

two places at once

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by [dowhile](#)

Summary

While Shane is in New York securing a large donation for the Irina Foundation, Ilya's in Montreal trying to get his daughters to a figure skating competition on time.

A long day in two cities—but they get through it together, apart.

Notes

the brainworms have taken over.

Fucking fuck.

Ilya Rozanov had spent the last 30 minutes attempting to coax his daughter's hair into a bun and was failing horribly.

He had set up a hair workstation in the hotel room in Montreal: bobby pins, hairspray, gel, and scrunchies and hair ties galore. Mari, his seven-year-old, sat patiently at the edge of the chair. Ilya had promised to do her hair for her figure skating competition. He was quickly realizing what he'd signed up for.

Lena, the four-year-old, was running around the room, singing (screaming) Disney songs. Ilya and Mari both closed their eyes. Ilya, to silently pray for strength; Mari, to visualize her routine. Meanwhile, Lena continued her musical numbers and didn't seem to care whether anyone wanted to hear them.

Shane was away at a meeting in New York City. They were hoping to bring on some new sponsors for the Irina Foundation and an offer had come in from a prominent Japanese-American businessman—Henry Yamada. Given Mari's competition that same day, it had been decided that only one of them should go. Shane's parents were in Dublin for an anniversary trip, but even then, it would've been too sad if neither of them were able to support their daughter.

They'd ultimately decided Shane should go. Ilya promised he could hold the fort down with the kids, and Shane, maybe naively, had believed that to be the case.

—

Shane felt himself tugging at his tie as he sat in the lobby of Yamada Global Systems. He'd been ashamed to admit that he'd done most of his research on Wikipedia about Mr. Yamada and his company on the plane, and now he felt like he was about to take a pop-quiz on a subject he hadn't completely studied for. Something about microelectronics. Shane rubbed his face in his hands before looking out the window.

On the ground floor of this sleek office building, Shane watched the hustle and bustle of New York City and suddenly felt very, very small. Millions of people getting on with their daily lives. It was sort of nice, in a weird way, being able to blend in with the crowd. No one seemed to either notice or care who he was. In his forties, he was beginning now to savor it.

Shane watched as two women wrangled two unruly toddlers back into their strollers and smiled quietly to himself. He missed his own family right now, knowing he should be there to support Mari's competition. He was about to pull out his phone to see if he had a message from his husband when—

"Mr. Hollander? Mr. Yamada is ready for you," the woman at the front desk said. Shane stood up slowly, fixing his tie, attempting to see if his hair was messed up in the glass to no avail. He stood around awkwardly as he tried to figure out where to go. Mr. Yamada's assistant pointed down a long hall. Shane nodded appreciatively, and headed back.

“Your father,” said Ilya in Russian, exasperated. “I do not know how he does this.” He’d taken out his sad attempt at an updo for the umpteenth time and attempted to brush out the hairspray. No use. She’d need a hosedown. Her hair was becoming glued to her scalp.

Ilya could see he was not helping Mari’s nerves at all—her legs were bouncing up and down, brow wrinkled, biting her lip. Though not related by nature, Mari had Shane’s nurture written all over her nervous face.

Ilya pulled out his phone and quickly searched up a YouTube video that might solve his problems. He had no idea why this hadn’t been his first thought. It was probably why Shane had been so successful at everything: watch a video or read a book and suddenly the man was imbued with whatever knowledge he was seeking. He’d say Shane was a nerd if he wasn’t so good at it.

He checked his watch. Quickly, he covered Mari’s ears and swore under his breath, momentarily forgetting about the other child he’d been raising for four years.

Ilya’s eyes widened. A peaceful silence had fallen and Ilya had been too busy to notice the omen.

“Lena!” he yelled, his heart dropping, looking around the room. Not under the first bed. Nor the second. Did she escape into the hall? She might be running around the streets of Montreal by now.

He nearly ran past the bathroom until he saw her, eyes guilty as anything, a mountain of toilet paper sitting in front of the shower. Ilya shut his eyes and sighed, summoning all of what was left of his strength.

“*Elena*,” he said sternly. Lena turned around slowly, knowing she was in deep, deep trouble when Papa used her whole name. “Here. Now.”

“Well, let’s cut to the chase,” said Mr. Yamada, gesturing for Shane to take a seat. Shane had been too busy taking in the office. It was clean and understated, not a single book or decoration out of place.

“I’m sorry, what did you say?” said Shane nervously, still staring at the set of woodblock prints behind his desk. Nothing made Shane feel more like a bumbling idiot than any business meeting. Over twenty years of doing it and he still felt like there was a manual everyone else had read and he hadn’t.

Mr. Yamada was a well-dressed, well-groomed man with salt-and-peppered hair and a goatee Shane was slightly jealous of. Shane’s own hair had started graying in the last three years or so, and while he couldn’t blame Lena entirely, the correlation was undeniable.

Behind Mr. Yamada were woodblock prints flanked on either side of mahogany bookshelves. Shane found himself staring at the artwork, transfixed.

“Ah, I see you like my woodblock prints,” he said with a kind smile, turning back to Shane. “They’re Hiroshige’s.”

Shane blinked back stupidly in return, wondering why he was so transfixed. Then he remembered—

“My grandmother,” Shane said slowly. Mari’s namesake. “She always had something similar on her walls. Like those prints, I mean.”

He’d only been five when she’d passed, and it felt like her presence had been mostly scrubbed from existence. But he remembered those prints—on her wall, next to the scrolls of calligraphy. Maybe he’d just seen a photo.

“I’m sorry, what were you saying?”

He could only feel a sinking feeling. How badly was he tanking this meeting?

“No, no,” beamed Mr. Yamada. “No worries. These are my favorites, I’m always happy to talk about my collection.”

—

Mari’s hair was already falling out as they rushed through the front doors of the rink and Ilya signed her in. Despite Lena being securely strapped into her stroller, Ilya kept glancing back to make sure she hadn’t Houdini-ed her way out.

Around them, the lobby of the rink bustled with families all in different stages of meltdowns. Kids were scattered around, lacing up their skates or having their parents lace them for them. Parents chased escaped toddlers. Bored older siblings formed groups in the corners.

Usually, he’d been the second parent chasing the escaped toddler. Shane did all the rest.

Ilya careened his head until he found the check-in desk and took Mari and Lena with him.

“Warmup for the Girl’s 7-8 competition starts in three minutes,” said the lady at the desk with a smile.

Ilya gave a tight smile and nodded, peeling off Mari’s coat with one hand while steering the stroller with the other. Mari was about to head toward her team when Ilya stopped her.

“Hey,” he said in his gentle Russian. “I have something for you.” He rummaged through his pockets to find his phone and pulled up the video Shane had recorded.

“Hey, sweetheart,” chirped a proud Shane in French. “I’m so sorry I couldn’t be there. Papa and I are so proud of you. Good luck with your competition. I’ll be rooting for you!”

Mari's smile at his phone didn't reach her eyes. This video was a poor substitute for Daddy and he knew it.

"Deep breath, okay?" he said, holding her hands in his. "Do your best. You got this."

She nodded shyly, accepted a kiss on the head, and followed her team onto the ice.

—

Mr. Yamada had given Shane a tour of his office. It'd been an incredible tour—the man knew exactly his style, sleek and timeless, full of culture and creativity. Mid-century modern furniture met old school Japanese decor, all at least a hundred years old. Shane was ashamed to admit the history lesson on Japan he'd just been given, and felt even more embarrassed he'd never learned half this stuff in school nor bothered to look it up.

"What I was saying was, I'm very glad to have met you, and I'm going to put \$500,000 USD toward the Irina Foundation," said Mr. Yamada. "I'll have my team draw up the details."

Shane fell back into his chair, stunned. It took him a moment to realize his jaw was hanging wide open before he closed it.

"What?" said Shane, feeling as though he'd heard something incorrectly. If this was true, it'd be the highest donation that they'd received that wasn't from Ilya or Shane's own pockets.

Mr. Yamada only grinned widely at him.

"I was always very impressed with your story," he began. "Coming out like that. It was very touching."

Shane was still stunlock, blinking stupidly at him, unable to realize he'd been giving Shane a compliment. When his brain caught up, Shane finally said, "Thank you. Thank you so much. I... I don't even know—"

Mr. Yamada put his hand up. "No worries. I'm happy to do it. I can't imagine how difficult it all was for you. My husband and I have been together over fifty years. I didn't come out until I was in my sixties. I really can't imagine doing that in front of the whole world."

Shane felt taken aback. He didn't remember reading that in the personal life section of his Wikipedia page. He had no idea Mr. Yamada was queer at all.

"Fifty years," Shane echoed. "Wow."

A brief flash of life with Ilya appeared in his mind unbidden. He couldn't imagine keeping their love a secret from the world for over half a century. Shane was standing on the backs of giants.

Mr. Yamada turned a photo around on his desk and smiled. A young Japanese man and another young man stood on the edge of a dock, both wearing incredibly short-shorts. They were mid-laughter, their arms wrapped around each others' shoulders in a way only Shane could read as more than just platonic.

Shane smiled at the memory of Ilya's "boring" photos. Back when they didn't know what they should've known. A feeling captured that didn't have a name yet. No words to describe it. He was seeing that now in another's photo.

"My guy is Swedish," said Mr. Yamada, with a wink.

Shane laughed.

—

Shane called Ilya shortly after his meeting had ended with a spring in his step. The FaceTime opened on Mari sitting on Ilya's shoulders sporting a silver medal around her neck.

Shane somehow beamed even wider.

"Daddy!" said Mari in that little voice that never failed to melt his heart.

"Silver? Wow! That's amazing!" exclaimed Shane, feeling his voice break a little. He wished he could've been there to see it.

"She was amazing!" gushed Ilya, grabbing his phone from Mari. "And we only lost Lena once!"

He turned the camera toward his sulking second daughter who didn't seem to be overjoyed that her escape act was foiled. "Lena, say hi!"

On seeing Shane's face, Lena blushed and giggled, waving hello.

"Hi, sweetheart."

Ilya readjusted the camera back to him. They were headed back to the hotel room.

"You survived," said Shane.

Ilya seemed surprised at his own handiwork and cracked a smile. "I did, didn't I?"

"Course you did. Never doubted it for a second," said Shane.

Ilya laughed. "That is, how do you say? 'White lie'?"

"I'm still proud. Of both of you."

(Shane would say Ilya blushed then, but as they both knew, Russians do not do this.)

"How was the meeting, Mr. Businessman?" asked Ilya.

"It was, uh... it was really productive," said Shane, unsure how to summarize his experience.

"That is great to hear!"

Shane pulled the card that he'd been given out of his pocket.

My door's always open, come visit when you get the chance — Henry Yamada

Below was a Tokyo address. Shane had taken no time at all to find the Yamada's incredible Tokyo estate online.

"I'll tell you more about it later. But I've got an idea," said Shane, flipping the card over and over in his free hand.

"Uh oh," said Ilya with a smile.

"I want to take everyone to Japan."

Ilya raised his eyebrows. "Oh?"

"And I think we should get started on Japanese lessons, too," he said. "My own parents included."

Ilya nodded and looked at him with those soft eyes that made Shane feel like he was melting.

"These kids. If they learn a fourth language, they will be superhumans," said Ilya. "I am scared."

Shane laughed. "They *are* superhumans already."

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