

Five Million Yen: Chapter 6

by Daniel Harris

Ben Clarone, a musician, has just arrived home in New York City from an exhausting three-month world tour. He has little cash and a check for five million yen. Things are not as he expects. Here are links to previous installments.

Part V: <http://www.fictionaut.com/stories/daniel-harris/five-million-yen-part-v>

PartIV: <http://www.fictionaut.com/stories/daniel-harris/five-million-yen-part-iv>

Part III: <http://www.fictionaut.com/stories/daniel-harris/five-million-yen-part-iii--2>

Part II: <http://www.fictionaut.com/stories/daniel-harris/five-million-yen-part-ii>

Part I: <http://www.fictionaut.com/stories/daniel-harris/five-million-yen-part-i--2>

Rita closed the door behind her.

-Ben, you have to get out of here now. There are people who want to hurt you.

-Whoa, wait a minute. What people want to hurt me?

Rita began putting my clothes into my pack.

-Wait a minute. What's going on here?

-Ben, I'll tell you when we are out of this room.

I helped her load the pack. I put my Adidas shoes on and the windbreaker. I put my empty wallet in my front right pocket as a guard against pickpockets.

-Leave the key for the room here. Don't lock the door; they will only break it down.

-Wait a minute. I'm not leaving this room. I've paid for it, I was robbed in it and now I have to leave after one night?

-Just follow me. There is almost no time.

I turned off the light and closed the door.

-Hurry!

She ran down the hallway to the stairs, opened the door and heard footsteps. She did a quick 180.

-This way.

We went back past my room, the shower and around a corner to another staircase. I noticed that there was no exit sign over the door.

Rita went up to the eighth floor. On the eighth floor we retraced our path from the seventh floor. She stopped in front of 8D.

-Isn't this Reynard's apartment?

-Yes, only he can help you.

She knocked, but there was no answer.

-I saw him go out late this afternoon. He's probably not home.

-Shit! Quick.

We ran back to the front staircase. This time we headed down.

-I know you're in here Rita. It's just a matter of time. Come to Big Stinger now.

The voice was a serious basso and with the echo it was hard to tell if the voice came from upstairs or downstairs. Rita pulled me back into a hallway.

-That guy's my pimp. Rodney tipped him off to your money. I stole your stuff. After you've saved my life, I washed your clothes and put them back. Big Stinger has your check and all your papers. He wants you as a hostage. Stinger wanted to keep you here, so I also stole your clothes so you couldn't leave. He, Rodney and a guy named Victor Ruiz, think they can hold you hostage. Then have you deposit the check and then extort the money from you.

-That's not possible. I'm too well known and the people at the bank know me.

-They're serious. They will hurt you. Maybe even kill you. They will hurt the two guys on six who gave you clothes. They have been doing coke and speed all day. They are crazy.

-Rita, I think you are a little hysterical. They may want to hurt you, but why would they hurt the goose that laid the golden egg, especially if they have the egg?

-Ben, I'm helping you because you saved my life when I shot the junk into an artery. I stole everything from you. I tried to get your Driver's License and the check for you, but Big Stinger has them in the safe.

-His safe, in this flop?

-No, the safe in the office. Remember Rodney is in on this.

-Just get out of this building. I'll run upstairs and distract Big Stinger. You take the elevator down to the first floor and get out of the neighborhood as fast as you can. I gave you a token. Don't forget that. You owe me fifty cents.

Rita ran up the stairs and entered the fifth floor, slamming the hallway door.

Ben went down the hallway to the elevator and called the elevator. It seemed to be stuck somewhere. He didn't hear any click or door closing. He decided to chance the back stairs.

Ben arrived at the first floor. As he was walking towards the elevators he saw Reynard coming into the building and walking toward the elevator.

-Ah, Ben can I have a word?

-Sure.

-Here's a dollar, Take a train south as far as it will go. Enjoy the sea air. Don't come back to this hotel again.

-What? How can you order me to do this?

Reynard reached in his blazer pocket and flashed an NYPD Shield.

-There's trouble and you are at the center of it. You're just a victim, I don't want you a corpse. Get moving. Fast!

Ben went out the front door, turned left uptown and cut over to Broadway on 104th street. He crossed over Broadway and headed down towards 103rd.

He passed a slice joint. The smell was too much for his Italian blood. There was a street window.

-Sell me a slice for a token?

- Sure my man. Show me the token I'll show you the slice.
- Can you put some extra cheese on that? I'm starved.
- Not for a token.
- Come on. I've got to play a gig all night. I need some fuel.
- I'll give you a free Pepsi.
- Deal.

It sounded like a downtown local was approaching the 103rd street station. Ben took the slice and the Pepsi and sprinted down the street. At the top of the steps he could hear the train entering the station. He took the steps two at a time. When he got to the platform level he waited for just the correct moment. Just as the conductor was closing the doors in the front of the train he jumped the turnstile and boarded the back section of the train with the doors closing on his pack.

- Keep clear of the closing doors!

The conductor flicked the doors open and closed. Ben pulled his pack inside.

-Do not hold the closing doors. It's against Transit Authority regulations. Violators can be subject to arrest and fines.

- I can't believe it. I still have the pizza and the Pepsi.

-Eating on New York City subways is a violation of the subway rules. Violators are subject to arrest and fines.

- Just made it mang.

It was a guy sitting by the door.

Ben smiled. He looked up. Overhead there were only posters advertising, *I'd Rather Not* with Zoë's picture. They filled all the poster space in the car.

- I can't believe it.

Ben found a seat in the middle of the car, put his pack down between his legs and ate his pizza.

-Damn! Freshly cleaned chinos and I spill pizza grease on them. Figures.

He thought about getting off the train at 72nd street and seeing if he could crash on Carmello's couch, but nixed that idea.

-I'll switch to the IND train at 59th street and go smell the sea like Reynard suggested.

At 59th street he went downstairs and waited for the downtown Stillwell Avenue-Coney Island train.

There was a guy playing *Summertime* on an alto sax. He was terrible. Sounded like a tenor player trying to play alto. He had a student like that once. Blow the ass end off of *St Thomas* and *Giant Steps* on tenor, but couldn't play *Come to Jesus* in whole notes on alto.

Ben walked by the dreadful alto player and looked in his case on the floor. It held some singles and a decent amount of change.

When the train arrived he got in the conductor's car. The car was full of Hasidim and a few Puerto Rican families coming from visiting relatives in The Bronx.

-In an hour I'll be at the sea.

He finished the Pepsi.

-I'm only following police orders. He looked up and saw Zoe's image repeated like a mantra. The entire car was filled with posters advertising, *I'd Rather Not*.

-She's everywhere and nowhere.

When the train arrived at Stillwell Avenue, Ben and a few sleepy families left the train. He crossed Surf Avenue walked up onto the boardwalk.

-Ah, the sea. But he could also smell the homeless and the forgotten sleeping under the boardwalk. He walked across the beach to the sea. There was good surf running from the nor'easter. Low clouds scudded across the sky, but no rain fell.

-I love this, taking a big gulp of sea air.

Ben started thinking. How do I get out of this? What is Rita's involvement? Who is Big Stinger? Why would they want to kill me? Besides the busses and the subway where is Zoë?

He thought about the guy playing in the subway. Shit, I'm a musician, I just need a horn and a few hours and I could make a few bucks.

As he walked along the beach he noticed a tube sticking out of the sand. Ben picked it up. It was a cheap penny whistle.

-Of course idiot, a penny whistle would be cheap. Are there any expensive one's?

Ben knew a horn player who was always bragging about how expensive his horns were and how little he paid for them. I'll bet Manny would be telling everyone how many dollars he paid for a penny whistle.

He started to play the whistle. It didn't work.

-What the ...?

Ben examined the instrument. Ah, here's the problem, someone had stuck gum in it. Ben worked on the gum with a stick and sand and after some time managed to remove the gum.

He sat down on a bench on the boardwalk and started improvising on the now working flute. Did he know any Irish tunes besides *Danny Boy* and *The Irish Washerwoman*? Better get those two under his fingers on this tin whistle.

A possible twenty was in the offing.

If I hit Grand Central at seven in the morning, I could make my breakfast and more. Optimism reigned.

The caffeine in the Pepsi was wearing off; he nodded out on the bench with his pack under his legs.

To Be Continued

