

under the scars

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Summary

For as long as Ilya has remembered, there were five letters neatly printed in the crease of his arm either in vivid black or as a ghost of his memory.

He is four when he learns that it is a soulmark.

He is six when he realises his parents do not have each other's names.

He is eight when he works out the name is probably from the English speaking world.

He is ten when he works out it is a boy's and receives a slap across the face for asking.

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He is twelve when he buries his hopes with his mother. Fate is what men make for themselves, hopes and opportunities his father states harshly, hand on each son's shoulder at the funeral but Ilya sees the pill bottle in his dreams as if it is as real as the alcohol on the coffee table and thinks maybe what his father made was graves for more than just his mother.

He is fourteen, fresh off international scouts noticing him for the first time, when his father takes him to a clinic with a leaking ceiling and a stone faced doctor who takes a stack of notes and a bottle of vodka, the expensive kind, and lasers the soulmate mark off him as Ilya screams and begs. He carves each letter of Shane's name into the wooden slat under his bed as tears of pain and frustration blur his vision and he promises himself he will escape.

He's sixteen when he feels the scar at his arm tingle as he watches the Canadian junior team face off against the Americans. *Shane*. It cannot be. His arm tingles every time Shane has the puck. It does not matter, his father hisses, realising the same moment Ilya does, grabbing his arm and viciously stabbing his still lit cigarette into the scarred flesh. '*That is done with, Ilya.*'. His arm burns but not as harshly as the eyes Ilya cannot pull from the screen. Another burn. Another. Every hit perfectly placed for the letters that no longer show on Ilya's flesh.

He's seventeen when he meets his soulmate, and he knows it's him, he can feel it, and Shane is so *kind* but Ilya has been trained to only respond to harsh demands and expectations, informing him there are many Ilyas' in Russia. Hope blooms and he's ready to follow, anywhere really, anywhere that isn't back to where he came from because Shane is where he is supposed to be but he has to check and it's heavy, the weight of his father's victory when Shane says 'yeah I guess you are right' and leaves with his handshake and his polite smile and the remains of Ilya's heart in his hands.

He's twenty seven when Shane tells him he's pretty sure there are millions of Ilya's in the world but only one for him, face set and determined as he stands barefoot and ready to fight. One arm is still in a sling and bruises are fading into his face, and to Ilya he has never looked more beautiful. Ilya got used to taking what he could get, ignoring the imprint of his own name on Shane's foot, aided by Shane's quirk of keeping his socks on and how shy he is in general, reaching for his clothes before Ilya has come down from the high and retreating back behind the wall only Ilya is allowed to pass.

"Mine is gone, my father-"

“Your father is *dead*,” Shane snaps, and then the anger seems to drain out of him as he grabs Ilya’s wrist with his good hand and slowly traces his hand up his arm to the crease of his elbow, touching the scarred flesh, “I’m here.”

Simple. Ilya could say a thousand different things and they would be a thousand different people’s words. Shane grows nervous in his silence and takes a step back, a cold horrible feeling spreading in Ilya’s stomach when he does it. He’s blowing it. The moment he hoped for, denied he hoped for, hoped for again, and he’s blowing it.

“Ilya...I get it ok? I’m weird and boring and you probably think that I’m no fun and wish it was someone else but-”

“No!”

Shane was the one who walked away from *Ilya*. Only so far though, only ever so far, as if they were not just soulmates but linked by a red string of fate carrying across the oceans, between continents, drawing them both to the ice that could unite them. Hockey has been Ilya’s downfall and his salvation, his family in ruins and yet Shane in front of him. It was the excuse for him to be forbidden, it is the very reason he probably *should* still be forbidden and yet it is fate. There is nothing more natural in the universe than stepping forward and dropping to his knees and pressing his index and middle finger to his own name at Shane’s ankle.

“I am sorry. My mark...”

“It’s still there Ilya,” Shane murmurs as he awkwardly crouches and returns his hand to its former place, over the marred skin, “It feels...right? Mine is where no one can see it. Yours is...no one would know. But *we* know, Ilya. *We* know. Come to the cottage. Give us a chance.”

“I did. I said to you,” and he has to pause and regain his composure, the wall that only Shane gets passed on his side, “I tell you, many Ilya’s in Russia. That day. In juniors. I...was waiting.”

“I know,” Shane murmurs, “M’sorry. I was scared. But Ilya...m’not afraid anymore.”

Ilya cups his chin and feels Shane tremble under his touch, “This is a lie I think.”

Shane inhales and then exhales deeply, and Ilya thinks there are many better places for this conversation than kneeling on the floor of the hotel room Ilya should have left days ago but he couldn’t bring himself to leave the city while Shane was still in the hospital.

“Okay, I’m terrified,” Shane says flatly, blinking rapidly as he makes himself hold Ilya’s gaze, and no matter how hard it is with people when it matters he *always* holds Ilya’s gaze, “But I’m not afraid of us anymore, Ilya. Come home.”

Home.

One word and it beats in Ilya's chest like a wardrum. It is so Shane, to skip so many stages, to steamroll past the questions as long as he is satisfied with the answers in his own mind. Ilya belongs with Shane and so his home is Ilya's home and Ilya doesn't remember what it is like to *have* a home, all foundations in the coffin with his mother, but he knows he could not leave Montreal. He could not leave Shane.

Shane dips onto his knees and presses their foreheads together.

"Yes. I...I am coming to the cottage."

He is twenty seven and he is at peace.

F I N

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