

Soulmates

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She looked in the mirror and saw an old man staring back; she blinked and he was gone. Perhaps she had only imagined. Perhaps it was the 6 a.m. sleep in her eyes. Perhaps she was going crazy. That was probably it. Yawning, she finished putting on cover stick to hide the dark circles under her eyes, grabbed her backpack, and headed out the door.

It was good to be back on campus, good to be starting another year of school. The freshmen wandered about looking slightly lost, but also excited. The first year of college was always exciting because then they might meet The One.

Everyone had a special someone whether they liked it or not. Call it fate or some weird quirk of nature, but everyone had a soulmate. Some found out early in life, their tiny chests glowing with light as they were placed next to their soulmate in the nursery. Some found out in school or at the swim park. The unlucky ones may not find out until they were in their 40's or 50's, but this was unusual. Soulmates tended to be born in the same area and gravitate towards each other unintentionally. What with the modern ease of travel, most people had found their someone by the age of 20. Except her. She sighed as she looked at them wandering down the sidewalk together, chests glowing. Sisters, best friends, even lovers might be soulmates. But it was dangerous to have romantic interest in your soulmate. The bond which connected the two began at birth and lasted until death, which was far greater than the span of the strongest marriage and totally uninfluenced by emotions. To be separated from a soulmate because of fighting was terrible. No, it was much safer to have a special someone be a friend. That's all she really wanted. Just a friend.

She had hoped maybe travelling to a college would get her to meet new people, and maybe that special someone. The first year she entered all of her classes with eagerness, wishing that her chest would glow. The second year there she enrolled in completely different types of classes in an effort to meet a new bunch of possibilities, but to no avail. This third year, she had given up. It was a small campus; she had walked past almost everyone there without the faintest flicker of a sign. She kept an eye on the new freshmen, but not with any real expectation. She had fallen into despair recently, and she felt weaker. Maybe the new job would help; it was certainly an unexpected opportunity, almost like fate. She might meet her someone there, if only she had the energy to go.



After her classes, she dragged herself to her car. It was the second week working at the nursing home, and she was beginning to feel comfortable. There had been no soulmates yet, but the nurses worked on varied shifts; there might be one she still hadn't met. Many of them were close to her age, having chosen to do CNA training instead of college. But she couldn't just stand around looking for nurses. Today she had someone to visit, an elderly gentleman named Ed, who had no living relatives to be with him in his last hours. She signed in, clipped on her nametag, washed her hands and went. Room 203A, room 203A, *ah, here it was*. She entered and waited for her eyes to adjust to the darkness. The curtains were drawn shut to block out the afternoon sun as he lay in his bed. As she approached the bedside, dreading the prospect of a dying man, Ed suddenly turned towards her; his face lit up with surprise. But no, it couldn't be, the light was coming from his chest; she looked down and saw her own glowing. She squeaked with surprise and fell back against his dresser, barely holding herself up.

"What, how?" she stammered, looking down at her chest.

"It's you," she heard him whisper. She looked up, and his cheeks were wet with tears. "I thought I'd never find you. I've grown so weak; my time is almost done. I had given up on you. But you're so young! How old are you?"

"Twenty-one."

"Are you married?"

"No."

"That's the age I was married. I had traveled the world because of the war, and by the time I got back, I figured if I hadn't met my soulmate yet, I probably never would. The girl I met had always dreamed of marrying her soulmate if she ever met him, but because of the war she thought he had probably died, and we consoled ourselves with each other. Turns out, he hadn't. We met him on our 30th wedding anniversary in Italy. She left me for him, those 40 years ago. I've been alone since then—always alone." "I'm so sorry. But how is this even possible?"

"I don't know. I thought I was alone. I thought you weren't real. I went my whole life thinking I was a failure—a freak. I didn't have a soulmate, my own wife didn't want me, and I couldn't have children to comfort me in my old age." Ed began to weep again.

"But you aren't a failure, your wife sounds terrible, and the other things weren't your fault! And you do have a...a soulmate." She could barely get those last couple of words out. Surely she wasn't linked to an old man? What would happen when he died?



“I didn’t for 70 years though,” Ed countered. “But you are right. And I’m glad I have finally met you, now before I die.” Ed looked up at her, tears still running down his cheeks, but a smile stretched across his face.

“But you can’t die!” she said in a slight panic. “How am I supposed to go my whole life without a soulmate?”

“You are to do it better than I did. You must go and live the life I always should’ve, knowing that you do indeed have a soulmate, and that I will be watching over you.” His eyes drifted shut and she began to cry. His breathing came slowly, and then he murmured, “What is your name?”

“Amy,” she whispered back.

“Amy,” he sighed, his chest falling. It did not rise again.

