

Five Million Yen: Chapter 66

by Daniel Harris

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Jack Krackenthorpe, Director-General of MI-5, sat alone drinking tea in Lee Ho Fook, a third-rate Chinese restaurant in Soho a mile from his Curzon Street office. He was the only patron. Krackenthorpe was waiting for Sir Hugh Montague, Director General of the foreign espionage arm of British military intelligence, commonly known as MI-6. Krackenthorpe was dressed in casual sports clothes. Jack knew Hugh from their monthly meetings, but he had no idea why Hugh had called a meeting at such a gritty place on a late Saturday afternoon, when either of their private clubs would have afforded more comfortable surroundings and superior cuisine.

Sir Hugh Montague, a tall, heavysset, ruddy-faced man, strode into the restaurant with a subaltern.

—Sorry I'm late, Jack, said Sir Montague, pulling out a chair for his companion. Allow me to introduce our special agent for French affairs, Duncan Hawkins, Christ Church, Oxford, 1965.

—Pleased to meet you, Hawkins, said Jack, deftly removing a black tea leaf from his teacup.

—I must warn you Jack, said Hugh, shaking the rain off his Mackintosh coat, only the beef chow mein is palatable. I'll take some tea. Please pass the pot.

—From the tone of your voice, said Jack, I didn't think we were here to dine.

—I'll let Hawkins explain, said Montague, motioning to Hawkins as he took his seat.

—Your daughter, Olivia, said Hawkins, is one of our most successful agent *provocateurs*. She met Alexander Moika, a physicist working for the Soviet military, at a conference in Warsaw. Not a month later, she arranged an extended meeting in Moscow. Agent Krackenthorpe left Moscow three days ago with microfilms of Soviet plans for a new weapon, yet to be constructed. On paper the physics worked, but there were difficulties weaponizing the physics.

—Sounds like normal espionage work to me, said Krackenthorpe. Where is Olivia now?

—You don't know? said Hugh startled by Krackenthorpe's response. Have you heard from her?

—All I know is that she and her mother were in Paris a few weeks ago. Mum says that Olivia went to Monte Carlo to hear a new concerto by some wacko Austrian this weekend. She says Olivia was infatuated with an American jazz musician named Clarone, or Cauldron, from New York City. Apparently he has a big international reputation as a new music specialist. Mum says he's incredibly handsome.

Hawkins and Montague stared at the table. Hawkins glanced toward Montague.

—I defer to you, sir, said Hawkins.

Montague cleared his throat.

—Jack, said Montague, I have some terrible news. A KGB agent assassinated Olivia earlier this afternoon in her Monte Carlo hotel room. I am so sorry. I thought you knew.

Jack Krackenthorpe's head snapped back. His facial expression was that of a man who had been slapped on the cheek with a riding crop. How would he break such news to Olivia's mother and his wife Beverly, who had never approved of Olivia following her father into the world of espionage? Beverly would be beside herself with rage and grief.

—Give me a minute, Hugh.

—Take your time, Jack. We have additional problems. Besides losing a superb agent, our high-level code seems to have been compromised

It took all of Jack's mental resources to begin thinking of the necessary actions. He wondered how many agents Hugh had in the South of France. He knew *his* resources in France were limited

—I assume, then, you did not order her body to be abducted from her hotel room? said Hawkins.

—Olivia's body abducted? said Jack.

—Three men posing as MI-5 operatives with the complicity of false Monte Carlo police officers took Olivia's corpse, said Hawkins. They also found the microfilm, which an earlier search, probably by her killer, failed to find.

—When did this happen? asked Jack.

—About three hours ago, said Hawkins. We received a coded telex from an agent in Monaco. His information was confirmed by an intercepted Soviet military transmission.

—Are you sure? said Jack.

—Positive, said Hawkins.

—Would you gentlemen care to order? asked a malnourished waiter with terrible teeth.

—We've changed our plans. The tea is enough. Please bring me the bill, said Hawkins.

—Has MI-5 done anything to provoke a revenge killing of your daughter? asked Hawkins.

—I have been reviewing our missions and activities in my head, said Jack. Nothing stands out. Was there a report by the local police?

—Things are vague, said Montague. Understandably the local authorities are embarrassed by the situation and are reluctant to talk, though they are willing to cooperate. Hawkins may have more details.

—A chambermaid discovered the body in the shower about three this afternoon Central European Time, said Hawkins. Police were called and responded immediately. In addition to your daughter, the police found recent nude sketches of her. A waiter in the hotel says that Olivia and another guest, the artist Anatoly Gringovitch, left the pool area and went to her room around eleven this morning. The

sketches apparently were done in Olivia's room. There was further evidence that they engaged in sexual activities.

—Is this Gringovitch a Soviet citizen? asked Krackenthorpe

—No. He was born in Leningrad, but his parents immigrated to Chicago when he was a small boy. He's an American citizen. No one knows if he has any relationship with the KGB. He is a successful artist with residences in Brooklyn, Paris and Rome.

—What else do you know about him?

—Before the chambermaid found Olivia's body, Gringovitch reported that his hotel suite had been robbed. Two paintings were stolen and the suite had been searched. The first call to the police by the hotel manager was for the robbery. The manager called the police again six minutes later with news of the murder.

—Sounds like Gringovitch was setting up an alibi, said Montague.

—Likely, continued Hawkins, since the two stolen paintings were found in the front hall closet in Olivia's suite.

—Now that's interesting, said Krackenthorpe. So where is Gringovitch now?

—As far as we know, he is at the hotel with his wife and two sons, said Hawkins. The false police released him and the local police are reticent to detain him for fear of repercussions. After the hoax was discovered, he *was* warned by the authentic responding police detail *not* to leave Monaco. In addition to our operative, I believe the local police have a surveillance team watching him.

There was a long silence.

—This is one bloody mess, Hugh. Do we have any idea where my daughter's body is now?

—No, said Hawkins. The curious thing is, no one saw her body, or the three men, leave the hotel.

—You're telling me, said Krackenthorpe, his face purple with rage, that *my* daughter was murdered, three men impersonating MI-5 operatives stole her corpse, and yet *no one*, neither hotel staff, nor

police, saw three men with a body on a gurney leave the hotel? What the hell is going on here?

—Easy Jack, said Hugh, I believe MI-6 should manage the investigation of your daughter's disappearance. Olivia was working for us. The fact that she is your daughter could cause some conflict of interest.

—Yes, my personal interest is in finding my daughter's body, said Jack. Your mission is the national interest. If some party used my authority without my knowledge, then MI-5 will investigate a possible breach of internal security. Of course, our international resources are limited, so we will defer to you. Does Prince Rainier know about this?

—Our sources indicate that he does *not*, said Hawkins.

—I must leave, gentlemen, said Krackenthorpe. I have work to do; how many agents do you have in the south of France, Hugh?

—Enough.

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Anatoly Gringovitch, his wife Francesca and his two boys, Dante and Zeno, were in the lobby of the Monte Carlo Opera House site of the orchestra concert. Lena Koshka introduced Dante and Zeno to Clovis Pennymaker and Michel Marteau's two boys, Henri and Charles. Since they all had comp tickets from Ben, they were sitting in the same section of the hall. The four boys pleaded to sit together.

—All right, but Dante you are in charge, said Anatoly. One inappropriate sound and I'll have the ushers remove all of you and hold you in the hoosegow until the concert is over. Is that understood.

—Yes, papa, said Dante.

—That goes for you also, said Michel Marteau to his two sons.

—Yes, boys, try to act like you have some manners and upbringing, said Francesca.

—Dante is always trying to get me in trouble with dad, said Zeno.

—I don't want to hear it, said Francesca shaking her finger at Zeno. We are onto you two.

All eyes turned to Monique as she entered the lobby with Carmen. A photographer ran up to her and fired off a dozen shots and yelled at her to smile.

Monique was embarrassed by the photographer's aggressiveness. Mulvihill, dressed in his Barney's suit stepped between the photographer and Monique and with all the authority of experience and his policeman's voice, ordered the photographer away.

—Merci, said Monique to Mulvihill.

—You're welcome miss. My name is Claude Mulvihill. I have been asked by the management to act as your bodyguard.

—Bodyguard? said Monique.

—Yes, bodyguard. There have been reports that the paparazzi will be out in force. Clarone's television-star wife, Zoë Bontemps, is here and the paparazzi will want to take as many pictures of you and her as they can get.

—Well, you stopped that one, said Monique with relief.

—I will try to give you as much privacy as you want. If you think I'm too aggressive or inhibiting you too much, tell me, and I will back off.

—That is kind of you.

Carmen approached Monique and Mulvihill. I have our tickets Monique. We are not sitting together.

—Let me see the tickets? said Mulvihill.

Mulvihill looked at the tickets and walked over to a seating chart on a nearby kiosk. He returned to the two women.

—Ms Zwaan, what is your friend's name?

—Carmen.

—Carmen, we will switch tickets. You will sit next to Monique. I will sit in the seat behind Monique.

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Two uniformed Monaco police officers approached Anatoly Gringovitch.

—Anatoly Gringovitch?

—*Oui?*

—Please come with us.

—What is this about? said Gringovitch.

—The robbery you reported, said the taller of the two.

—Wait, I must give these tickets to my family. Francesca, take the tickets. These policemen wish to speak with me about the robbery in our room.

—Can't you wait? said Francesca to the police officers. The concert starts in five minutes.

—This should not take too long. Unfortunately, Monsieur Gringovitch will miss the first half of the concert.

—The reason I am here, said Gringovitch, is to hear my friend Ben Clarone perform Hausenstockmann's composition, *Constellations*. Certainly this can wait until intermission.

—Unfortunately not. You can buy a ticket for tomorrow's performance. You must come with us now.

—One moment, please, said Gringovitch, as the police escorted him away. Francesca, if I'm late, I will meet you at the gala.

—I will take the boys to the hotel at midnight, said Francesca to Gringovitch's back.

* * *

The stage manager knocked on Ben's dressing room door.

—It's time Monsieur Clarone, said the stage manager. Do you need assistance?

—No, I'm good, said Ben gathering up his contrabass clarinet. By the way, how soundproof is this room? I will need to warm up while

the orchestra is playing the first piece on the second half of the concert. I'm playing in *Bolero*

—You can play as loudly as you like as long as the door is closed.

They climbed a flight of stairs and stood in the wings on stage left.

Serge Nobokolov, the co-soloist was already there. Ben could tell he had been drinking heavily. He looked drunk and smelled of weed and vodka. This could be trouble.

—Well Mr. Note Perfect, said Nobokolov, slurring his words, I'm going to make you look like a fool tonight.

—Easy, big fella, said Ben with a smile. This is no time for bullshit.

—Bullshit. I'll show you bullshit. I'm going to make you look so bad, you're going to wish you never took this gig. Who the fuck do you think you are, God's gift to music?

Ben ignored the last remark. He walked away from Nobokolov just as the big man retched the contents of his stomach on the back stage floor. There was a flurry of activity as stagehands cleaned up the mess. Trying to calm the Russian bassist. The orchestra manager, Jean-Claude, put his hand on the big man's shoulder

—Easy Serge. Do you feel better now? said Jean-Claude.

—Get that fucking Italian greaseball out of my sight. I never approved Clarone to play this piece. This is Donax's gig. Clarone is a jazzer, not a trained musician.

—Serge, you know Arno Donax is in hospital. Ben is the best in the world, and a Julliard graduate. You should be grateful he agreed to play.

—He's a pompous ass. I hate his guts.

—Easy, Serge. It's not a competition, it's a serious orchestra concert. Act like a professional. There is a full house. All the big international critics are here. I'm sure the critics will have nothing but praise for your playing.

The conductor, Igor Marcevicz, quietly observed the unruly actions and words of his Russian comrade. He walked up to his two soloists, ignoring the Russian's vitriolic comments about Ben.

Gentlemen, I will remind you that the composer has asked that the lights be turned completely down and then a minute of silence before we begin. Do you need an A from the oboist?

—I'm good, said Ben.

—You wish you were good, *ryvok* (jerk), said Serge spitting out the word.

Marcevicz unleashed a stream of strong sounding words in Russian.

Serge glared at Ben.

—It is time to make music, said Marcevicz.

Serge Nobokolov led Ben onto the stage with the Marcevicz walking a respectful distance behind them. Both Ben and Serge were on platforms above the orchestra. The conductor's platform was not as high, but located so the soloists and the orchestra could easily see him.

Marcevicz donned a headset.

—We are ready, Maestro, said the stage manager

—Lower the lights. There will be a minute of silence before the downbeat. Can you see my baton?

—Yes, Maestro.

Marcevicz removed the headset. The lights were lowered. There were a few coughs, but the audience became very quiet. Marcevicz let the audience sit long enough for their eyes to become accustomed to the darkness. He raised his baton and gave a violent downbeat.

The orchestra uttered a monstrous swirling, swarming chord meant to simulate the Singularity, the beginning of the universe. Powerful lights illuminated the hall for a half second. The effect elicited a unison gasp from the audience. The shadow created by the lights burned an image of multiple levels and shapes on their retinas.

When their ears had recovered, the only sound was Ben's *pianissimo* contrabass clarinet low D and a roll on a high E bell. The overtones from the Ben's contrabass clarinet mingled with the bell, which produced a faint buzz in the audience's ears. Nobokolov began his first solo, which started with a *passacaglia*-like melody, imitated at the interval of a whole tone by Ben's contrabass clarinet, accompanied by contrabass marimba and timpani. By the time Nobokolov had finished his solo and the orchestra took over, it became clear to Ben that Serge was drunk and faking big sections of his part. It was going to be a difficult night.

In the *Pleiades* section of *Constellations*, Serge had to play very soft harmonics with the strings. His pitch was unsteady, unusual for someone with perfect pitch like Nobokolov. Ben, who only played at the end of this section knew he had to step up his performance to give life and veracity to the work. He also knew, that since Nobokolov was the European, as was the press, they would blame any and all errors in the premiere on the "jazz" musician Clarone. Ben's big chance to shine was in the *Hercules* section. It was powerful and muscular, exactly Ben's kind of music.

When Ben finished the *Hercules* section, there was foot shuffling in the orchestra, being high praise from the orchestra members for his playing. *Hercules* segued into *Aquila*. Ben's part was a rapid spinning *obbligato* meant to simulate the star *Vega's* rotation. Ben had to circular breathe for almost four minutes. Ben could hear Serge struggling with his part. The orchestra was playing their very

difficult parts perfectly. Ben hoped Serge would get his act together. It was embarrassing.

In the *finale*, the orchestra gave a masterful performance. With Ben pulling him along, Serge recovered enough to play his part with accuracy and spirit. When *Constellations* reached its sublime conclusion, there was wild applause and cheering. Ben and Serge descended from their high podiums. Together with Marcevicz and Hausenstockmann, they received five curtain calls. Hausenstockmann motioned Ben to take a solo bow. Ben stepped forward raising his contrabass clarinet in a power salute. The audience loved it. Nobokolov's solo bow drew enthusiastic but modest applause. When the applause finally died down enough for the four of them to exit the stage, Hausenstockmann walked alongside Ben and put his hand on Ben's shoulder.

—Thank you, Ben, you saved the night.

—You are too kind, Maestro. *Constellations* is a masterpiece. Maybe tomorrow we will play it perfectly.

—Please don't say anything to Serge. He can be a real hothead after he has a bad performance

—Nothing but smiles and high fives, said Ben.

Ben needed a drink, but he had to change clothes, warm-up and mentally prepare for playing in the orchestra. Ravel's *Bolero* was the last work on the program. With intermission, he had forty minutes to decompress and prepare.

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Monique jumped up and down clapping she was so excited for Ben. She yelled *Bravissimo* when he took his solo bow.

—Wasn't he great? she said in Carmen's ear. Ben, my hero.

—He *is* an astounding virtuoso, said Carmen. What a sound he makes with that instrument.

—Can we go back stage and see him? she asked Carmen.

—Is that allowed at intermission? said Carmen.

—I think I can take you there, said Mulvihill overhearing their conversation. But we have to hurry, or we won't return to our seats before the end of intermission.

* * *

—I could kill you, you showboating dago bastard, said Serge, yelling in screwed up Russo-Anguish. Someone hold my bass.

One of the stagehands gingerly took Serge's bass. Ben saw that Serge meant to slug him. Fortunately, Marcevicz intervened, speaking Russian and led Serge to his dressing room, which was on stage level. Ben went down a flight to his dressing room. The door was open.

—Well, Clarone, we meet again, said Dan Arris. Your clothing is soaked; you must have been doing physical work that wasn't diddling another man's wife.

—Performing music *is* work, said Ben, wary of Arris and unsure if he should enter the dressing room.

—Come in. We have business to discuss.

—Look Arris, can't this wait until after the concert? I have to change and warm up for the second half.

—A double-crosser like you doesn't deserve to live until the second half.

—I'm sure you're correct, but I fully plan on meeting my obligations.

—You have a big obligation to *me*, Clarone. Where's the Gorky?

—In my safe deposit vault at Credit Agricole.

—How do I know that's true?

—You could ask Isabella Sanitizzare, said Ben.

—Where have you been? Isabella is dead.

—Dead?

—Probably murdered by your stewardess slut.

—Watch your mouth, Arris. You can try to bully me, but keep her out of this.

—Close the door.

—No, I think not, said Ben.

—This is Maestro Clarone's dressing room, said Jean-Claude to Mulvihill and Monique pointing to the open door.

Ben turned and saw Monique about to enter his dressing room. She was dazzling in her outfit. He recognized Detective-Sergeant Mulvihill.

—Monique! he said with a smile as big as his voice.

—Ben, you were magnificent! said Monique squeezing between Ben and his contrabass to give him a big hug and a juicy kiss on the cheek.

—Who are *you*? said Mulvihill to Arris.

—I'm an old friend of Ben's from Brooklyn, said Arris. We'll continue this conversation later, Ben. You have your hands full.

—That's Dan Arris, said Ben to Mulvihill, his voice muffled by Monique's kisses.

Arris pulled a pistol out of his pocket, spun and aimed at Ben's head as he walked past Ben and Monique. Before he could pull the trigger, Mulvihill knocked the gun out of Arris's hand and put Arris in a hammerlock on the floor. Jean-Claude ran up stairs to the stage manager.

—Quick, call the police! Some man just tried to shoot Ben Clarone, said Jean-Claude out of breath.

—Shoot Clarone?

—Yes, hurry.

Ben kicked the pistol into the hallway, which discharged when it hit the wall. The bullet ricocheted off a post and back into the dressing room hitting the heel of Monique's right shoe, knocking her out of Ben's arms and onto the floor. It lodged in Arris's left shoulder

who Mulvihill had pinned on the floor. Arris ceased struggling with Mulvihill and began screaming in pain. Four police officers ran into the dressing room, followed by Inspector Lilly Rose.

After Arris was taken away and Monique was settled into a chair in the dressing room, Ben tried to comfort her. She was inconsolable.

—Ben, what is happening with you? said Monique. Why was that man trying to kill you?

—I really don't know. I'm the only person who can help him. I'll explain it some other time. I have to get ready for the second half.

—Nothing stops you? Not even someone trying to shoot you? said Monique.

—The show must go on. But I'm worried about you.

—My shoe is ruined, she said tearfully staring at her damaged pump.

Ben didn't know how to respond. Suddenly Monique started to laugh.

—What's funny?

—I'm worried about a shoe and someone just tried to kill you. How girly is that?

—Well, how stupid is what I'm doing? Unpacking a saxophone and wetting a reed after someone has tried to kill me?

Monique stood up and collapsed in Ben's arms. They both were laughing at the absurdity of it all.

Two paparazzi stood in the doorway of Ben's dressing room. Flashes from their cameras blinded Monique and Ben.

—Where is Mr. Mulvihill? He was supposed to keep these creeps away, said Monique.

—Get out of here! said Ben charging the two men who kept shooting. Ben, slammed the door on their cameras.

Ben walked back to Monique and took her in his arms. They both took full pleasure in a long kiss.

—I'm mad for you Ben, said Monique.

—Me, too. You have to understand this is not normally what happens at orchestra concerts.

—I believe you. Don't you have to prepare for *Bolero*?

—Yes, but how are you going to return to your seat? It is a maze back stage. And what are you going to do for a shoe? There's no heel on your right shoe.

—I'll go barefoot. It's an opera house. There must be shoes in the costume department.

—You're right. I'll walk you to the stage manager's office. Someone will outfit you with shoes and take you to your seat.

* * *

Anatoly Gringovitch was again sitting in the big leather chair in Olivia Krackenthorpe's suite answering questions.

—You are telling us, said the senior officer, that you never saw three men with a gurney take Olivia Krackenthorpe's body from this room?

—That is correct, said Gringovitch. I left with the lieutenant. The colonel remained in the room.

—Where did you go?

—The lieutenant took me to my suite. He told me I was not under suspicion of murder and was free to continue my activities.

—Where was Olivia's body when you left the suite.

—In the bathroom, lying on floor in the shower. It was ghastly.

—Can you describe the colonel to us?

—I can do better than that. I can draw a picture of the colonel and the lieutenant.

—Excellent. Can you also draw a picture of Olivia lying in the shower?

—Yes, said Gringovitch, but I need some pencils and paper. There are pads and pencils in my suite. It is not the suite that was robbed, but the floor above.

The four officers watched Gringovitch draw.

—I wish our police artist drew that well, said one of the junior officers. You can see character in these portraits.

—Yes, but I actually *saw* the men. I'm not drawing from someone's description.

—The colonel smoked a pipe? asked one of the policemen.

—Yes, said Gringovitch. It was driving me crazy. Pipe smokers love to take their time and fuss with their pipes, trying to make you think they are intelligent and thoughtful.

—The French are here, said an officer guarding the door of the suite.

Lieutenant Giles LaPonti, Nice, Police, said LaPonti extending his hand to the senior officer. These are British colleagues who are here to find the body of Olivia Krackenthorpe. There were sent here by Sir Hugh Montague, Director General of MI6. Olivia Krackenthorpe was one of his agents.

—You've arrived in time, said the interrogating officer. Do any of you recognize the men in these drawings?

The three men passed Gringovitch's drawings among themselves.

—This is Alexis Trovopolov, code name Kobra, said the British agent holding the drawing of the colonel. He's a career KGB agent renown for disguises and impersonations. He's also a ventriloquist

—Can anyone identify the younger man? asked the interrogating officer.

All three men shook their heads.

—Probably a trainee of Trovopolov's, said LaPonti. There was silence while everyone studied the floor.

—So, who killed Olivia? asked Gringovitch.

—That's an interesting question, said the man who identified Kobra from Gringovitch's drawing. Kobra is the snake that charms the victim. A trained assassin does the actual dirty work. Kobra is too valuable to the KGB to be used for eliminations.

—Has anyone located Olivia's body? asked one of the Brits.

—Not yet, but we have our men searching this hotel, room by room, closet by closet, said the senior police officer.

LaPonti's radio squawked.

—Excuse me, gentlemen, said LaPonti. He stepped into one of the bedrooms.

He returned with a grim face.

—I've learned that Dan Arris, the international art dealer and infamous forger, was shot at the opera in Ben Clarone's dressing room. Initial reports implicate Ben Clarone as the assailant. Arris is an art dealer with ties to you, Monsieur Gringovitch, as well as, Ben Clarone.

To be continued

