

The Nude Pianist: A Novel:

Chapter 40

by Daniel Harris

Click on my name above. It will take you to my homepage where you will find links to more stories and previous chapters of "The Nude Pianist."

* * *

January 10, 1976, SoHo

Francesco stood smoking and surveying his drafty, unheated loft. In the corner of the studio were the paintings and sketchbooks he had moved from Michiko's apartment. In the bedroom were two duffle bags of clothes and personal effects.

He had wrapped all his paintings of Michiko in brown paper. He didn't wish to see them again. His history of depression had chased away a jewel of a companion though he had not been depressed in several months. He was surprised that he wasn't depressed now, given the gut-wrenching situation of losing Michiko and the troubles with Elaine. Today was Friday, Michiko would return on Sunday. He wondered if she would have a change of heart. She said she would explain later her reasons for booting him out. He knew she had a full performing schedule this winter and spring with multiple trips to Europe. Not likely she would have time for emotionally charged discussions.

That afternoon, Francesco was painting when the telephone rang. Normally he wouldn't answer it if he was working, but on the off chance that it was Michiko he answered it.

—Hello.

—Frank Martin?

—Yes, sounds like Tim Tillinghast?

—Good guess, said Tillinghast.

—What's on your mind? asked Francesco, wondering why his landlord would be calling him late on a Friday afternoon.

—I have some news for you. I've sold your floor, but I told the buyer I had to give you until July to move out. That's the best I can do. Having one of your paintings in my house, I have to treat you like family.

Frank wondered how Tillinghast would treat him if he didn't own one of his paintings.

—Five months that should be enough time, said Frank. Thank you for giving me such generous notice. Alex told me you only gave him thirty days.

—I need the first floor for the staging of major renovations. I felt bad, but I need that space now.

—Do you think you can keep my rent at \$1500 until I move? I'm a little strapped.

—You didn't burn through that \$65,000 from last spring already did you?

—I only received 45% of that, and then don't forget Uncle Sam, plus the governor and the mayor also get a cut. After commissions and taxes, I was left with about eighteen grand.

—You sound like a Republican businessman complaining about taxes. Getting only 45% doesn't sound kosher.

—Angelique Brody is my lawyer and my dealer. As my dealer, she gets 50% and another 5% for being my lawyer. Of course, commissions are figured on the gross and taxes are figured on my \$29,250 net.

—You're making me feel bad, said Tillinghast. Hold on Frank, I have another call.

How bad could a rich man feel evicting a major American artist from his studio? Frank asked Bounder.

—Still there, Frank?

—Yes, go on.

—Look, Frank, I told you your rent would go up to \$2000 a month starting last year. I've held off for a year. It's not like it's a big surprise that I have to raise your rent.

—Since I have to move, and it's only five more months, can't you keep it at \$1500 a month?

—Hold on, let me talk to my bookkeeper.

Frank paced around in a tight circle. Bounder watched the telephone cord and wondered if it was the start of a game.

—Still there, Frank?

—Haven't moved.

—The best I can do is \$1750. My bookkeeper is giving me grief for offering that.

—You really want to stick me for an extra \$250? I always pay on time, frequently ahead of time.

—Look here's what I'll do. You can pay \$1500 for February, but you'll have to be out by February 29th. The ball's in your court: \$1750 a month until June 30, or \$1500 until February 29. You get an extra day because it's a leap year.

—Do I have to let you know today? I need time to check the real estate market.

—Tell you what I'll do. Today's January 10th. Let me know by next Friday, January 17th.

—I guess I'll have to live with that. You wouldn't want to buy another painting would you?

—I'm a landlord, Frank, not a restaurant or bar that takes paintings for food and drink.

—Gotta give me points for trying, Tillinghast.

—Start looking for a new studio. I expect to hear from you next Friday. If I don't hear from you, you're out on February 29th. Don't forget you have the option of paying a small rent increase and staying until the end of June.

—That increase might break my bank.

—How can that be? Elaine Aster says you're one of the most financially successful artists in America.

—No comment.

—Call me Friday. Mazel tov.

Tillinghast hung up.

—Mazel tov, schmazel tov! Fucking landlord asshole, yelled Frank, slamming the phone on his worktable and walking into the kitchen for a bottle of beer.

—Come in, it's unlocked, responded Frank to an unexpected knock on his door.

—Frank, it's Alex, said his visitor opening Frank's door. I have news.

Frank looked out from the kitchen as Bounder ignored Alex and sauntered up to Frank and meowed for food.

—I have to give you Bounder, said Alex. I'm leaving for Amsterdam tomorrow. I'm joining a new Dutch dance company as the principal choreographer and dancer.

—That's okay. I love this guy. But Tillinghast told me minutes ago that I have to go. He's sold this floor.

—That's a bummer, Frank. What are you going to do?

—I'll have to find another studio.

—Well, at least you have a place to live uptown.

—Not anymore, Michiko threw me out. I moved all my stuff here last night.

—That blows. How are you holding up?

—Too early to tell. But I seem to be doing okay.

—I hope so, you're the last tenant in this building. There's no one here except workmen to help you if you have trouble.

—I'll be fine. Bounder will keep me on track, won't you Bounder?

—Meow.

—He always talks to you? asked Alex.

—Usually. Want your din-din, kitty cat?

—Meow!

—Can I offer you a beer?

—Thanks, but I'm in a panic to get out of Dodge. My plane leaves tomorrow.

—Great knowing you, said Frank, shaking Alex's hand. Maybe you can hire me to design some sets for you?

—You're top of my list, Frank. I don't have much, but you're welcome to anything I leave behind in my loft.

—Thanks. Good luck, Alex.

—Thanks, Frank.

When Alex left, Frank fed Bounder and called Gringovitch.

—Well, Anatoly, said Frank, it happened. They gave me two options. Pay \$1500 for February and be gone by the 29th, or pay \$1750 a month and be out by June 30th.

—You're still living uptown with Michiko, aren't you?

—No, she threw me out. I'm living and working in my loft on Greene Street, but I need to find a place soon.

—Dead of winter is not the best time to find a new space. If you've got the cash, I'd stay until June. Hey, you never know, things might change. A lot can happen in five months.

—You're right, but if you hear of any suitable place, let me know, will you?

—Do you have to stay in Manhattan?

—I'm willing to try Brooklyn.

—I can help you find a place in Brooklyn, but Manhattan, it's not my territory.

—Well, keep me in mind if you hear of anything.

—Absolutely.

To be continued.

