

The Nude Pianist: A Novel:

Chapter 43

by Daniel Harris

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—You know Frank, said Gringovitch, walking around the balcony of Frank's Red Hook space, you can't put anything up here that would give an inspector reason to evict you. It can't look like you are living here. There's no certificate of occupancy for this building. It's zoned industrial. No living allowed.

—What does that mean?

—No bed. They don't mind a small fridge or even kitchen things. Companies have kitchens, but a bed is out. So is a chest of drawers.

—So, what the hell am I supposed to do about sleeping?

—You can make a couch that doubles as a bed. You can sleep on it, but during the day when an inspector might appear, it has to be a couch.

—Can't Zambrano keep the inspectors away?

—You might have to pay a bribe, replied Gringovitch. Maybe \$50 a month.

—Another obstacle put in the way of the artist.

—What blows is, once they know you'll pay, they'll be here every month.

—Fucking bullshit.

—On the other hand, the neighborhood is so violent, the inspectors probably won't bother you. They don't want to walk these streets. Even the cops don't patrol the area with any regularity.

—I guess that's a good thing. Do you think I should buy a gun?

—Have you ever fired a gun?

—I'm a farm boy. I've fired rifles and shotguns thousands of times, but never a pistol.

—You might invest in a pistol. But remember, you have to be prepared to use it. If someone attacks you with a gun, it's gotta be a gun fight.

—Christ, I'll have to think about that.

—It's the fucking drugs. Heroin is rampant. All they want is a few bucks to buy more smack.

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Frank looked down from the balcony onto the studio space. He had painted the floor and cleaned the windows. With Gringovitch's help, he had moved all his studio equipment and art to Red Hook. Several hundred sketchbooks filled fresh wooden shelves; boxes of loose paper sketches, small canvases and sculptures lined the rear wall. Zambrano told him to keep the front of the studio by the garage door clear. Zambrano or one of his "associates" might occasionally need to park a car there. The building was 120 feet long and 80 feet wide, almost 10,000 square feet counting the balcony, four times the size of his Greene Street loft and only \$500 a month. He could paint large, very large. But he still had to solve the sleeping problem.

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Six weeks after Angelique Brody's death, her body was returned to New York City. Francesco worked with Valerie, Angelique's Assistant, to arrange a memorial service. They contacted all sixty of Angelique's artists, and each one had agreed to loan a painting or sculpture for a special month-long exhibit at the Art Students League. The service would be held at the Cathedral of St. John the Devine, where the sixty artworks would be on display for the service.

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After the memorial service, Francesco was standing in front of the Cathedral of St. John the Devine talking with some of the mourners when Gringovitch approached him with a tall heavy-set man with a Chicago boxcar haircut. The man stood over 6'2", was

heavily muscled and walked like a cat. He seemed to be overly aware of his surroundings. Francesco thought he could be a cop or secret service thug.

—Frank, I would like to introduce Dan Sarras, my dealer, said Gringovitch.

—That was a class memorial service you arranged, said Dan Sarras.

—Thank you. I'm Francesco Martinelli or Frank Martin, your call, said Frank.

—Dan Sarras, Anatoly's dealer, said Sarras. He tells me I should see your work.

—Sure, said Frank, extending his hand.

Sarras shook Frank's hand with a forceful grip.

—What would be a good day to visit your studio? asked Sarras.

—Is tomorrow too soon? said Frank.

—Tomorrow evening, okay?

—I'll be in my studio all day.

—Good. I'll see you then, said Sarras. I have to speak with some other people. He turned and approached two women leaving the service.

—He didn't seem too friendly, said Frank to Anatoly.

—I think he's working the crowd, said Anatoly. Events like this are good for renewing relationships. You see Sarras talking to those two women? The one on the left is Isabella Sanitizzare, the woman who runs Aster Gallery in Paris. The other one is a professor of art history at Vassar and a curator.

—That Isabella is hot.

—Remember I told you, she could give a pecker to a deadman.

—She does okay with me, said Francesco, and I'm hardly dead.

Sarras approached Frank and Anatoly with the two women.

—Anatoly, I think you know Isabella Sanitizzare, said Sarras,

—Yes, we met in Paris, said Anatoly giving Isabella an air kiss.

Good to see you again.

—May I introduce Professor Susan Ramsey, said Sarras, she is curating the Darcy Sussingham retrospective at MOMA.

—Pleased to meet you, said Anatoly. This is my good friend, Francesco Martinelli.

Frank tried not to stare at Isabella. He shook Susan Ramsey's hand and extended his hand to Isabella.

—Finally, I meet the legendary Francesco Martinelli, said Isabella, shaking Francesco's hand.

—Pleased to meet you, said Francesco, I believe you've sold my work.

—Yes, I have, said Isabella, though it practically sells itself. When are you going to deliver more paintings?

—Elaine and I have not worked out an arrangement, said Francesco. Angelique was in negotiations when the tragedy occurred. Elaine was hoping to reconnect but was waiting until she had a bigger space.

—Yes, she told me you are painting very large pictures, too large for her West Broadway gallery and certainly too large for Aster Place in Paris.

—I have a new studio and will be making even larger paintings.

—How big?

—I'm currently working on one that is 20' by 12'.

—That's too large for Aster Place.

—When you see the new paintings, said Gringovitch, you will be impressed. They are spectacular. They're a major progression from Francesco's previous paintings. You should visit his studio.

—I'd love to, said Isabella. Where is it?

—I'm at 163 Van Dyke Street in Red Hook, Brooklyn, said Francesco. But I don't think you should travel there alone. It's a rough neighborhood.

—Oh, I would take a limo, said Isabella. Have you seen Elaine? She was here a minute ago.

—I don't think she wants to talk to me, said Francesco. The last time I saw her was right after we learned Angelique had died. She mentioned that she would be interested in showing my work in her galleries, but the paintings I'm currently doing are too large for her spaces.

—You know, she is leasing a new space on Wooster Street, said Isabella. It has thirty-foot ceilings. Plenty of wall space for large paintings. *Entre-nous*, Elaine is counting on you rejoining her. She and Angelique had almost hammered out a contract.

—You know, said Francesco, turning to Susan Ramsey so as not to stare at Isabella, I have a solo show at the Whitney Museum coming up this fall.

—You do? said Susan Ramsey. That's impressive. Who is curating it?

—Maria Monsanto, said Francesco. I believe Angelique was acting as a co-curator.

—Maria Monsanto. Wow, said Susan, she is the absolute best. Has she shown you the catalog yet?

—No, said Francesco. We were assembling the paintings for the show when Angelique died. Things have been in disarray since then, and we are seriously behind schedule. I'm frantically trying to finish three of the new series.

—Are these the big paintings Elaine saw last year? asked Isabella.

—No, they are even larger. The one's Elaine saw were my color-modulation series. This new series I call *Atmospheres*.

—Has Elaine Aster seen any of these paintings? Susan asked.

—No, only Gringovitch and Maria Monsanto.

—We'll have to make a studio visit, said Isabella. How is tomorrow? Elaine and I will limo over to your new studio. What's your phone number? We'll call you to confirm.

—I'm having trouble getting a phone, said Francesco, AT&T won't put a phone at that address because the basement floods at high tide. But I work from six in the morning until eight at night. I eat my lunch in the studio. I also live there, so I'll wait for you.

Frank was hoping that Isabella would come alone, not that there was any chance that he could seduce her in his downscale space, but he could give her his undivided attention.

Isabella was probably 5'10" and voluptuous: she possessed perfect breasts, which were not encumbered by a brassiere, a trim waist rode above womanly hips. The short skirt of her suit revealed

shapely athletic legs. She had high cheekbones, a straight regal nose, and a full mouth. Her green eyes added a seductive menace to her countenance. She wore her Titian red hair in a stylish short cut. Being a memorial service, she wore no jewelry.

—Do you think I could join you, asked Susan Ramsey.

—I'm sure Elaine wouldn't mind, said Isabella. Is it all right with you, Francesco?

—I'm not a eunuch, replied Francesco. What red-blooded male wouldn't be flattered to entertain three beautiful women?

Susan Ramsey blushed. She didn't have the class or looks of Elaine or Isabella though she did radiate health and intelligence.

—You are too kind, Francesco, said Susan

To be continued.

