

Five Million Yen: Chapter 40

by Daniel Harris

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Museums, the sources of civic and cultural pride, are in truth, major repositories of forged and stolen art. - Dan Arris

Ben was dreaming of sex with Claudia. But, in his dream, he could hear Dan Arris calling his name and pounding on a door. The fear of Dan Arris was pushing out the delights of Claudia.

-Monsieur Clarone! Please answer the door!

Ben rolled over. The pain in his ribs snapped him awake. Ben went to rub his eyes and instantly pulled his hands away. Ben realized the knocking at the door of his studio was real.

-Monsieur Clarone, *c'est moi*, Sophie. It is eight o'clock. I must fix your eye. I have to go to class.

Ben sat up and looked around his sleeping area. There was a pair of boxer shorts by his bed. He put them on and scanned the room with his good eye for his trousers

-One minute, said Ben still trying to reconcile the sexy dream and the angry knocking. Who would be knocking his door?

-Monsieur Clarone, *c'est moi*, Sophie, I'm here to paint your eye.

-One minute, Sophie. I was asleep. I need to put on some clothes.

Ben pulled on his blue jeans and a t-shirt. He stumbled into the kitchen. It was difficult to move because of the stiffness of his ribs. He turned on the light, found a glass and filled it with cool water. Ben emptied the glass in one long drink.

He put the glass down and opened the door to his studio. Bright sunlight steamed into his eyes. He instinctively shielded his eyes

from the sun, but his thumb touched his sore right eye. He sucked in a breath through clenched teeth.

-Sophie, I apologize. I slept late. I didn't fall asleep until after two this morning.

-I will have to hurry to make up your eye before my class.

-But I need a shower.

-Take your shower now. Quickly, said Sophie.

Ben went into his bedroom and removed his clothes. He walked into the shower. From her chair in the kitchen, Sophie watched Ben's reflection in the hallway mirror as he walked from the sleeping area into the shower. She had never seen such a fine specimen. Certainly none of her classmates, or the life models in her drawing classes, had a body or bearing like Ben's. Her body stirred with lust.

Ben turned on the shower and waited for the hot water. He was soaping his body when a naked Sophie joined him. She had a girl's body, barely budding breasts and a thinly thatched *pubis*.

-What are you doing? asked Ben.

-I'm here to make your eye presentable. She saw the big circular bruise on his ribs. She explored his bruises with her fingertips and asked, Does that hurt?

-Yes, but only when I twist or turn.

Sophie reached down and fondled Ben's package. His manhood responded immediately.

-I don't know if I can do this, Sophie. My pain may ruin it.

Sophie skillfully inserted Ben into her grot. They coupled standing under the shower. Sophie had some moves that Ben had never experienced.

-Jesus, said Ben. Sophie arched and moaned. Ben burst forth in an ecstasy he rarely felt. They slowly slid down the shower wall to the floor. They rested with the shower pelting them.

Ben left the shower first and took another towel from the hall closet.

-Here, Ben said, handing Sophie the fresh towel.

They both toweled off. Ben glanced into the kitchen and saw Sophie's clothing on a chair. Her panties looked too small for a woman.

Ben put on the same clothes he wore the night before, jeans and a blue work shirt, but with clean underwear.

-I feel like a child molester, said Ben.

-Ben, I am twenty-three. but my body is still not developed.

-It worked like a woman's.

-No fourteen-year-old girl can do what I did.

-I never had sex with a fourteen-year-old, so how would I know?

-Trust me. Now, I will paint your bruised eye.

Sophie stood before him at the kitchen table while making up his eye. When she was finished, she sat on his lap. Ben cupped her left breast. It barely filled his palm. Sophie responded by kissing Ben and nibbling his ear.

-Enough, now, Monsieur Ben Clarone.

-Sophie, do you have a driving permit?

-Yes, do you want to see it?

-Sure.

-Ben looked at it. The picture was correct and her birth date was 1 October 1952.

-You didn't believe I was twenty-three did you?

-No, but I also wanted to know if you could drive. I might need you to drive for me sometime.

-I must go to class.

- And I have to prepare for a rehearsal. Will I see you tonight?

-Yes, but I will be disguised in a special costume.

-What is it?

-A surprise.

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Hausenstockmann was acting like a bull in heat. He had completely rewritten Ben's part. It was more virtuosic and more

than a few pages longer. Normally Ben welcomed big musical challenges, but Hausenstockmann was giving Ben a hard time about every detail.

-What an asshole, thought Ben. That SOB stayed up all night writing a part he didn't think I could sight-read. Now he's calling out every little detail to make himself seem superior.

-Ah, Herr Clarone, said Hausenstockmann, you are not playing 11 notes in the time of 9 notes exactly. Give me your best, please.

-Yes, *maestro*, it may not be perfect, but it is in an accelerando.

-That is true, but I have notated that accelerando absolutely. You don't have to decide how fast to accelerate. Follow the score, all will be well.

-But, *maestro*, what I'm playing is what one calls performance art, how to use the time and notes to express an emotion.

-I leave nothing to the performer, he sneered. Play as I notate.

-As you know, *maestro*, it is not the same part and it is notated at pitch, so I must transpose as I sight-read. The part last night was notated in the more common French notation in treble clef. This part is notated in three clefs.

-I hope that is not a problem. There is no money to have a copyist make a transposed part.

-I think I'm doing well. Ben was embarrassed at having to defend himself.

-It could be better, Clarone. You Americans always demand special treatment.

-I didn't ask for special treatment. You are not going to find anyone as good as me, and you know it.

Ben knew Hausenstockmann was full of shit

-Maestro, if you don't think I can play the part to your satisfaction, find someone who will. So, rather than belittling me, why don't we work together? The part I sight-read last night was excellent. If you have revisions, even major rewrites, no problem, I will learn them. It is two weeks until the first performance. I have learned more difficult music than this, and you know it.

-My assistant Cassandra Stefani has leaned this part and is quite capable of performing it at this time.

-Well, why did you contract me?

-She doesn't have a contrabass clarinet. She has been playing the part on a bass clarinet.

-It is much easier on the smaller instrument, said Ben suppressing a derogatory chuckle.

-We would like you to rent her your contrabass to use for the concerts.

-Did you say, *rent* Stefani my contrabass clarinet?

-You heard me, Herr Clarone. We will rent your contrabass from you for a fair price.

-No fucking way, said Ben with some heat. This instrument cost me over ten thousand dollars and a three year wait. She can buy a cheap three thousand dollar metal one. You fucking Krauts are a bunch of assholes. I'm outta here. Insult someone worthy of insult, you NAZI bastard.

Ben took his contrabass, took it apart and put it in the case.

-Herr Clarone, shot back Hausenstockmann, you will be here for the rehearsal with Nobokolov this afternoon at three. I demand it, yelled Hausenstockmann purple with rage.

-Don't push me. You can always have your bitch play the part on her bass clarinet.

Ben picked up the case, stalked out of the room, slammed the outside door of the house and marched toward his car.

-Ben, Ben, called out Jean-Claude Lyon, running after him.

-What.

-There is a big misunderstanding. I, we, the orchestra, even Hausenstockmann, want you to premiere the work. There is no way Stefani will be playing that part.

-Tell that Kraut asshole to get a life. I'm the best in the world. He doesn't want me; tell him to go fuck himself. I'm not loaning, leasing or selling my axe to anyone, certainly not to his groveling mistress. Tell *him* to buy her a contrabass clarinet.

-Ben, I know that, and so does he. He always has one blowup at the first rehearsal and then he calms down. It's over.

-The conditions for me to premiere this concerto have changed. I want more money, and a properly prepared part. You people have set me up. I'm sure all along he wanted his girlfriend to play the premiere. And, Jean-Claude, you haven't played straight with me.

-Ben, I didn't now about this. He's just being the jerk he always is.

-Well, fuck him and the horse he came in on. I'm the best you can get and if you want me to do this gig, I want serious money. And, I will not be pushed around by that fascist Kraut. He's swimming in a tar pit. He told me Arno Donax couldn't play this part, and that was before he made major changes and additions. *Sayonara, mes amis*. Talk to me later. I don't need this European bullying.

-Ben, if you go, please return this afternoon for the rehearsal with Nobokolov.

-I have a costume to buy. Maybe I'll see you this afternoon.

-Please make the rehearsal with Nobokolov this afternoon.

-Nobokolov can practice with that Kraut. I can sight-read anything Hausenstockmann can compose.

Ben got into his rental car, slammed the door, gunned it and spun gravel in Jean-Claude's direction.

-Fucking European assholes! Ben screamed into the windshield.

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The phone rang four times before Gabe Benjamin answered.

-Yes?

-Gabe, Ben Clarone. You called?

-Where are you?

-A phone *cabine* in Beaulieu-sur-Mer.

-Have you had lunch?

-No, do you want to do lunch? I can be at your hotel in twenty minutes.

-Be careful where you park. Most of the street parking is off limits for the parade tonight.

-See you in twenty minutes. Ben hung up.

It was a beautiful late October day. Most of the restaurants in the old quarter were filled. Gabe found one on a narrow side street. There was an inside table available. They took it.

-So, Ben, how are you holding up?

-What do you mean, "holding up"?

-You should see your eye. Quite a shiner. Have you been in a fight?

-Several, including one with that egomaniac Hausenstockmann.

-Did he sock you in the eye?

-No, my supposed business partner, Dan Arris, the art dealer.

-Have you seen a newspaper?

-No, should I find one?

-You were seen leaving the Ritz Hotel with Dan Arris. You were detained by airport security at Orly-Ouest because of injuries, probably caused by Dan Arris.

Arris's wife, Claudia, fell in the shower, hit her head and died of brain trauma. The police might be curious why Dan Arris slugged you.

-You're making this up, Gabe.

-Well, someone socked you in the eye and probably other places also.

-Arris. He smashed me in the ribs, the gut and then patted me in the right eye. What do you mean Claudia is dead?

-Just what I said. Fell in the shower. Not fifteen minutes after you left the Ritz.

-But why would she be taking a shower. She was dressed to go out. She and Arris had to entertain a big group of millionaire art collectors. The bellman came, and carried my contrabass clarinet and backpack to the taxi. The bellman saw me hugging and kissing Claudia. She was dressed in an expensive Chanel suit and very much alive. Arris jumped into my taxi, slugged me three times and then walked a block back to the Ritz. I'm the victim of Arris. Did Arris kill Claudia in the shower? Was he arrested?

Gabe poured more wine in their glasses.

-The papers didn't say if he was arrested, though authorities questioned him.

-I wouldn't put it past that bastard to have killed his own wife.

Both men sipped their wine thinking their own thoughts.

-So why the hell were you kissing Arris's wife, blurted out Gabe.

-She told me they were divorced. I found a telegram from Arris to Claudia that ordered her to keep a close eye on me.

-So, did she do that?

-Well, she bedded me on the train to Paris.

-Is she the good-looking stewardess with the injured ankle that rode in the car with us from the airport?

-That's the one. I can't believe she's dead. We were embracing like lovers not twenty-four hours ago. She was coming to Nice to be with me after the private art show that she and Arris hosted at the Ritz. Her ankle, by the way, was not injured; she was faking it to get off work.

-Sorry if I ruined your day, Ben.

-The ruin is that I quit the concerto solo gig.

-You fucking did *what*?

-I told Hausenstockmann I quit. He had a different part than the one I played for him last night. Today it was this hand-scribbled part, vastly different than last night and he threatened to have his girlfriend, who apparently had been practicing that part, premiere the part with the orchestra. When he asked if I would rent her my contrabass clarinet because she didn't own one, I lost it. What an insulting NAZI pig.

-What a *putz*! How do you get mixed up with so many jerks?

-I guess it's just the business.

-So what do you need from me? Do you still have a place to stay?

-Yes, at least for the weekend. But I'll probably go back this afternoon and play the rehearsal, which will either smooth things over or end it forever. I could use the money and I have to hang out down here for some more art business. Besides I've promised tickets to a dozen people. I can't realistically pull out; I'm too deeply invested.

-We were thinking of using the Monte Carlo Orchestra to record the orchestral parts of the film score. If I talk to the manager, Jean-Claude, I can probably make everything nice-nice.

-That would be generous of you. I hate to use up all my favors.

-Not to worry, Ben. I'm a professional fixer.

-Well, do you think you can find me a costume for the masquerade ball at Villa Arson tonight?

-Piece of cake. I'm sure Roi de Quoi has access to lots of costumes.

-That would be terrific. Tonight is the biggest party of the year at Villa Arson. A costume is *de rigueur*.

-Let me make some phone calls. Drink some more wine. Order a dessert. Relax. Enjoy yourself. You deserve better than to be jacked around by a bunch of Austrian *Kunst furz*.

To be continued.

