

# Five Million Yen: Chapter 61

by Daniel Harris

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Dan Arris sat in Chez Colette enjoying a roulade of veal stuffed with root vegetables. He was not a happy man. Arris was dining four blocks from the apartment where he had met with Arno Aghajanian, Zoë, Isabella and that Russian art expert, Lena Koshka. Now Isabella was dead in that apartment, and he had to face the prospect that Koshka would declare the Gorky a forgery, thereby blowing the sale and a million plus dollars. Where was the original Gorky? Isabella had to have hidden it.

—Would monsieur care for a dessert? It's included with the menu, said the waiter.

—Give my dessert to the woman dining alone over there. Bring me a double Hennessy and a double espresso, please.

—*Oui*, monsieur. I'm sure mademoiselle will be pleased to accept.

Arris took his address book from his jacket vest pocket and searched for Isabella Sanitizarre's Nice address. He found it: 10 Place Charles Félix on the Cours Saleya.

Leaving the restaurant, Arris stopped by the woman's table.

—Did you enjoy your dessert?

—Quite. To whom do I owe the pleasure?

—Arris. Dan Arris. I deal in art and antiquities. Here is my card. And you?

—Marie-Pierre LeNez. I'm a columnist for *Libération*. What brings you to Nice?

—Business. I'm selling a painting belonging to a friend, the painter Anatoly Gringovitch.

—Yes, I know his work. I wrote an article about his paintings included in a group show at a SOHO gallery in New York last year. A version of it appeared in *Art In America*.

—I know that article, but wasn't the by-line Marie-Pierre Proulx?

—That's my family name. My reporter name is LeNez, the nose. I can sniff out a villain at 100 meters.

—Is that so?

—Hasn't failed yet. My nose tells me you have a past.

—Ancient history. A false conviction. I was released after six weeks. My nose has been clean for years now.

—You see, my nose was correct again. A perfect record by a nose, she said with a seductive grin.

—Mine's actually been broken three times. I kept putting it where it didn't belong as a kid in the Bronx. Straight it will never be.

—Will I see you again?

—Maybe. But will you put your nose in my business?

—Maybe we can put our noses in each other's business, said Marie-Pierre with a wink.

—So nice to meet you. Do you have a card? I might have some insider art tips.

—Thank you for dessert, she said handing him her card. Pleased to meet you, Arris.

—Likewise Nose.

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The first time Arris walked by Isabella Sanitizzare's apartment it was dark. He walked to the sea and sat on a bench. Shortly before eleven he walked back to the apartment. A police car pulled up in front of the address. Two female officers helped an elderly lady, apparently Ida Oates, Isabella's grandmother, out of the car and into her building.

Arris walked to a nearby telephone cabine and called Serge, the Russian hit man.

—Wait for me in front of the opera house. Be there in twenty minutes, said Arris.

—Yes, boss. More women?

—Maybe. Arris hung up.

Arris noticed limos and hired cars lining up near the opera. Perfect, there will be a big crowd here when the opera finishes. Arris checked his pocket. Isabella's keys were still there. He found the keys on the floor at 17 rue de Paris where they had fallen from Isabella's purse.

Arris let himself in on the ground floor and walked up to Isabella's apartment.

He knocked on the door.

—Oui?

—This is Dan Arris, Ida. I'm here to see Isabella.

There was a long silence. Arris heard Ida unlocking the door.

—Come in Mr. Arris. This is a sad day, said Ida opening the door and motioning Arris to enter. Her eyes were red-rimmed from crying.

—Why? Isabella stands to make some good money on the sale of the Gorky painting.

—Isabella was murdered tonight, said Ida. She began to weep.

—Isabella! Murdered? I saw her not four hours ago. We had all but wrapped up the sale of the Gorky. A few formalities on Monday and it would be a done deal.

—No deal for her. It was hideous. The police speculated that whoever did it, took his pleasures with her before and after he murdered her. A real sicko.

—Awful. When did you find out?

—The police came here around nine. I identified her at the scene of the crime. I may never get that image out of my mind for the rest of my life.

—I don't mean to be rude at such a time, but didn't Isabella bring the Gorky painting here around seven tonight?

—No. I was here all afternoon and evening until the police came. She left this morning and didn't return.

—Are you sure that the Gorky painting is not here? I don't have it. Did you see it at the rue de Paris apartment?

—No, but I was so shaken I didn't notice anything.

—Strange. Where is the painting? It is worth millions, as you probably know.

—Mr. Arris, commerce is about the last thing on my mind. I've lost a beautiful, successful granddaughter to a brutal rape and murder. I would like to shower, take a tea and whiskey and be left alone. Would you please leave?

—Yes, of course. I understand completely, but may I have a look around to see if the painting is here?

—Yes, please be quick. My social skills and self-control are in short supply.

Arris made a cursory search of the apartment. He knew the original Gorky had to be in this apartment, but he needed the old lady out of the way.

—I am so sorry to have bothered you, Ida. If there is anything I can do, please contact me.

—Yes. But now, please leave.

—Of course. I'm so sorry for your loss. It is my loss also, Ida. Goodnight.

—Goodnight, Mr. Arris.

Arris met Serge among the crowd in front of the opera. Serge followed Arris to Ida's apartment.

—Here are the keys. Don't make noise. Lock the door when you leave. Keep out of sight. Leave the lights on but don't leave any water running. Walk directly to the sea. I will be sitting on a bench. Bring me the keys.

—Yes, boss. And the pay?

—The same.

Serge grabbed his crotch grinning in anticipation of additional prurient pleasures. It will be a day to remember.

Forty-five minutes later, Arris could hear Serge approaching. He was swearing in Russian. Something must have gone wrong.

—Serge, what happened? Did you do the job?

—Yes, but that old bitch gave me a hard time. She got away from me and cut me bad with a kitchen knife.

—Did you finish the job, or did you let her escape like that stewardess?

—No. I killed her. Cut her head right off. I had my fun. Never had a gullet job before.

—You're disgusting. You can't walk around the streets with blood on you. Go wash off in the sea. Do it now before someone sees you.

—That water is too cold.

—Cold? A tough Russian like you calls that water *cold*? You've got to get the blood off your body and clothes before someone spots you.

Serge walked to the edge of the sea pulling off his t-shirt. The water was warmer than he expected for November. Arris pulled the garrote from his pocket and walked up behind Serge who was rinsing his shirt in the sea surge. Arris tightened the garrote around Serge's neck and with his knee in his back Arris had all the leverage he needed. Serge bucked twice and then collapsed into the sea where his last breath was lost in the luminous sea foam.

Arris took the wallet from Serge's rear pocket and pulled his jeans down to his knees. He slid a condom from the wallet. Looking along the shore, Arris found a fat stick about two feet long. He pushed the stick with the condom stretch over the end up Serge's anus, leaving Serge's own calling card dangling between his hairy cheeks. Arris opened the wallet and let the hundred dollar bills from Serge's earlier job waft into the water.

—Some homeless bastard is going to be rich on money I made, said Arris amused by the irony of the evening's events.

Along the Quai des Etats-Unis Arris dropped the wallet into a trash receptacle and walked to Ida's apartment. An hour later he was on the autoroute to Marseille. In his pocket was Isabella's cashbook. The entry for Monday, November 8, 1976: Clarone—25,000FF Re: Services Rendered.

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Lieutenant Giles LaPonti watched Monique clinging to Ben in the light of the hotel steps. She was going to be all right.

—Monsieur Clarone, you are in charge of the lady now, he said. If you have any problems or questions she has my card. Call me day or night.

—We can't thank you enough, Lieutenant LaPonti. Does she need to see you tomorrow?

—No, we have her statement. But please don't leave the Côte d'Azur without notifying me.

—Yes, sir. Thank you again for finding Monique.

—Thank a cat named Zoot. He's a great little fellow with an eye for the pretty ladies.

Monique gave LaPonti a kiss on the cheek.

—Thank you.

—Now stay out of trouble and don't stay up all night, said LaPonti. You have a big concert tomorrow Clarone.

—Yes, sir. Good night.

—*Bon soir*, Inspector, said Monique.

LaPonti turned on his flashers, made a u-turn on the street in front of the hotel and headed back to Nice.

—Monique!

—Ben! What an awful two days. A soak in the tub, then take me to bed.

Monique wakened Ben twice in the night with nightmares. He held her until she went back to sleep.

At eight Ben awoke and took a shower. He had a final rehearsal with the technical people and the other soloist, Russian bassist Serge Nobokolov.

While he was shaving, Monique came in the bathroom.

—Why are you up so early?

—I have a rehearsal this morning, but I'm free in the afternoon. We will buy you a grand gown and take you to the beauty salon. You are not only my guest tonight, but you will be the belle of the ball. You haven't see ritzy, until you've been to one of these post-concert events.

—But Ben, that will cost so much money.

—Nothing costs too much money for you, my love, he said, folding Monique into his arms.

—You smell so good, Ben. Give me a *real* kiss.

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A lone sleepy gendarme and Girolamo Dente were the only people at Découvrir Art when Dan Arris arrived at four in the morning.

—You are forbidden to enter this area, said the gendarme.

—So sorry. Here, said Arris flashing a forged INTERPOL I.D. and passport.

—Excuse me, Inspector Daniels. Only the old Italian man is here. The fire department and the police have left. I'm to stay until a new door can be installed tomorrow morning.

—Smart thinking. The police are so much better here in Marseille than in Paris.

—Absolutely, sir, said the gendarme with a proud smile.

Arris walked into the outer office of Découvrir Art. Ivan Gorleka, the old KGB arsonist, knew his craft. The fire was confined to an area around the desk. There was much smoke damage and some water damage, but most of the paintings were going to be fine after cleaning.

Arris walked into Girolamo Dente's studio. The old man was snoring at his desk with his head on his folded arms. Arris gently shook his shoulder.

—Signore Dente.

The old man gave one last snort and slowly turned his head to see Arris.

—*Che cosa?*

—Dente, it's me, Dan Arris. I'm here for the painting.

—Arris, the painting is destroyed. Leave me alone.

—Come, old man. Show me what's left. I won't harm you.

Arris helped Dente rise. They walked together into the front room.

—Here is the relic, said Dente handing Arris the charred lower right-hand corner of the Gorky.

Arris gave it a long hard inspection. He was happy to see the telltale brush stroke of the copy. Now he had to find the original. The ledger he filched from Isabella's apartment was the clue to the whereabouts of the original. It had to be with Clarone or someplace Clarone had stashed it.

—Dente, I'm taking this. If anyone inquires, Inspector Daniels from INTERPOL took it as evidence. Here's my I.D. Forget you ever saw Dan Arris tonight.

—Yes, Inspector.

Arris was pleased that Dente was a quick read.

—*Ciao*, Signore Dente. I'm sorry about your loss. We will return this to your client for insurance purposes after the investigation is complete.

—Yes, of course. *Bounanotte*, Inspector.

—*Ciao*.

The gendarme guarding the door gave Arris a mock salute and a big smile.

—*Bon soir*. Are you off to Paris?

—No, New York. The owner is an American.

—I always wanted to go to New York City.

—A great place to visit, but it's a tougher city than Marseille. There are parts of Brooklyn where not even the military will go.

—Yes, there is a quarter here in Marseille that is much the same.

—Keep up the good work. Monsieur Dente is badly shaken by the fire. Treat him like you would your father. *Bon soir*.

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Saturday morning Lieutenant LaPonti stood near the customs exit at the Nice-Cote D'Azur airport waiting for the passengers disembarking from Pan Am flight 82. He was holding a hand-lettered sign that read: MULVIHILL. He was looking forward to meeting



Detective-Sergeant Claude Mulvihill. Inspector Lilly Rose told him that Mulvihill was the perfect stereotype of a New York City cop: big, brusque, shrewd and street smart. LaPonti wasn't happy that he was missing his son's soccer game and had only four hours sleep, but duty called.

—You must be LaPonti, said Mulvihill, approaching LaPonti from behind and tapping his left shoulder.

—And you must be Mulvihill, said LaPonti turning quickly to see Mulvihill's surly face, nearly a head above his own.

—Pleased to meet you, Lieutenant LaPonti, said Mulvihill shaking LaPonti's hand. Pardon my Canadian French.

—Your French is perfect. My car is right this way. Inspector Rose gave me a glowing report about you.

—Ah yes, Lilly Rose. Not a woman to my taste, but a detective to admire. She's a clever policewoman.

—France's finest. So, Mulvihill, are you here for art or murder?

—Possible art fraud. Where there is fraud and big money there is always the possibility of homicide.

—You will be pleased to be in Nice. Last night we had a homicide we think is connected to a painting. A major art dealer was found raped and murdered. A local art expert, Lena Koshka, inspected the painting at the murder scene earlier in the day and declared the painting a copy. She telephoned Lieutenant Smith in New York and informed him. The murder victim was trying to palm the painting off as a rare original Gorky.

—Yes, I was in Smith's office when he received the call. Lena Koshka is an expert in contemporary art. I tend to believe her. The other player on the selling side is Dan Arris, a notorious figure. Slippery and walks both sides of the street.

—Both sides of the street?

—He was working for the KGB *and* the CIA when he was arrested for currency forgery. He dodged a long jail term by fingering a KGB double agent, who died under mysterious circumstances. Arris has international connections in the political world and in the shadowy world of criminals and spies. He is known for complicated schemes

that usually involve three. He must have been a three-card monte hustler in his youth. Lieutenant Smith suspects that there might be the original and two copies of the Gorky in Arris's possession. He uses beautiful women and his charm to get his way. If necessary he has connections with people who can make things and people disappear. He can be very dangerous.

—Do you think he is a murderer?

—No, he would have someone who's a pro do that work for him. In prison he was known as a hothead, but he's not stupid enough to whack someone.

—Whack?

—Assassinate. It's an American Mafia term.

—I have a lot to learn about American police terms, said LaPonti. Let us now go to my office where I can fill you in on recent developments.

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—What do you mean, Inspector Paumé, said Inspector Lilly Rose into the telephone, someone from INTERPOL *took* the Gorky painting from Découvrir Art early this morning?

—The gendarme on duty said an Inspector Daniels from INTERPOL came and took the remains of the Gorky painting, said Paumé. According to the gendarme, Daniels had valid INTERPOL identification and passport. There was nothing he could do. Daniels told the gendarme he was taking it to New York where the owner lived.

—There's *always* a problem in Marseille, said Rose. Find out who this guy Daniels is. I suspect he's an imposter. More important find that fragment of the Gorky. And don't dally. Have that gendarme look at photos of the usual suspects. Somewhere there must be photos of Arris, Gringovitch and Clarone. Make sure he looks at them.

—Inspector Rose, I'm three blocks from you in Paris. I'm not in Marseille. You know the police in Marseille won't do that. You better come up with a plan B.

To be continued.

