges and hid her bruises. You would go on tour and notch your belt with any number of willing women. Yet, you demanded totally fidelity of Zoë. You kissed her with other women's perfume on your body. You were an arrogant asshole. You didn't deserve what you had and didn't have what you deserved. You deserve what you have now. Now you are a raving bare-forked fool madman with nothing.

Ben, maybe you're not so smart. You arrogant asshole. You left a trail of people hurt by your haughtiness and narcissism. Students you lorded over and fellow musicians you mocked to their face in front of their peers. Small people you treated like shit, ignoring their admiration and their small kindnesses. You sneered at the bigs and the rich who groveled to hear you play for them, and then demanded bigger fees. You loved berating some lesser musician. You called them musical barnacles in the ocean of music.

You could be kind in a self-serving way. You gave generously and spoiled lavishly. You could change in a second to a kind and giving person, but the fear of the real you hung like an invisible plague over everything good you did.

Zoë shivering when we were watching the parade and you took her to Bloomingdale's and bought her a mink coat. She was embarrassed, but happy to be warm. No sex than night, or many after that. I guess you thought I bought you a fur coat as a substitute for any personal warmth.

You and those silly theater people of perfect teeth with all the pseudo- affection and air kissing.

-Oh, Zoë you look so beautiful tonight. Is this your husband? And Zoë blushing and saying,

-Why yes, he is.

And what did I do, give the bitch, who was leering at me, the stare that looked through her clothes. You thinking,

-I can make this bitch squirm. She knew and looked away.

Zoë's theater friends, knife you in the back as soon as kiss you. Worse than strung out junkies looking for the man. All jealous bitches crazy for a chance. And the men, mostly simpering dudes with "oh so meaningful lives." Such tender predators. You want to puke it's so perfidious.

But you, genius Ben, are now reduced to nothing. All you have is your rapidly disintegrating arrogant being, yet nothingness envelops you in its deadly shroud of emotional and material wretchedness. This is your flop, a domain an eye blink from homelessness. A catalog of your nothingness.

No chair,
No food,
No drink,
No glass,
No plate,
No fork,
No spoon,
No knife,
No clothes,
No shoes
No identity,
No money,
No woman,
No hope.
No job,
No begging bowl,
No blind man's cup.
Nothing, Nada

Hunger is gnawing at your gut. You haven't thought about food until now. Your last meal was on Northwest somewhere over Ohio. Lukewarm beef tenderloin tips with ersatz mashed potatoes, rock hard lima beans and an angel food cake without holiness. The two

Scotches had worn off and the baby in the seat behind you was crying. Hell, you would cry too if you could. You spent four days traveling in an aluminum tube from Tokyo, stuck two days in the transit lounge in Anchorage without food and you, poor baby, your mother's breasts dry, and we're all shuttled from gate to gate in Seattle trying to make a connection to New York. Hell, finding a toilet was hard enough. They reduce you to the joy of having a long and grateful piss as you bounce over the great American continent wedged in the economy toilet. Cry baby cry. You have every right. Your cry is our blues.

The nor'easter slashed against the window.

So where was your mistake? What triggered the robbery? You wrack your brain. The old guy asked:

-Did you flash money?

Did you flash money Ben? What did you say?

-I have five million Yen.

That must be it. That Adonis must have robbed my room when I was in the shower. I'll bet the bastard even turned the water off, so I would be in the shower for a long time. Ben, your first job tomorrow is to grab that son-of-a-bitch and get the money back. You know he must be the thief, or the accomplice of the thief.

Hunger is making your mind sharper. Your mind snaps to attention. All the keys are not the same; it's just a ruse.

The steam heat comes on. It becomes stiflingly hot. You open the window. A police siren arrived at the window in three echoes. You perked your ears.

-Now, that's pretty cool.

The tenorman must have found a new reed because he was playing "On Green Dolphin Street" almost in tune. The drinker and his wife are sleeping it off. It was close to one in the morning. A lone voice from somewhere in the court shouts.

-Shut that saxophone up goddamnit. Every Saturday night I have to listen to your shitty saxophone.

You could hear Ella singing:

*And through these moments apart
Mem'ries live in my heart
When I recall the love I found on
I could kiss the ground on
Green Dolphin Street*

Well this was no Green Dolphin Street. You weren't kissing any Broadway concrete or even Manhattoes earth. Recalling love was remembering moments of bravura masculine vainglory. Great beautiful wife you treated like third-rate stupid arm candy. Now she floated up and down Broadway on the side of the 104 bus. A ghost of your past and the glory of her present.

You wished you had a horn. You could teach that guy a thing or two about playing that song. He probably never heard the Sarah Vaughan rendition. Forget him having heard Prez or Bean. You remembered Clark Terry and Zoot Sims ringing the meaning out of that tune at the Black Hawk in Frisco. Now that was memorable. Screw kissing the ground, kiss Zoot's reed.

You missed your horns. What did Zoë do with my saxophones? You had the straight soprano, but you also owned a curved soprano, an alto, two tenors, a great baritone and even a funky bass sax that got you a job once in the hard times subbing in the pit for *West Side Story*. You bought the bass from a destitute circus band musician in Sarasota, Florida when Sarasota was a funky carny town and fishing village.

That was when you were a being. Now you are a nothing. You are paying the dues. Big dues you jerk. You deserve all you don't have

now for the way you treated all you had. Did you make some Faustian bargain somewhere in the past? You've now crashed from the top to the void.

You now sit in nothingness and hopelessness. Small future and a disgusting past. You rip off your bathrobe and toss it out the window. Standing there naked you scream:

-Ecce Homo! Ecce Homo! ECCE HOMO!

-Shut up you crazy bastard!

You fall on the bed. Your left ham lands on the broken spring, which skewers your flesh. You have reached bottom.

To be continued.

