

Five Million Yen: Chapter 39

by Daniel Harris

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Ben followed Jean-Claude's white Fiat. Every time Ben shifted gears, he was reminded of Arris's punch.

-Goddamn Arris. Goddamn Claudia for lying to me. I don't want to dull my mind with pain pills, not when I have to sight-read some Hausenstockmann nightmare. Son-of-A-bitch!

White Fiats were everywhere. It was difficult for Ben to follow Jean-Claude's white Fiat. Jean-Claude also had the habit of speeding up to cross intersections as the light was changing. Twice Jean-Claude waited after he lost Ben at an intersection. They finally turned off Promenade des Anglais onto Gambetta. Ben almost missed Jean-Claude's sudden right off Cessole onto Stephen Liegeard. Ben was caught in the wrong gear and had to double shift down to ascend the hill. At the top of the hill were the gates of Villa Arson. Jean-Claude flashed his lights indicating a parking spot with his arm.

Ben made a perfect one-move parallel park on the circular road.

-When the going gets tough, the pros get professional, he said to himself with satisfaction at his parking job. New Yorkers know how to parallel park. Look at Jean-Claude's Fiat, the left rear wheel is over the curb onto the sidewalk.

Ben was snapped back to reality by pain in his ribs when he exited the car. It was dark outside and there was only one street lamp, so Jean-Claude did not see Ben's grimace.

-Ben, let me see if they have someone who can give you a key. Stay here and I'll return directly, said Jean-Claude as he approached Ben.

-I'll go in with you. They should see who I am.

-As you wish.

Jean-Claude pushed the "call" button on the gate. A buzzer sounded and the latch snapped back. Jean-Claude pushed the gate and waved Ben through.

-It's the door on the right.

A young man and woman sat at the reception desk. They had the lean look of ardent French art students.

-You must be Monsieur Clarone, said the man.

-Allow me, said Jean-Claude. Mr. Ben Clarone, this is Michel Legrand and Sophie Kessel. They work night reception during the week. Michel and Sophie, meet Ben Clarone.

The two looked at Ben in horror.

-Oh, I'm so sorry, said Ben. I was in a taxi accident in Paris a few hours ago. I'm sure my eye looks dreadful, but I assure you it does not hurt and I can see you perfectly. The medics at Orly checked me thoroughly. As my father would say, all my eye requires is a kilo of raw beef and a good night's sleep.

They both laughed at Ben's remark about the raw beef.

-We say the same here, said Sophie.

-My father swears horsemeat heals faster, said Michel.

-Do you have the key for Mr. Clarone's atelier? Jean-Claude asked.

-Yes, said Sophie. She took a key ring with two keys from her desk.

-The big Fichet key is for the atelier. The smaller key is the front gate, which is locked from sundown to sunrise. If you forget your key, the code is C7A9. Here are the rules for residents. I wrote the code on the back of this pamphlet with the emergency numbers. Do not lose the Fichet key. We will charge you 500 francs for a replacement.

-Why so much? Asked Ben.

-We have to recode the lock and replace the key. It is a special high security key and expensive, said Michel.

-Mr. Barnardi, the director of Villa Arson, told us to tell you he is very sorry he could not greet you this evening, but there is a special fund-raising event for this center that he had to attend. He will pay his respects tomorrow, said Sophie.

-Is there a telephone in the atelier?

-No, only an intercom to this office. We can take calls for you and announce visitors. There are two public phone *cabines* outside the gates. They take coins or *telecartes*. There were phones in the ateliers, but the artists did not want to be disturbed by telephone calls when they were working. You may have France Telecom install one at your expense. The wiring is in place; you need only rent the telephone.

-I assume you have luggage? Michel asked.

-Yes, a backpack and my contrabass clarinet, said Ben.

-I will find a cart and help you unload, said Michel.

-Sophie, may I use your telephone to call Beaulieu-sur-Mer? I must talk to the composer Hausenstockmann. Ben's flight was late; we are running behind schedule.

-Yes, of course, Mr. Lyon.

Michel arrived with a luggage cart. He and Ben went to retrieve Ben's luggage.

-What is in this huge case? Michel asked.

-A contrabass clarinet. It plays two octaves below a normal soprano clarinet.

-How low is that?

-The lowest note is the left-most black key on a grand piano.

-What is the highest note?

-I can go as high as you want, but normally the upper soprano clarinet range is usual. The contrabass clarinet is rich in harmonics, so one can make all kinds of sounds with this instrument, both animal and industrial.

-Will you play for us here?

-If Mr. Bernardi would like me to, I will be happy to put on a small concert and demonstration. I'm sure you will all be tired of hearing me practice. Mr. Hausenstockmann composes very difficult music and this is a duo concerto for contrabass clarinet and contrabass, the bass string instrument. I'm sure you will hear many strange sounds and much cursing.

-This is a center for contemporary art. The students crave anything avant-garde, especially music. Anthony Braxton gave a concert here last spring. It was packed.

-Braxton is an old Chicago friend. He is a superb performer and improviser. He's a hard act to follow.

The cart bogged down on the gravel path. Ben pushed with his left hand. It still hurt to put strain on his upper body. Jean-Claude saw that Ben was favoring his right side and took over for Ben with the cart.

-Ben, you're the artist, you shouldn't be pushing heavy carts. I just spoke with Hausenstockmann. He said he wishes to meet you here tonight. He will bring your part for *Constellations* and go over it with you. I did not tell him about your little accident. Sophie, the girl at reception, will put some make-up on your eye to make it look better. Act like a jazz musician and wear dark glasses.

-I have just the pair, said Ben. He caught himself in time. He almost said, "I bought in Nice yesterday."

-Have you ever used a Fichet key, Mr. Clarone?

-No, but let me try. Don't say anything.

Ben looked at the lock in the dim light and at the key. He slid it in on the first try.

-Excellent. We have artists here who never lock their atelier because the key is too complicated, said Michel.

-*Morceau de gâteau, pour moi, homme*, said Ben in his best John Wayne imitation.

-Michel and Jean-Claude laughed.

-You are one funny guy, Ben, said Jean-Claude.

Michel pushed open the door of the atelier and flipped on the light switch. There was a foyer that opened onto the kitchen. A short

hallway led past the bathroom and into a big room. A sleeping area in the corner was surrounded by folding screens. The rest of this large room was the work area.

Ben clapped his hands in the big room. It was a reverberant space.

-Ah, a live room. I hope I won't be bothering anyone if I play late at night or early in the morning.

-I don't think so. The woman who has the atelier next to you is in Germany for two weeks. She has an installation of her sculptures in Berlin. There is no atelier on the other side, said Michel, only the maid's closet. If you need anything, someone is at the front desk until midnight, except Sunday night, then only until six.

-Thank you for your kind assistance. How do I know if a visitor arrives for me?

-We will buzz you on the intercom. One more thing, the automatic watering system starts at eleven at night. The sprinklers work in timed groups and some of the sprinklers spray on the path, so keep your eyes open.

-I'm sure I'll get sprayed at least once, said Ben with a grin.

Ben was hoping they would leave so he could prepare for Hausenstockmann. Being French, they always had one more thing to say or ask.

-Ben, are you hungry, asked Jean-Claude.

-Food would be good, but I need to clean up and check my contrabass for any travel damage.

-I will go and bring Hans Hausenstockmann and some food. It is now eight-thirty; we will be here in one hour. Is that enough time? Jean-Claude asked

-It should be plenty.

Michel put Ben's contrabass in the middle of the big room. He put Ben's backpack on the bed. Michel and Jean-Claude left with Michel pulling the cart.

Ben closed the door behind them

-Now, to assess the damage, Ben said to himself.

He took off his jacket, shirt and t-shirt. There was an ugly black circle where Arris's fist had landed on his ribs. Probably his eye would be swollen shut tomorrow. Ben looked in the refrigerator for ice. There were three ice cube trays with ice. He could use the ice for his injuries. In a closet off the bathroom, Ben found towels and linens.

Ben dumped his pack on the bed. He found his tube of arnica Montana pellets. He put a half-dozen under his tongue.

-First a shower. Then check the contra, he mumbled to himself.

The good shower and change of clothes improved Ben's spirits. He looked in the cupboards for anything to eat or drink. He found six bottles of wine with a note from Bernardi: *Welcome to Villa Arson. Best, Bernard Bernardi, Director.*

Ben took a wine glass from the cupboard, and using the corkscrew on his Swiss Army knife, opened a bottle of red wine.

-Mmmm, said Ben out loud. Mighty fine wine.

He put the wine down and took out his contrabass. Everything looked fine, but it was time for a test. He thought about taking the pain pill, but decided to try playing the contra first.

He played a few tentative notes. It wasn't painful, so he gave it a full-scale blow.

There was a dull pain, but nothing he couldn't handle with a little wine. There were two problems: no music stands and the lights were all aimed at the walls. It was track lighting, easily adjusted, but he would need a ladder. He walked over to the intercom and pushed the call button.

-*Oui*, said Sophie.

-*Bon soir*, this is Ben Clarone.

-Yes, Mr. Clarone. What can we do for you?

-Do you think Michel could bring a ladder to my studio so we can adjust the lights? Also, do you have three music stands?

-I will ask Michel. He is buying us pizza from a truck down the street. He should be back in five minutes.

-Thanks you. He can bring the ladder and music stands after you have enjoyed your pizza.

-Thank you. That is very thoughtful of you Mr. Clarone.

-You can call me Ben.

-Yes, Mr. Clarone.

Sophie's refusal to call him Ben reminded him of the stewardess Monique on his flight over from New York. He hoped Monique would accompany him to the premiere of *Constellations*, but airline stewardess had an unpredictable life.

Ben put a few more reeds in a glass of water and continued warming up. The contra played beautifully and the acoustics in the studio were like playing in a stone cathedral. The contra sounded huge. Hausenstockmann was going to be impressed.

Ben tried the reeds he had soaked in the glass of water. One of them was going to be excellent with a little playing time. While he was trying the reeds, he noticed that the room was particularly resonant when he played a low e-flat. The whole room rattled with a sympathetic vibration, especially the inside security curtain.

-Wow, thought Ben. I hope Hausenstockmann has a good loud low e-flat in the part. The whole room shakes when I unload on that note.

There was a knock on the door. Ben put the contra on its stand and answered. It was Sophie.

-I'm here to make your eye look better, she announced.

They sat at the kitchen table. Sophie did her magic.

-I work as a free-lance make-up artist for film and television. Usually I'm making black eyes, not fixing black eyes. This is much more difficult.

Sophie had a very soft touch. Finally she took a mirror and showed Ben his new eye.

-You are a sorceress, said Ben. Very good work.

-Will you need me to do this for you tomorrow and Sunday?
Sophie asked.

-Probably. How do I contact you, Sophie?

-I will be here tomorrow morning at eight. I have an art class at nine. Is that too early?

-I don't know, but eight is okay.

-I have to return to reception so Michel can bring you a ladder and some music stands.

-Thank you Sophie, you are the best.

Sophie blushed. *Bon soir*, Mr. Ben Clarone.

Ben helped Michel carry three music stands and the ladder into his atelier.

-You see the problem, Michel?

-Yes. Do you want a *flaque de lumière* in the middle of the room, or general light all over?

-I don't understand your French, said Ben.

Michel pantomimed what he had asked.

-Ah, now I understand, said Ben. I would like a *piscine de lumière* in the middle of the studio and more lighting in the room.

Michel's eyes gleamed at their successful communication.

-Yes, but I have to find more lights. We start with a *petit flaque*.

Ben arranged the music stands in the middle of the room. He took two chairs from the kitchen and placed one for himself with the stands in front and one for Hausenstockmann next to him.

-*Le petit flaque ici*, said Ben.

They had just made the puddle of light when there was a knock on the door.

Ben answered.

Jean-Claude waved Hans Hausenstockmann into the atelier.

-Hans, I think you know Ben. Ben, Hans can't wait to hear you play your contra. I have been telling him what a great instrument it is.

-That's funny, thought Ben; he's never heard me play it.

-Come in. Come in, gentlemen. Michel and I are arranging the lighting.

Hans Hausenstockmann was nearly seven feet tall. He stood ramrod straight. He had a long narrow head covered with blond hair with streaks of white. He wasn't wearing glasses, but had some half-frame reading glasses on a keeper around his neck. He was wearing a maroon sport jacket that had seen better days. All the pockets were bagged out with most of the buttons were missing. He was

wearing worn brown wide-wale corduroy slacks and Addis running shoes with black dress socks. Under his left arm were artists' boards containing the score of *Constellations* and Ben's part.

-Ben, I don't want to keep you up too late, said Hausenstockmann. I will go over the score and your part. Tomorrow morning, after you've had some time to look at the part, we can go over it in detail. In the afternoon, Serge Nobokolov will join us so we can rehearse the duo parts. If we need it, we can rehearse Sunday morning at Jean-Claude's home in Beaulieu-sur-Mer. Jean-Claude tells me you have an automobile.

-Yes, I do.

-Good, I am too busy to make trips to Nice. Tuesday we will have our first rehearsal with the orchestra.

-That reminds me, Ben. Maestro Markevitch has changed the program. Since we will be doing all eight movements of *Constellations*, he has programmed Ravel's *Bolero* for the second half. You will play the saxophone parts. I have a full schedule of rehearsals for you. The Ravel has only one rehearsal, so it won't take up much of your time.

-Thanks for giving me the heads up, Jean-Claude, said Ben.

-Sorry, my friend, but I had no way of contacting you.

-I will have to find some instruments, but that should not be a problem.

-Can we start now? asked Hausenstockmann.

-I'm ready, said Ben.

Hausenstockmann spread the contrabass part over the three music stands. Each movement of the work was on three large pages. Each page was an art board with six music manuscript pages glued to it. Ben noticed that the dedicatees were Serge Nobokolov and Arno Donax. Hopefully, Ben would get his name there in place of Arno's when the printed edition was published.

-This first *Constellation* begins with very quiet percussion and solo soprano voices. We will start at your first entrance, said Hausenstockmann folding his seven-foot frame onto the kitchen chair.

The first notes for the contra were all very loud with many tremolos, trills and rapid staccato melodic figures.

-I will begin conducting here, he said pointing to two measures before Ben's entrance. Your entrance signals the cataclysm of creation

Ben came in as directed and nailed the part perfectly.

-What a sound! Bravo! Hausenstockmann jumped up.

He stood across the room and asked Ben to play that section again. Again Ben nailed it.

-Can you play from your next entrance? You will have to play the *ostinato* figure for about a minute non-stop. The *ostinato* was a fast rhythmic seven-note vamp that covered two octaves. The fingerings could cramp your hands.

Ben looked at the part. He would have to circular breathe, that is, take air in through his nose to his lungs, while playing using air reserves in his cheeks. It was a technique of most Third-World wind players who performed with drummers and string players who did not have to breathe.

-This is the tempo, said Hausenstockmann clapping his hands in the tempo.

Ben sight-read it with aplomb. After the *ostinato* there were a series of loud low e-flats. Ben gave them his best. The room shook and the security screen rattled.

-Jean-Claude, did you hear that? shouted Hausenstockmann. This instrument is astounding. Ben you are making me so happy. Now I can change the part to what I originally envisioned.

The next hour passed in a similar fashion. Ben was getting tired.

-Jean-Claude, Maestro Hausenstockmann, said Ben. I think I would like to stop for the night. Tomorrow will be a long day and I have not slept in a bed for three nights.

-Yes, you are correct, Ben, said Jean-Claude. Hans, we should leave Ben. He will come to Beaulieu-sur-Mer tomorrow at ten. Is that all right with you?

-Works for me, said Ben.

-Yes, that is good for me, said Hans Hausenstockmann.

-Ben, here is the orchestra schedule, a map to my home and the concert hall.

Ben put the papers on one of the music stands.

-Ben, before we go, can I ask you to play a few things for me, asked Hausenstockmann.

-Sure, anything you would like.

Hausenstockmann pulled a sheet of music paper from the boards and put it on one of the music stands. The sheet was covered with notations of chords, called multi-phonics, that could be playable on the contrabass clarinet.

Ben played them all. He and Hans checked the tuning of the different notes of the multi-phonics. Ben gave suggestions for fingerings and notation. He also demonstrated some other advanced techniques. Ben suggested using slap-tongue for some of the very loud short notes. It was nearly midnight before they finished.

There was a knock on the door. Jean-Claude answered the door. It was Sophie.

-I have two telephone messages for Mr. Clarone, she said to Jean-Claude.

-Thank you, Sophie. I will give them to Mr. Clarone. *Bon soir.*

-Ben, I can't thank you enough. I have been nervous about this contrabass part. I am so pleased you were able to make time in your busy schedule to come and premiere this concerto. The sound you get from that instrument is remarkable, said Hausenstockmann.

-Thank you. It is a special instrument. This concerto will give the contrabass new life. The small world of contrabass performers thanks you for such a wonderful showcase for their instrument, said Ben.

-Thank you. But now we must go. I have many changes I want to make to your part and Nobokolov's part.

-Thank you, Ben. You've saved the concert, said Jean-Claude. I put some phone messages for you on the kitchen table. We will see you tomorrow at ten. It takes about a half hour to reach my home from here on Saturday morning.

-Thank you, I'll reserve plenty of time.

-Good night, thank you both.

-Oh, Ben, I forgot, there is a *pan bagnat* in my car for you. It will be soggy, but I'm sure you are hungry. I will bring it *tout suite*.

-Good. I am starved.

Ben closed the door of his atelier. He had to piss like a racehorse. As he stood over the toilet he looked down. His urine was dark red. What was that about? He flushed, and decided to see how it was in the morning.

There was a knock on the door.

-Yes.

-It's me, Jean-Claude.

Ben opened the door.

-My apologies. I completely forgot the sandwich. I hope it is not too dreadful.

-Well, Bernardi left me a couple of bottles of wine. The wine will improve the flavor of the soggy *pan bagnat*.

-Ben, I can't thank you enough. Hans is beside himself with happiness. He is astounded how accurately you sight-read the part. Arno Donax could barely play the notes. Hans was worried he had a flop on his hands. There were so many problems with Donax.

-Well, maybe he can change the dedication, said Ben.

-That's not my decision, and perhaps not his, since the commission contract specifically stated for soloists Serge Nobokolov and Arno Donax. The local papers will probably give you bad reviews, no matter how spectacularly you play.

-As long as the check is good, said Ben. It's the fate of us studio musicians. I'm the anonymous guy who improvises the saxophone solo everyone sings. It's the story of my life.

-I'll make sure you are well taken care of, Ben. Hans is waiting. I must run.

-Goodnight, Jean-Claude, and thanks.

Ben closed the door, put the sandwich on the kitchen table, and poured a big glass of wine. He saw the two phone messages. One was from Gabe Benjamin and the other was from Isabella Santizzare.

-I wonder what those two want, thought Ben.

He couldn't believe that a week ago Friday night, he was in the international transit lounge in Anchorage, Alaska returning from a three-month global tour.

Ben could hear some squealing and laughing outside his atelier. Soon there was a knock on the door. He put the wet sandwich back on his plate and took a big gulp of wine. He opened the door.

-Surprise! Surprise!

Ben saw a stag accompanied by a she-wolf. They were people dressed in very elaborate and accurate costumes. The headpieces were like helmets. Ben could not see any human eyes. The stag had magnificent horns and the she-wolf big teeth and lolling tongue. The full body costumes were astoundingly realistic.

-Is this a trick-or-treat, Ben asked.

-Ben, it's us, Bernard and Elsie Bernardi!

-Ah, come in. You scared me.

Ben stepped aside and motioned them into his atelier.

-We saw Jean-Claude and Hausenstockmann outside the gate when we arrived home from the masked ball. They said you were still awake, so we thought we would say hello, said the stag.

-Those costumes are amazing. I am very tired and I was ready to believe real animals were knocking my door.

-Ben, is that all you have to eat, asked the she-wolf.

-I'm afraid so. I had a big breakfast around noon in Paris, said Ben.

-Barnard, said the she-wolf, we must take him home and give him some good food. This is terrible. I can't believe the Monte Carlo Orchestra would treat a major musician like this.

-Oh, they have been very accommodating. I was supposed to be here on Thursday, but I am a day late.

-Elsie, do we have any food in the house suitable for Ben? Asked the stag.

-Of course, answered the she-wolf.

-Please, I am very tired. If I eat too much now, I won't be able to sleep.

-Are you sure, asked the stag.

-Thank you very much for the offer. The wine you left has made me very sleepy, said Ben.

-Ah, that was the plan, said the she-wolf.

-If you insist, we will leave you to rest. But tomorrow evening, there is a big party here and you, as resident artist, must attend. No excuses. Can you find a costume, asked the stag.

-I think I know someone who can find one for me, said Ben.

-You *must* have a costume. Toussaint is the biggest party of the year at Villa Arson. The students and resident artists spend a lot of time and money making costumes, said the she-wolf.

-Come, Elsie, let us leave this human to rest.

The stag and the she-wolf both gave Ben a big hug. The motion of the requisite three kisses was made, but only rubber and cloth touched Ben's cheeks.

To Be Continued

