The universe can't stop us

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The universe can't stop us

by atlas22

Summary

Everyone has a soulmate. Your soulmate is your other half - someone who completes your life and makes you feel whole.

On your sixteenth birthday, you receive your soul-mark: the first words your soulmate will ever say to you. Some people spend their whole lives waiting to hear those words. Others choose not to believe in soulmates at all. Then, there are those who hear their words from the lips of a rival and simply refuse to believe it.

What if soulmates existed in the world of Heated Rivalry.

Notes

Heated Rivalry is bringing me out of writing retirement. Mostly follows canon up until All-Star Game.

See the end of the work for more notes

Everyone has a soulmate. Your soulmate is your other half - someone who completes your life and makes you feel whole. They don't have to be romantic; they can also be platonic. Regardless of the bond, a soulmate exists to make your world feel at peace. On your sixteenth birthday, you receive your soul-mark: the first words your soulmate will ever say to you. Some people spend their whole lives waiting to hear those words. Others choose not to believe in soulmates at all. Then, there are those who hear their words from the lips of a rival and simply refuse to believe it.

June 1999

Shane was eight when he first learnt about soulmates. His team was running drills at hockey practice, a final cooldown before they finished for the day. He was the last to skate in his team for the mini relay, he had only two lengths of the circuit to go. His friends' cheers echoed off the glass, and though he could see the rival team trailing in his peripheral vision, he tried to block it all out. He loved the feeling of being on the ice. Ever since his mum took him skating two holidays ago, he'd known this was what he wanted to do.

Shane swept his stick around the last cone and, with a controlled hit, sent the puck into the mini goal at the end of the rink. Adrenaline rushed through him as a smile graced his cheeks and his friends swarmed. His best friend, Jacob, skated toward him and made a loud kiss noise against the side of his helmet before the two of them started cracking up. It was an inside joke; Jacob was pretending to be Theriault, an NHL star who was known for doing that to teammates after a winning goal.

"Eww, Jacob just kissed Shane!"

"It's—it's not like that!" Shane stammered back. His cheeks felt hot as he whipped around to see Bradley snickering, a few other boys on the team joining in. Shane glanced at Jacob, who didn't seem fazed by the comments and just shrugged.

"Are you guys soulmates or something?" Bradley continued, making kissy noises and faces at them.

Shane looked at Jacob, who appeared just as confused by that word... soulmates.

"Bradley - that's enough! I will not tolerate that type of behaviour on this team. If I hear it again, I will be speaking to your parents."

The giggles quieted fast as the boys either dropped their eyes to the floor or awkwardly peeked at each other. It was rare for their coach to raise his voice. Bradley looked scared; he nodded quickly and mumbled an apology before skating off.

When Yuna asked Shane how practice went, he told her about what happened. He was expecting his mum to go on about sportsmanship but instead his parents sat him down and

taught him about soulmates. Shane went to bed that night thinking about his soulmate. He wanted to know who they were and he hoped they loved hockey just as much as he did.

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May 2007

Shane could barely sleep the night before his sixteenth birthday. He never admitted it to anyone, but he had been waiting years for his soul-mark. On the morning of, he spent thirty minutes scouring every inch of his body. He knew it could appear any time during the day, but he wanted to be absolutely sure before he stepped out.

Eight years ago, when his parents first told him about soul-marks, they'd also taught him that he'd have to cover his own up. At the time, he hadn't really understood; his parents had theirs on display, so why couldn't he? But he'd grown to realise that showing a mark before meeting your soulmate was rare, almost taboo. Some of his friends had already received theirs, showing up to school with bandages on their wrists or wearing armbands. It felt like a rite of passage that Shane wanted to be a part of, too.

He finally got his mark that afternoon. He was putting his gear away in his locker after practice when a burning pain flared on his upper thigh. It felt like a lit cigarette was being pressed against his skin. He doubled over, his body falling into the locker; he awkwardly braced himself against the metal, trying not to draw any attention.

The pain died down after thirty seconds. Shane stumbled into a bathroom stall and shoved his pants down, eyes widening as he saw the word inked onto his leg:

"What?"

Shane ran his fingers over the script lightly, expecting it to sting like a fresh tattoo, but he felt nothing. It was as if the ink were part of his skin itself. A spark of hope rose inside of him - somewhere out there, someone was destined to say those words to him.

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Six months later, Shane got his first official girlfriend. They'd met at a friend's sixteenth birthday party.

"I'm grabbing a ginger ale. Do you want one?" Shane asked Sarah as he reached into the crowded fridge. They'd only just been introduced, and Shane had to squeeze past her to reach the drinks.

The music was so loud he wasn't sure she'd even heard him. "What?" she yelled back, leaning in closer.

When he heard those words, he paused. It definitely wasn't the first time he'd heard the word since turning sixteen, but he hadn't accounted for it being such a common phrase. This made sense though. Sarah was pretty and, from what he'd heard, a nice girl. He had just always imagined this moment differently. He'd expected some kind of magical spark or a sign from the universe... but evidently, he was asking too much of fate.

Shane asked her out later that week. He never asked to see her soul-mark, and she never asked to see his, either.

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December 2008

The World Junior Hockey Championships were the only thing consuming Shane's mind for the last month. He had been training harder than ever, especially with the NHL draft approaching, his first real shot at the big leagues. While he hoped to be the number one pick, the tabloids were already pitting him against Ilya Rosanov, Russia's newest star. Watching Rosanov practice, Shane couldn't help but be amazed. The boy was quick and sharp, every move calculated. Shane wondered what it would be like to play alongside him rather than just against him.

Pushing the door open, Shane felt the bite of cold air on his cheeks. He'd told his parents he was calling Sarah, but that was a lie. Sarah hadn't even texted him "good luck" since he'd arrived, and he was surprisingly untroubled by the silence. As he turned the corner, he saw Ilya leaning against a wall, a cigarette in his mouth and a lighter in his hands. His mind went back and forth on whether to introduce himself, but his feet decided for him.

"You're supposed to smoke over there," Shane blurted out, nodding toward the designated area. His cheeks started to burn - that wasn't at all what he'd planned to say. He felt ridiculous. Of course Ilya knew the rules; he just didn't care. Now Shane looked stupid.

Shane waited for a response. Ilya just stared at him, looking as though he couldn't believe Shane had even dared to speak. Shane was certain he'd heard Ilya speak English before, so he knew the boy understood him.

"What?" Ilya finally said. The word was heavy, coated in a thick accent.

The word didn't just reach Shane's ears; it slammed into him. It was heavy, and it felt like a physical blow to his chest.

The air in Shane's lungs vanished. For a split second, the world went terrifyingly still. He could no longer feel the harsh wind against his cheeks or the ache in his legs from practice,

the only thing that was left was the echo of Ilya's voice. Then, the tension broke, replaced by a rush of heat so intense it felt like his blood had turned to liquid gold.

The mark on his thigh didn't just tingle; it burned with a fierce, pulsing electricity that made his leg tremble. He felt an overwhelming sensation, similar to those moments right before the puck drops in a game, but multiplied by a thousand. He felt grounded and untethered all at once.

"The smoking area," Shane managed to choke out, his voice sounding like it belonged to someone else entirely. He pointed toward the far corner, his hand shaking so noticeably he had to shove it into his pocket. "It's... it's over there."

Shane couldn't remember much of the rest of his conversation with Ilya. His mind was still replying to Ilya saying those words. When his mum later asked, "What's Ilya like?" he simply shrugged and responded, "Kind of a dick."

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July 2010

When Ilya heard that Hollander had also signed with CCM, he called his agent immediately. He pitched it as a promotional opportunity, but in reality, Ilya just needed to see the boy whose words were inked into his skin, the boy who consumed his thoughts far more than he cared to admit, especially in the quiet of the night.

When he'd first heard his words, Ilya thought fate was playing a cruel trick. There was no way he could have another boy's words on his arm. It wasn't that he didn't like men, he'd known he was bisexual for years, but he knew it wasn't safe in Russia. He tried to convince himself it wasn't true, that someone else might eventually say the same phrase, but the strange resonance he felt around Hollander suggested otherwise.

It was a sensation he couldn't describe, lacking the right words in either English or Russian. The first time they met, he assumed it was just the soul-mark reacting. It was a deep, soul-level peacefulness. But when they met again at the draft, and then later in the gym, that same gravity followed him, a pull that only existed when Hollander was near.

It was a feeling Ilya wanted to chase.

As the director called "Action" for the fifth time, Ilya skated toward Hollander. He struggled to maintain the 'serious' expression the brief required, but Hollander cracked a smile, and they both dissolved into laughter. The energy between them felt perfectly balanced, like two notes hitting a chord.

After the shoot, Ilya followed Hollander into the shower stalls. His eyes wandered freely over the landscape of Hollander's body - from his defined shoulders to the curve of his ass, down

to the black band wrapped tightly around his upper thigh. It was clearly covering a soul-mark. Ilya wondered what the chances were that his own words were hidden under that fabric, just as Hollander was etched onto his own arm.

As he stepped under the spray, Ilya caught Hollander glancing back at him.

He knew he shouldn't be doing this. He knew starting something was a risk he couldn't afford, but the compulsion was overwhelming. The closer they stood, the louder the pull became, until Ilya wanted nothing more than to have his hands all over him. He let his gaze heavy on Hollander's body; seeing Hollander's physical response to him, Ilya knew he was done for.

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June 2014

Ilya had tried to push Hollander away. What they were doing was too risky, and it felt too real. He hadn't replied to any of his recent texts, even though the silence physically ached. But his avoidance streak ended today; they were presenting together in Vegas.

Ilya spent as long as he could in the bathroom, terrified of what he, or Hollander, might say after all this time. Walking out with seconds to spare, he put on a confident facade and played into the perfect rivalry dynamic the fans loved. When Ilya's hands brushed against the back of Shane's neck, a shock of static electricity jolted through him. It was like a reminder of that bond that Ilya knows he will never truly be able to shake.

Afterward, as if he couldn't stop himself from following the current vibrating between them, Ilya followed Hollander into the hallway. He was being yelled at, but the only thing on his mind was that pulse that only felt at peace when he was near Shane. He held him close, breaking every promise he'd made to himself, and told Shane to meet him in his suite.

The air in the room was electric. Ilya didn't hold back, barking commands for Hollander to undress. He watched, a dark sense of satisfaction blooming in his chest as Shane obeyed, and the thought crossed his mind to demand he remove the black band on his thigh, too. He wondered if Shane would listen. He wondered if he'd finally be allowed to see the words hidden underneath. He didn't ask, but later he did press his lips against the fabric of the band to test the water. He wasn't pushed away, but the sudden, pulsing heat he felt was enough to convince him he was still too scared to know for sure.

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November 2016

After Ilya cums with Shane’s name on his lips, Shane realizes just how much he wants this to be real. Then he notices the bandage on Ilya’s arm as he moves it to run his fingers through Shane’s hair. Shane reached out, his fingers hovering inches from the tape, a pull inside him that wanted to rip it off so he could see the truth and get over it once and for all. But he couldn’t do that to Ilya and the jarring reminder that Ilya had a soulmark reminded him of the impossibility of the two of them, sparking a wave of panic about what they’ve been doing.

He scrambled off Ilya’s lap, fumbling to pull his clothes back on.

"I just... I forgot I have a team meeting in the morning," he stammered.

He knew Ilya could tell it was a lie. He didn't even need to look at Ilya’s face to know he’d caused a wound. He could practically feel the sting of it in the air, but he’d already let himself get too close. He had to run.

***

When Shane asked out Rose Landry a week later, he did so knowing she wasn't his soulmate. He couldn't even remember her first words to him. Rose was kind, and he enjoyed her company, and the papers loved the "NHL Star and Actress" headline. Shane told himself he loved it, too.

But every time they were together, something was missing. He found himself constantly comparing the quiet, polite air of his life with Rose to the bone-deep, earth-shattering connection he had with Ilya. Every time, he realised it just wasn't the same.

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January 2017

Shane had come into the All-Star Game weekend with a clear mind and ready for a fresh start. After Rose broke it off with him, Shane had decided to accept that Ilya was his soulmate and it was freeing. He no longer wanted to worry about whether he was Ilya’s soulmate, he assumed he wasn’t, and he kept telling himself that that was okay.

Shane watched Ilya across the crowded bar and felt the familiar, low-thrumming pulse in his thigh. He’d stopped trying to find a reason for it. He told himself it didn't matter if he wasn't the author of the words under Ilya’s bandage. If he had to be the "other" person in Ilya’s life while some stranger held the title of soulmate, he would take it.

When he took a seat next to him it brought a sense of comfort that Shane missed. He missed Ilya’s voice and especially missed his smile. He tried to make it clear that he and Rose were no longer a thing, and hoped that inviting Ilya back to his room later that night made that even more obvious.

When Shane opened the door, he was freshly showered and still only in his boxers. He pulled Ilya inside before he could change his mind. Ilya's eyes eagerly roamed Shane's body; it had been months since they'd last been together, and even just looking at him made Ilya hungry. He'd hoped their conversation at the bar earlier meant he wouldn't be turned away if he knocked, and he was very glad he'd been right.

Shane looked like he was waiting for Ilya to announce why he'd turned up, but Ilya was distracted. On Shane's upper thigh, the words were finally visible. He had never seen them before, they were always expertly covered, but now they were there in the flesh.

"Is that what she said to you?" It came out rougher than Ilya had expected. He had a sudden, fierce urge to reach out and run his fingers over the ink.

Shane looked at him, still confused.

"Your words, yes?" Ilya nodded downward. Shane's eyes followed the gesture, and his face shifted from shock to a quick, defensive anger as he tried to shift his stance to hide the mark.

"Makes sense. Boring words for a boring person," Ilya teased. He took a step closer, backing Shane against the wall until his fingers could dance over Shane's hips.

"That doesn't even make sense. I didn't say those words," Shane scoffed. He shivered as Ilya moved closer, his lips brushing over Shane's neck.

The past tense didn't go unnoticed by Ilya. He wasn't surprised that Shane had met his soulmate, but the thought still stung. "Ah - so someone *has* said Hollander's precious words. Rose Landry?" Ilya couldn't stop himself. He told himself he didn't need to know, that it was better if Shane had someone else, especially since they would never work out anyway.

"No. Not Rose. I told you, we aren't together."

Ilya felt himself smile against Shane's skin. He buried his face in Shane's neck to hide it, trailing kisses down his torso and slowly lowering himself to his knees. He could feel Shane harden under his touch, the soft, familiar noises finally breaking through the tension.

Those noises were cut short when Shane spoke again. "What about you?"

"Hm?"

"Have you met your soulmate?"

"Yeah."

"Oh. Right. Okay."

Ilya laughed. His fingers teased the waistband of Shane's boxers as his head rested on Shane's stomach. "Jealousy is not a good look on you, Hollander."

"I'm not jealous."

"You don't need to be," Ilya retorted, winking up at him as he pulled the boxers down. The words hidden under the bandage on his own arm meant it was the truth, even if Shane didn't know it yet.

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"Stop thinking, Hollander." Ilya could tell Shane's mind had wandered. Shane always complained when Ilya stopped running his hands through his hair, and he had been still for nearly a minute.

"Don't you want to be with them?" There was a quiet sadness in Shane's voice.

"With who?"

"Your soulmate."

"It's complicated," Ilya muttered. He didn't want to get into this. He saw Shane's eyes flicker to the bandage on his sleeve.

"Are they back in Russia?"

Ilya sighed. He hated lying to Shane, but the truth felt like a heavy weight he wasn't ready to drop. He hooked his legs around Shane and flipped them over so he was looking down at him, pinning him to the sheets.

"I know how to make you stop thinking."

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April 2017

Ilya loved competing against Shane. There was no one else in the league who challenged him the same way, no one else who could keep up with his strides or force him into the kind of high-stakes plays he'd usually avoid. But more than the competition, he loved seeing Shane thrive.

Ilya watched as Shane skated down the rink, the puck dancing between his blades. For a split second, their eyes met, and Ilya couldn't help the grin that tugged at his lips. Then, in a heartbeat, everything went wrong. He saw Shane's edge catch. He saw him fall.

The sound of the impact seemed to echo through Ilya's own bones. He heard himself scream, a raw, jagged sound that didn't belong in a crowded arena. He skated forward, his heart

hammering against his ribs, but the world was already a blur of jerseys and whistles. He tried to push through the refs and the gathering crowd, desperate to get closer, but the Voyager players shoved him back. To them, he was just an opponent whose teammate just knocked out their captain.

Ilya swore he could feel Shane's panic as if it were a physical weight in his own chest. He watched, helpless, as they wheeled the stretcher away.

Ilya should've been more careful; anyone could have seen him rush into the hospital in such a frantic state, but he didn't care. He needed to see Shane. He needed to know he was okay.

"Sorry, sir, we can only let in immediate family at this time."

"Please," Ilya begged. He could feel the panic rising, his brain racing through desperate ways to get inside. "I need to see him."

The nurse looked at him with a heavy sense of pity, and Ilya hated it.

"Please... He is my soulmate." Ilya ripped off the bandage covering his wrist, thrusting his arm toward the nurse so she could see the ink. "Please. Let me see him."

The nurse looked at the mark, then glanced around at the empty desks and quiet corridors. "Alright," she whispered. Ilya let out a jagged breath he hadn't realised he was holding. "Go ahead - I'll pretend I didn't see you."

Ilya rushed toward the room number Shane had texted him earlier. He peered through the gap in the door, seeing Shane lying in the hospital bed, and the world went still. Pushing the door open carefully, he took in the sight of the machines Shane was connected to. A cold knot of worry tightened in his chest; this looked much worse than the concussion rumours circulating in the news.

As he stepped inside, he heard Shane's voice, and a wave of familiarity washed over him. "Ilya?"

"I'm here..." Ilya rushed to his side, lacing his fingers tightly with Shane's. "It's okay. I'm here." His lips meeting Shane's in a kiss.

"How did they let you in?" Shane's voice was barely a whisper.

Ilya averted his gaze, his heart hammering against his ribs like a trapped bird. He looked at the hospital walls, then back at Shane.

He could lie. He could say he'd bribed the nurse or slipped through a side door. He could've kept the bandage on, or put it back on after - but he'd chosen not to. The images of Shane falling on the ice flashed through his mind. The fear that he might never have been able to hold him again suddenly felt small compared to everything else.

Ilya took a jagged breath, a reckless sort of courage catching in his throat.

"I told them you were my soulmate."

The word hit Shane like a physical weight. *Soulmate.* He didn't realise he was crying until he tasted the salt on his lips. Beside the bed, the heart rate monitor began to chirp, a frantic, rhythmic beeping that gave away how much his pulse was racing. Shane didn't have the energy to hide it anymore, the crashing reminder that his soulmate belonged to someone else.

"Are you in pain?" Ilya's voice was thick with concern.

Was he? Technically, yes.

"Should I get a nurse?" Ilya asked, already shifting toward the door. But it wasn't the kind of pain a nurse could fix.

Shane shook his head, using the hand still entwined with Ilya's to pull him back.

That's when he saw it. Down the inside of Ilya's right forearm was a line of neat, familiar handwriting. He couldn't read the specific letters through the blur of his tears, but the sight of it - the visual proof of another person's claim - made the ache in his chest sharpen. He quickly averted his eyes; he knew it was rude to stare at a mark without permission.

"It's okay," Ilya said softly. A hint of a tease coloured his tone, gentle and warm. "You can look."

Shane felt Ilya's hand cup his cheek, a thumb brushing away a stray tear as he guided Shane's face back toward him.

"They are your words." When the words left Ilya's lips, he wondered why he'd never said them before.

Shane's eyes flew open, locking onto Ilya's. He heard the monitor pick up speed, the beeps becoming a continuous drone of excitement and fear. He was terrified to look, but he couldn't stop himself.

"What?" Shane whispered.

"Your words. You said these words to me," Ilya said. He spoke with such certainty, as if it were a fact of the universe Shane should have known all along.

Ilya moved his arm closer, and Shane finally saw it: his own handwriting, slanted and precise, inked into Ilya's skin. When Shane ran his trembling fingers across the script, words he'd blurted out in a cold alleyway years ago, he felt his entire body catch fire. It was the exact same lightning-strike of peace he'd felt the moment he first heard Ilya speak.

"It's me?" Shane breathed, still unable to wrap his head around it.

He felt Ilya press a firm, lingering kiss against his hair. "It has always been you."

"Me too," Shane choked out.

"Yeah?" "Yeah."

Shane tilted his head up, closing his eyes as Ilya leaned in. This kiss was different from the ones before; it radiated a different energy, desperate and grounding all at once, as if they were trying to transmit a million unspoken thoughts through the touch. As they pulled apart, the monitor finally began to slow to a steady, peaceful hum. Shane smiled up at him, at his soulmate.

End Notes

thanks for reading <3
kudos and comments are like little endorphins lighting up my brain

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!