

# Five Million Yen: Chapter 65

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Inspector Lilly Rose was more repulsive than Mulvihill remembered. She was a bulldog with pestiferous breath. Fortunately, she was in the front seat with her driver. Mulvihill sat alone in the back.

—Sergeant Mulvihill, we will converse in English, said Inspector Rose.

—My French is that bad?

—No, but it is Canadian French, which is grating to the driver's ears.

—Ah, yes, said Mulvihill picking up her drift. Their conversation was not for the driver's ears.

Traffic was the usual Saturday night crush in downtown Nice. The driver kept flashing his lights to work through the snarls.

—Just go with the flow, said Rose to the driver. We are not responding to an emergency.

—Yes, Inspector, said the driver

— Sergeant Mulvihill, there have been some new developments you should know, said Rose.

Mulvihill took out his steno book and a pen.

—You are going to *write what I tell you in a notebook?*

—I always take notes. I'm not as smart as you and Lieutenant Smith, said Mulvihill. I like my information on paper.

—I don't approve. A detective must have a memory for detail.

—I don't miss much, Inspector, said Mulvihill. But a paper record is what I prefer.

—As you know, continued Rose, Anatoly Gringovitch owns a rare Arshile Gorky painting which he has for sale. It is the last picture Gorky painted. The prospective buyer is Arno Aghajanian, a Hollywood divorce lawyer. Dan Arris is Gringovitch's agent for the sale. Isabella Sanitizzare was acting as a French go-between for Arris for tax purposes. As you saw she was brutally murdered. One of the new developments is that her grandmother, Ida Oates, was found murdered a few hours ago.

—Oates was murdered a few hours ago, or the body was found a few hours ago, Inspector? said Mulvihill.

—Ah, the confusions of English, Sergeant. The body was discovered at three this afternoon by a neighbor.

—Where? Mulvihill was enjoying questioning Inspector Rose.

—Her granddaughter Isabella Sanitizzare's apartment on the Cours Saleya, in the old quarter of Nice. The apartment was in total disarray as if it had been savaged. It appears that the murderer was looking for something, perhaps a copy of the Gorky painting. We know Madame Oates was alive at 10:30 last night. That's when two police matrons drove her home after she identified her granddaughter's body.

—Wait a moment, Inspector, said Mulvihill; I need a minute to write this down.

Mulvihill had beautiful cursive penmanship. He deliberately wrote slowly to annoy Rose.

—Continue Inspector, said Mulvihill, So you believe that the murderer was looking for the Gorky painting?

—Well, it most likely had something to do with the Gorky sale.

—Lieutenant Smith's dossier on Arris, said Mulvihill, mentions that Arris likes to do things in threes. Lieutenant Smith suspects that Arris made two copies of the Gorky. Not sure why, but that is Smith's theory based on Arris's M.O. He also suspects that the two paintings that Ben Clarone, traveling as "Benjamin Adoyan," carried to Nice were the two copies.

—I like Smith's theory of three paintings, said Rose.

—Lieutenant Smith is the best when it comes to art fraud schemes, said Mulvihill.

—This information is particularly germane, then, said Rose. Last night, a fire at Découvrir Art in Marseille destroyed a Gorky painting, which may have been a copy of the one Arris is selling. Our informants indicate that Ben Clarone delivered to Découvrir Art in Marseille one of the paintings he brought with him to Nice the day he arrived.

—Making a copy of a painting is not illegal, said Mulvihill. Artists do it all the time.

Inspector Rose thought about that for a moment.

—As you know Sergeant, it *is* illegal if one offers the copy for sale as the original.

They rode in silence.

—About the fire, arson or...? said Mulvihill, hoping Rose would not turn around to answer him even though her head did not clear the seat back.

—It is hard to get that information from Marseille authorities, said Rose. Cooperation between Paris and Marseille is always strained. My INTERPOL informants say arson by a skilled arsonist. The KGB has a score to settle with Arris. There may be a revenge motive here unrelated to our case. Arris did finger a KGB double agent, which resulted in Arris's counterfeiting sentence being commuted.

—Yes, that's true, said Mulvihill flipping over a page in his steno book.

An oncoming car, passing a stopped bus, headed right at them. Their driver swerved sharply to the right, unleashing a stream of invective in French.

—That was close, said Rose, her voice cracking.

—Fucking Italians, said the driver in English.

—Well, your driver has instant command of at least one English word, said Mulvihill without looking up from his notes.

He could hear Inspector Rose buckling her seatbelt.

—Maybe Arris had the fire set deliberately, said Mulvihill. Ever think of that?

—Why would he have one of his copies burned?

—Maybe he sensed we are closing in on his game.

—I hadn't thought of that, said Rose

Lilly Rose stared toward the sea as the car stopped and started through Beaulieu-sur-Mer.

—I think that is the hotel where Ben Clarone is staying, said Rose.

—Okay, continue, said Mulvihill, ignoring Rose's last remark..

—We know from Lena Koshka, continued Inspector Rose, that she viewed what she believes is a *copy* of the Gorky painting at the apartment in Nice where Isabella was murdered and where Arris and Sanitizzare showed the Gorky to the buyer, Arno Aghajanian.

—If that painting and the painting burned in Marseille are *copies*, where is the original Gorky? said Mulvihill.

—That is the question we need to answer, said Inspector Rose looking at the sea hoping to hide her annoyance with Mulvihill and his notebook.

They drove in silence for a while. As they neared Monaco, the traffic became stop and go again.

—As it happens, said Rose, continuing with her news, one of our undercover agents obtained the painting that Arris showed Aghajanian on Friday afternoon. So we know the fate of the copies, except, Inspector Rose paused, except we cannot be sure that the painting burned in Marseille is a copy. It could very well be the original.

Rose waited for a response from Mulvihill.

—Do you know for sure that the painting you now have is a copy? said Mulvihill. He was becoming skeptical of Rose's detection abilities.

—No, said Rose becoming impatient with Mulvihill's ceaseless picayune pedantry.

—There must be some marking on two of the paintings indicating they are copies, not the original, said Mulvihill continuing in a condescending tone. If the copies were top quality, even the forger

would not be able to tell one from the other. *Unless*, said Mulvihill pausing for emphasis, *unless* the forger made a very unobtrusive difference between the copies and the original. The only way *we* could identify the original would be if *we* had all three paintings to compare. As Lieutenant Smith has explained, the identifying mark could be as subtle as a slightly different brush stroke. Now, *if* Arris had the Marseille painting destroyed, it makes it impossible for us, or even a specialist, to confirm which of the two remaining paintings is the original, especially if the clue was something as subtle as a small brush stroke.

—Yes, Sergeant, said Rose, I know forgers leave some identifying mark. Are there any other candidates besides the forger, assuming Arris in this case, who could identify the original from a copy?

—The three persons most likely to know the hidden mark are Arris, Gringovitch and Clarone: Arris because he is most likely the forger, Gringovitch because he is a painter and owner of the original, And Clarone because he is the courier and might need to be able to identify the paintings should there be a mix-up, for instance if customs unpacked the paintings and he had to identify them to take them to their proper destinations.

Mulvihill waited to see if Rose understood.

—I follow you, Sergeant, said Rose with annoyance.

—It helps to keep a notebook in cases like this, said Mulvihill with some irony.

—Don't needle me Sergeant.

Rose began tapping the side window with her fingers. She was exasperated with Mulvihill's line of reasoning and she was being out maneuvered at the same time.

—So there is a good probability, said Rose, that Arris deliberately had one of his KGB cronies set the fire so that Lena Koshka, or any expert, would not be able to positively identify the original Gorky, even if she had the copy and the original in front of her.

—You're learning, said Mulvihill.

—But there might be other ways to detect a forgery, for instance the stretchers, canvas, paint, brush technique, etc.

—Arris is way ahead of you there, said Mulvihill. It took the United States secret service and the Treasury Department almost ten years to discover Arris's forged 100-dollar bills. He's a pro's pro, *crème de la crème*, top of the heap. He knows all the tricks and pitfalls. His one weakness: he's headstrong.

—How would we know when he is being headstrong? asked Rose.

—When bad things start happening to people around him, said Mulvihill.

—You mean like Claudia Monschaud, Isabella Sanitizzare and her grandmother?

—You're on the right track, said Mulvihill. Arris is too clever to dirty his hands. He's well enough connected to the dark underbelly of the espionage world that he could contract a killer. It would be easy for him to have an enemy eliminated, especially if he thinks they are double crossing him. Money is not a stumbling block. The rumor is that he still has millions in counterfeit hundred dollar bills stashed somewhere.

Inspector Rose stopped tapping on the window and half turned toward Mulvihill.

—Earlier today, I spoke with Lena Koshka. Now *she* is unsure the painting she saw on Friday is a copy. After consulting with a number of other specialists, she has revised her opinion. The painting she saw could well have been the original.

—You see, Inspector, how clever and subtle this case is? It has all the earmarks of Arris's M.O., said Mulvihill smiling to himself.

—Our agent also searched Anatoly Gringovitch's suite in his hotel in Monte Carlo. He discovered two paintings, but they were oil paintings that were obvious Gringovitch originals.

—What did he expect to find? A missing da Vinci?

—Don't be sarcastic, Sergeant, said Rose. Unfortunately, shortly after our informant telephoned us, his body was found in the boot of his taxi. You Americans use some other word for the boot?

—Trunk.

—Ah, yes, the trunk of his taxi. His tongue had been cut off and stuffed in his slit throat.

—That's usually the fate of rats, said Mulvihill.

—Rats?

—Squealers and snitches: those informers who talk to the wrong people. Happens frequently to people who work two sides of the street.

—Clever American expression, “work two sides of the street.” Yes, that describes Victor Taxi. He was a worm loyal only to his greed.

—I thought Lieutenant Smith and INTERPOL told you people to stop using Victor Taxi, said Mulvihill.

—Yes, but he had his uses, such as bringing us the Gorky painting, said Inspector Rose.

—In the States that kind of evidence gathering is illegal, said Mulvihill. Has Arris reported the theft to the police?

—Not to my knowledge, said Rose.

—Maybe, just maybe, Inspector, Ida Oates was murdered because Victor Taxi stole the painting from Arris. Ever consider that Inspector? said Mulvihill with some heat.

—No, Sergeant, said Rose.

—Think like Arris. You are selling a million plus painting and now it's missing. Who was in the room with you who had an interest in the painting? Isabella Sanitizzare. Where would she hide it? Why was Ida Oates in Nice, if not to collaborate with her granddaughter? Not difficult to put the pieces together. Arris no doubt hired the dead Ruskie to kill Isabella and Ida, whom Arris then garroted.

Inspector Rose was overwhelmed with the brilliance and speed of Mulvihill's logic.

—It's now time to be *real* detectives Inspector, said Mulvihill shedding his fatigue and finding his New York City mojo.

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Ben Clarone was zipping up his white jump suit, his attire for Hausenstockmann's *Constellations*, when he heard a gentle knock on his back stage dressing room door. This must be Monique, thought Ben.

—Yes, come in, said Ben.

The door opened. There stood Zoë Bontemps, his wife who had abandoned him and left him homeless while he was on tour, now a famous television star. Behind her was a tall, perfectly tanned man with an aquiline nose and thick slicked-back grey-flecked, black hair.

They were both formally dressed. Zoë was stunning in a designer gown so revealing and form-fitting that only static electricity could keep it on her body.

—Zoë! said Ben in surprise. What are you doing here?

—Ben, we've come to hear your concert, said Zoë. This is my divorce attorney, Arno Aghajanian.

Ben was in a state of shock, his mouth agape. The last person he expected to see in Monte Carlo was Zoë. Here she was four months after he left on the tour with the Japanese looking wondrously inviting. Why?

—This is for you, said Aghajanian, placing the divorce subpoena in Ben's outstretched hand. Pleased to finally meet you, you bastard, said Aghajanian.

—I'm sorry about the cat, said Zoë, I know you loved Tushka, but I couldn't take him with me. Play pretty. Bye-bye.

They turned and left, closing the door behind them.

Ben glanced at the fat subpoena. He tossed it on the dressing table.

—Nice timing, Zoë, said Ben to his reflection in the mirror. Damn, but she looked fine. Fame certainly agrees with her, but where did she find that lawyer? Typical insensitive cretin bastard to serve a subpoena right before I have to play one of the most difficult concerts of my life. What a motherfucker.

—Fifteen minutes, Monsieur Clarone, said the stage manager.

—Okay.

—Are you feeling unwell, Monsieur Clarone? You are quite red in the face.

—I'm fine, thank you. Just getting my adrenaline up for the performance.

—Remember, because of extra seating, the downbeat will be 8:30 plus five.

—Got it.

—I'll bring you up at 8:30 exactly.

—Thank you.

To be continued

