

a double double

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a double double

by [hightowered](#)

Summary

“Shane. It is Tim Hortons. All Canadians like Tim Hortons. Everyone knows this.”

Shane wants to explain. How it used to be good, how it used to be affordable, how he used to like going there after hockey practises as a kid, but instead he just says, “That is propaganda.”

Shane knows the coffee will be bad, the donuts will be wrong, and the order will be missing something. Ilya doesn't care. He just wants to see what Tim Hortons is like.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Shane knows this is a bad idea the second Ilya says it.

"I want to try Tim Hortons," Ilya announces, utterly certain.

Shane pauses mid way through tying his up his black Vans. "No, you don't."

The words hang in the air of their small apartment, still smelling faintly of the coffee they'd made an or two hour ago. A good coffee. The kind that costs too much to buy when you go out and actually tastes like something.

He looks up from the floor. Ilya is already framed by the door with his shoulders filling the space. There's a look of earnest discovery on his face that Shane knows all too well. It's the same expression he gets when he's trying to understand something else Canadian or rules to a sport he's not really interested.

Like when Shane's dad tried to explain curling to him last Christmas.

Ilya, already in his winter jacket, blinks at him like he's dumbfounded. "Why would I not?"

"Because," Shane says carefully, standing up, "it's not good."

Ilya laughs like it's a joke. As if Shane hadn't been completely dead serious about it. "Shane. It is Tim Hortons. All Canadians like Tim Hortons. Everyone knows this."

Shane opens his mouth. And then closes it. He wants to explain, how it used to be good, how it used to be affordable, how he used to like going there after hockey practises as a kid and getting a hot chocolate and a sprinkle donut, but instead he just says, "That is propaganda."

Ilya frowns. "In Russia, Tim Hortons is considered... how do you say... culturally important."

"That's insane," Shane says, grabbing his car keys from the hook by the door.

Ilya follows him to the door anyway, undeterred. "You always say Canadians are very proud of their things."

"We are," Shane says with a hand on the door knob. "This just isn't one of the things we should be proud of anymore."

"Anymore?" Ilya pounces on that immediately. "So it *was* good."

Shane exhales. This is how it happens. This is how he loses.

"It was," he admits. "When I was a kid. Before it got bought out. Before everything got worse."

Ilya's eyes light up. "So it is a nostalgia place."

“It used to be.” And the past tense of it feels heavy in his mouth.

“So you are taking me,” Ilya says, smiling like he’s already won. “We can stop on our way to the mall, yes?”

“I’m not--”

“You are,” Ilya says again, already opening the door. “Because if it was important to you once, it is important for me to understand.”

Shane stares at him. There are a hundred things he could say. He could argue about corporate greed and the decline of quality, about the false promise of branding and the slow death of cultural institutions. He could list a dozen better coffee shops within a five block radius.

He picks the only honest one.

“Don’t get your hopes up.”

The Tim Hortons they end up at looks exactly like every other Tim Hortons Shane has ever been to in the last five years, which to put plainly is grey, poorly lit, and mostly depressing.

They lacked a lot of life they once had now, following in the steps of every fast food chain around with a stubborn need for modernism.

The menu boards glow overhead of them, cluttered with pictures that promise more than they will deliver. And the floor has that permanent shine of somewhere that’s been mopped a thousand times and will never feel clean again.

Shane stares outside the windows where winter presses up close. All around the Tims is grey snow piled in uneven banks. The entire parking lot slushed over, cars idling with their exhaust curling into the cold.

Ilya stands shoulder to shoulder with him, craning his neck to take it all in. He looks almost reverent.

“Wow,” he says. “So many... donuts.”

“Most of them taste the same,” Shane says and rocks back on his heels.

“That cannot be true.”

“It is deeply true.”

They shuffle forward with the line, inch by inch.

The air smells like coffee that’s been sitting too long and Shane lifts his nose at it instinctively. Someone behind them coughs. And someone else ahead of them argues softly about an order that’s already been made.

Ilya reads the menu boards again. And then again. His lips move as he sounds out words, brow pinched in concentration like he’s studying for something important.

“What is a Timbits?” he asks.

“They’re the bits of dough that they take from donuts to make the holes.”

“That is smart.”

“Debatable.”

“And a double double?”

“It’s a coffee with two cream and two sugar.”

Ilya hums under his breath. “This is very specific.”

“It’s a whole thing,” Shane says. “People make it their personality.”

Ilya looks delighted by that.

When it’s their turn, Ilya steps up to the counter with far more excitement than he’s greeted with from the teenager working the shift.

“Hello,” he says politely. “I would like to try... the Canadian experience.”

The teenager behind the counter blinks and stifles a laugh. “*Okay.*”

“I will have,” Ilya continues, pointing, “this donut, *Boston Creme*,” he says with a smirk. “And this one, finger moving towards the Apple Fritters. And a box of these... Timbits. And a double double.”

“20 pack? Medium?” the teenager asks.

Ilya looks at Shane sideways like he’s been confronted by a hydra.

“Yes,” Shane says, already resigned.

“And you?” the teenager asks.

Shane sighs. “Just a hot chocolate, please.”

The teenager types away at the cash console, then nods. “That’ll be--” he names a total that feels way too high for the quality he knows this food will be.

Shane taps his card before Ilya can get a chance to finish pulling his out and they step over to the side, hovering in the waiting area.

Ilya leans into him, whispering conspiratorially. “I am excited.”

Shane watches a worker slide a lid onto someone else’s cup, the plastic snapping into place. “I know,” he says. “But I warned you.”

“For what?”

Shane shifts his weight, hands shoved deep into his jacket pockets. “For the disappointment.”

Ilya laughs softly, shoulders brushing his. “You are very dramatic about this.”

“Just wait.”

They get their order.

Well. *An order.*

The cardboard tray contains one donut they didn’t order, only one of the donuts Ilya pointed at, and a box of Timbits that appears to be missing at least a quarter of what should be there.

At least their drinks are kind of right.

Ilya peers down at it, confused. “This is... not what I said.”

“Yeah,” Shane says. “That tracks.”

Ilya looks up at the counter and offers a scowl to the worker.

Then at Shane. “They made it wrong.”

“Mhm. This is what it's like.”

“And we just... take it?” Ilya asks, gesturing vaguely at the receipt that’s been stuffed into one corner of the tray.

“Usually.”

Ilya's mouth twists. There's a whole thought happening behind his eyes, something that doesn't quite land. "*Why?*"

Shane shrugs. "Because if you say something, it takes another ten minutes and somehow they make it worse."

"That doesn't make sense."

"Welcome to Tim Hortons."

Ilya picks up the coffee, sniffing it cautiously. "This has 3 cream."

"I know."

"But I said--"

"I know."

Ilya looks genuinely distressed on Shane's behalf. "But you paid for it."

"Yeah."

"For the wrong thing."

"Yep."

"And this is normal."

"Painfully so. Most people just don't come here. Or they just deal with it."

"In Russia, this would start a fight."

"In Canada," Shane says, deadpan, "we just complain about it later. To other people. Or online maybe."

They sit down at a small, sticky table by the window. Ilya arranges everything carefully, like a new order might emerge if he's gentle enough.

He takes a sip of the 'double double' and his eyes widen, more surprise than anything else.

"Oh," is all he says.

Shane doesn't say anything. He watches Ilya's mouth, the way he holds the cup, like he's deciding whether to trust it again.

"It's... very sweet," Ilya says slowly.

"Uh huh."

He takes another sip, smaller this time. His brow furrows. "And the coffee tastes like... nothing."

“You would be correct.”

“But also bad.”

“Exactly.”

Ilya looks back down into the cup like hes offended by it but then takes one more sip anyway. “I do not understand how this is popular.”

Shane lifts a shoulder. The place is busy enough with people coming in with cold still clinging to them, and others leaving with trays and paper cups. No one looking especially pleased or surprised. “That’s what I’ve been saying.”

Ilya reaches for the donut next, his Boston Creme. He tears off a piece and chews at it slowly. And then he eats a Timbit. Then another. His expression never quite tips into enjoyment.

“They are,” he says at last, choosing the word carefully, “acceptable.”

Shane laughs and he wants to stop but he really can’t help it. “I told you,” he says, grinning despite himself.

Ilya looks up, mildly offended, and points at him with the half eaten Timbit. “You are very smug right now.”

“I’ve earned it, I think.”

Ilya studies him for a moment instead of responding, eyes moving over Shane’s face like he’s lining something up. Then his mouth curves into a small smile. “You are disappointed because it changed.”

Shane shrugs. “I guess.”

“You miss how it was.”

“Yeah,” Shane admits. “It used to be everywhere, and in a good way. There’s a Tims on most major blocks, so on hockey mornings or long drives we’d stop without thinking about it.” He pauses, thumb worrying at the edge of the napkin. “Sometimes my dad would bring it home as a treat.”

Ilya nods, thoughtful, like hes filing it away somewhere. “So this is not about the donut.”

“No,” Shane says. “It’s maybe more about realizing something you loved isn’t really there anymore.”

Ilya pushes the box of Timbits toward him. “You can still have the good parts.”

Shane snorts. “That’s optimistic.”

“But true,” Ilya insists. “Even if it is... how do you say... kind of shitty now.”

Shane laughs again, warmer this time. “Yeah. Kind of shitty.”

End Notes

i feel like if youre canadian, you just understand this experience...

x: @whyrozanov

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