

Five Million Yen: Chapter 63

by Daniel Harris

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Gringovitch sat on the big leather chair in Olivia's suite. Before him on a coffee table were the nude sketches he'd made of her earlier that day. Two members of the Monaco military police stood on either side of him.

—You are telling me that you came to Miss Krakenthorpe's suite and made these nude drawings of her? said the Sergeant who was interrogating Gringovitch.

—Yes, I did. It was at her request. One can't force someone to pose nude.

—Did you have sex with her?

Gringovitch hesitated, but there in the clear plastic evidence envelope were three used Okamoto condoms and their wrappers.

—Yes. We did engage in consensual sex.

—If Miss Krakenthorpe did everything you wanted her to do, why did you kill her?

—I did *not* kill her. We were going to meet downstairs in the dinning room for a late lunch. I heard her call the *maître'd* for a reservation as I was leaving, which was around two this afternoon. I went to my room to clean up. That was when I discovered my suite had been ransacked and two of my paintings stolen.

—Weren't you still in a raging heat after murdering Miss Krakenthorpe, so you destroyed your own suite to make it look like you were the victim of a robbery?

—I did *not* murder Olivia Krackenthorpe. Stop saying that. It insults my integrity as an artist. I would never harm such a beautiful creature.

—Was her murder an accident? Perhaps shower sex games gone terribly wrong? Or, did you sneak up on her and pull her backward, smashing her head so hard on the faucet handle that her head split open spilling her brains onto the shower floor?

—Absolutely *not*. We were both quite sexually spent. We had made plans for her to pose for a portrait starting tomorrow.

—Did you kill her because you were afraid your wife would discover your infidelities? Were you afraid Olivia would use the sketches to blackmail you?

—Absolutely *not*. I have drawn hundreds of women nude with and without the knowledge of my spouse. Look. I drew some sketches of her at the pool. She liked them and asked me to come to her suite and make formal drawings of her nude. She is a vain beautiful woman who enjoys modeling for artists.

—*Was, Gringovitch, was.*

—We had an hour or so of drawing and then some fun. We planned on lunch after we had both showered. She wanted to be alone, so I went to my room to refresh. That was when I discovered my suite had been robbed.

—So, did your sex games include tearing apart this suite also? What were you looking for in this room? Did you think she would use the pictures to blackmail you?

—No, she wasn't that sort.

—Did she tell you her father is an investor in this hotel?

—Yes.

—Did she also tell you her father, Jack Krackenthorpe, is Director General of MI-5, the British domestic secret service?

—MI-5? No, she never mentioned it. If I'd known, I probably would not have befriended her.

—Do you have something to hide, Monsieur Gringovitch?

—No, I'm in Monaco to hear my friend, Ben Clarone, perform a world premiere with the Monte Carlo Orchestra tonight.

—Did you know Olivia was an employee of MI-6, the British foreign espionage service? Did you think she was trying to entrap you?

—No. Entrap me for *what?* I'm a painter.

—Do you know Monsieur Dan Arris?

—Of course. He is my European art dealer.

—Did you know Arris was a double agent working for the CIA *and* the KGB?

—What? No!

—Did you not observe that the book the late Miss Krackenthorpe was reading was in Russian and was a collection of Vladimir Mayakowsky poems and plays? You *were* born in Leningrad, no? And lived there until the age of ten?

—Yes, I mean, no. Look. I need a lawyer. I don't know the laws in this country. I don't know what you can ask me, or what I am obliged to tell you.

—Monsieur Gringovitch, you will have your time before the Procureur Général. Maybe she will set bail, though that is unlikely knowing the family of the deceased. At the moment, all circumstantial evidence points to you as the murderer of Olivia Krackenthorpe.

Two officers came into the suite, an older man, a Colonel, and a young Lieutenant. The Colonel had a kindly, but world-weary face. Without his uniform no one would notice him in a crowd. The younger man held a police radio in his hand and stood ramrod straight. His posture bespoke career military.

—I will take over, Sergeant, said the Colonel to the interrogating officer. He turned to Gringovitch and studied his face and posture.

—Monsieur Gringovitch, my name is Colonel Maurice Bonheur. I am an early admirer of your work. You may know my ex-wife the New York sculptor, Margot Blackthorn.

—Yes, she was an established artist when I was starting out.

—It is almost certain that Gringovitch is the murderer, Colonel, said the Sergeant.

—Sergeant. I would prefer that you and your men await further orders at your police vehicles, outside. And please park them inconspicuously in the rear of the hotel. Has the medical examiner arrived?

—No, sir. The victim is *in situ*.

—Thank you. Sergeant that will be all.

Colonel Bonheur glanced into the master bath and then looked into the other three bedrooms and baths before returning to the sitting room.

—Monsieur Gringovitch, I must ask you a few questions, said the Colonel.

—Yes, sir.

—Do you know the whereabouts of your painting, *The Unfaithful Wife*?

—Yes, but it is not my painting. I own it, but it was painted by Arshile Gorky, his last painting before his suicide. It is in a bank vault in Nice.

—Who else knows it is there?

—My good friend, the musician Ben Clarone. It is in his safe deposit vault at Crédit Agricole, Avenue Jean Medecin, Nice. He brought the painting to Nice from my home in Brooklyn. There is a buyer for it there.

—Does the name Celine Crisse mean anything to you?

—Yes. She rented my studio apartment in Paris. She paid five years' rent with the Gorky painting.

—Did you know she was a professional thief?

—No, I knew her in Rome as one of several mistresses of the painter, Roberto Matta. She told me Roberto gave her the painting as part of a palimony deal.

—What made you decide to sell the painting?

—I wanted to purchase my Rome studio.

The Colonel took out a pipe, filled it, lit it and then tilted his head back and exhaled a great cloud of Balkan Sobranie smoke. Anatoly

was in despair. Pipe smokers were notoriously slow. He could be here with the Colonel for hours.

—Have you seen the corpse, Monsieur Gringovitch?

—No. The last time I saw Olivia she was standing where you are. She was making a reservation for our lunch with the *maitre d*.

—Was she clothed?

—No, she had been posing nude as you can see from the drawings.

—I assume, the Inspector said pointing to the evidence bag, you and she engaged in sexual relations.

—Yes. She was very seductive and desired intercourse. We were attracted to each other. The sex was not forced.

—And these velour ropes?

—She...

—No need to explain. A girl has to have her fun.

The Colonel turned a desk chair to face Gringovitch. Sat. Crossed his legs and studied his dejected subject.

—Are those the clothes you wore when you came to her room to make the drawings?

—No, I changed when I took a shower in my suite.

—Before or after your suite was robbed?

—After.

—Where did you put those clothes?

—In the laundry bag for the maid.

Bonheur fussed with his pipe. It didn't seem to draw properly.

—Monsieur Gringovitch, you are a well-known artist, yes?

—Quite a few people know my work.

—Have you ever served in the military? Seen battle?

—Never. No, I protested the Vietnam War.

—This may not be pleasant. Let us now view the woman whose favors you lately enjoyed. Come, monsieur.

The Colonel led Gringovitch into the commodious bathroom. Olivia lay on her back in the open shower. She was dressed in a robe. One leg was bent the other twisted under her back. Her hands clasped against her head; blood and brains had oozed through her fingers and onto the shower floor.

—Oh god! groaned Anatoly. The Colonel adroitly stepped aside as Gringovitch retched onto the floor trying to reach the toilet.

—Lieutenant, please record that Monsieur Gringovitch vomited upon seeing the victim's corpse.

—Yes sir.

—Before we leave the scene of the crime, do you notice anything?

—Are you asking the lieutenant or me? said Gringovitch coughing into his handkerchief.

—Both actually, said the captain.

—The shower is dry, said Gringovitch.

—There is no obvious hair or flesh on the faucet, handles, or walls, said the Lieutenant.

—Very good

The captain guided Gringovitch back into the sitting room.

—You may wash your face in the other bathroom, said the Colonel to Gringovitch. Please go with the Lieutenant and give him an inventory of what is missing from your suite. Afterward, you are free to go about your business.

—Thank you Colonel, said Gringovitch still coughing into his handkerchief.

—Lieutenant, said the Colonel, escort monsieur to his suite, take a statement and make an inventory of what was stolen from his room.

—Yes, sir.

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—Ooh-la-la, Monique. That gown is perfect, said Francesca, Gringovitch's wife.

—It is too low cut. I'd be embarrassed to be seen this exposed, said Monique.

—We can fix that with the correct brassiere, said the *patronne*. You want the exposure without vulgarity.

—Exactly, said Monique, but my legs are my best feature and this gown is so long.

—Madame, it is a peek-a-boo skirt with many slits. Your beautiful legs will be most erotic as you walk and dance. Your perfect skin and large eyes are your best features.

—Monique, we've been to five shops and this gown has you written all over it, said Francesca.

—Madame, try these shoes with the gown, said Mimi, a *vendeuse*. Monique put on the offered slender stylish heels.

—Oh, this makes all the difference, said Francesca. Monique you are a showstopper.

—I will have Mimi fit you with a brassiere and the ensemble will be complete.

When Francesca and Monique left for the beauty salon, Monique had a gown, undergarments, stockings, shoes, handbag and a raffish feathered hat. Ben would be proud to escort and dance with Monique. She was going to be desirable and radiant.

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Colonel Bonheur's radio squawked. The Colonel answered.

—Oui.

—The British are coming.

Five minutes later three men entered Olivia's suite. Two were dressed in blue jump suits pushing a gurney. The third was dressed in a wrinkled suit. He appeared to be the head of the detail.

—Name's Gull. I'm the commanding officer, said a burly man about thirty-five in the suit. The two others are Jay and Finch.

—Quite an aviary, said Bonheur with a laugh.

—We're here on orders from MI-5 Director General Krackenthorpe. We are to retrieve the body of his daughter, Olivia. Here is the signed special permission from His Serene Highness, Prince Rainier of Monaco.

—Yes, I have been informed, said the Colonel. Do you know what weapon was used?

—Yes. A new KGB stealth weapon, it makes no audible noise. It uses very powerful high frequency pulse waves to cause massive hemorrhaging in the brain, which results in bleeding from the ears, basically a series of massive strokes in the brain. You can see the victim is holding her ears. Her brain was literally being microwaved. Obviously quite effective.

—Do you know who might have done this to her?

—Colonel, we are but the housekeepers. I'm sure someone in MI-6 knows who ordered her murder. The murderer is probably a KGB contract killer.

—Yes, of course.

Jay and Finch lifted Olivia's body and placed it into a black body bag.

—Do you know why someone would want to kill her?

—I'm sorry, Colonel, said Gull. As you know, Miss Krackenthorpe worked for MI-6. There is a theory that she had used her charms on a Soviet scientist and had obtained plans for an advanced weapons system.

Finch and Jay began searching the suite. Leaning against the wet bar, in plain sight was a tennis racket in a case.

—Here's the ticket, said Jay. He took the racket out of the case, unscrewed the end of the handle and popped three rolls of miniature film into his palm.

—Jay, you found the film? said Gull.

—Here it is in my very hand.

Gull walked over to Jay and pocketed the film.

—Thank you, Colonel. It has been a model of international cooperation working with you. I'm sure the Queen will personally express the nation's gratitude to the Prince.

—Thank you Mr. Gull.

—One last thing, said Gull laughing, you might want to examine the hallway closet.

To be continued

