

**Chris**

“Lena? Can you hear me?” Chris shouted into his iPhone.

“Yeah, I can hear you. Why are you shouting?” Lena giggled.

Chris smiled at the sound of her voice. They’d been dating for almost two years, and while many people would normally marvel at a high school relationship of this length, many of his friends were surprised they even began dating at all. As one of the prettiest girls in school, they all thought she was out of his league. Everyone was astonished when they began dating at the beginning of junior year.

“Sorry. The gym is just so loud. But hey, guess what?”

“What?”

“I made it to the finals!”

Lena squealed in excitement, “No way! Out of 70 other fencers? That’s awesome, Chris!”

Chris was a fencer. He’d enjoyed movies and shows with swordplay in them since he was a young boy. When he was twelve years old, his parents thought his interest in swordfights might lend to an enjoyment of fencing, so they signed him up for a one-week camp. He hadn’t stopped fencing since. Now, he was in his last year of high school and it was his last opportunity to win the state championship. Last year he’d finished second. This year, nothing was acceptable to him but first place, especially since the tournament was taking place at his own school. He had the home field advantage.

“What do you mean ‘no way’? You didn’t think I could do it?” Chris asked jokingly.

“Of course I did. It’s still very impressive. So when is the final bout?”

“Any minute now-”

Suddenly, a voice chimed over the loudspeaker in the gym, “The gold medal bout is now beginning on strip three. The gold medal bout is now beginning on strip 3.”

“Right now, actually,” Chris amended, “I have to go.”

“Okay. I’m gonna come watch, so don’t finish the bout too quickly. I want to see you win.”

Chris was surprised, “You’re coming? What about your family party?”

The gymnasium's loudspeaker sounded again, "Second call for Chris Bradshaw on strip 3. Second call for Chris Bradshaw."

Lena laughed on the other end. God, Chris loved her laugh. "They'll understand. It's not everyday you get to see your boyfriend become state champion."

"Okay, awesome!" Chris had his phone tucked between his ear and his shoulder as he gathered all of his equipment. There was a lot a fencer needed, even wires. Fencing was scored electronically because often action was too fast for the referee to follow. The fencers were hooked up to wires, which were hooked up to a machine that lit up green when one fencer scored, and red when the other one scored.

"Yup. Good luck babe! See you in five minutes."

"Thanks Lena. I love you."

"Last call for Chris Bradshaw, on strip 3. Last call for Chris Bradshaw."

*Shit!* Chris quickly hung up the phone and ran over to the fencing strip, ready to take on the world knowing that Lena would soon be by his side.

### **Lena**

"Last call for Chris Bradshaw on strip 3. Last call for Chris Bradshaw."

Lena heard the gym announcement echo through the other end, before the line went dead. "Love you too," she sighed into the silent phone.

Knowing she didn't have a lot of time Lena ran to her mother who was busy talking to her Aunt Suzy. Not caring that she was in the middle of a conversation, Lena interrupted, "MomChrisinthefinalsandIneedtogowatchI'llcomebackrightafterIpromise!"

Her mother and aunt stared at each other.

"Could you actually understand what she just said?" asked Aunt Suzy.

Her mother smiled ruefully, "I've lived with her long to enough that I'm able to understand her even when she's talking gibberish." She turned to Lena, "You can go. Just drive carefully."

Lena was already halfway out the door, her long black hair waving from a sudden gust of wind. "I will mom!" She'd had her license for almost a year, but that didn't stop her mother from cautioning her whenever she went driving. Normally that would annoy Lena, but she was so excited about going to see Chris that it barely registered with her.

She quickly got in her red PT Cruiser, which was her grandparents' car before they stopped driving, and pulled out of the driveway and headed for the school.

Lena was so happy for Chris. She knew how badly he wanted this; almost as badly as he wanted her.

She laughed at her own joke. She knew Chris had had a crush on her since middle school, but she never had any interest in him. Lena just thought of him as the quiet weird kid who fenced. In freshman year of high school though, things had changed. First, he'd finally gone through puberty. Over the summer he had grown about 4 inches and put on a bit of muscle. Along with his blond hair and green eyes, she even remembered admitting to herself that he looked kind of cute. They were assigned to be lab partners in science class, and developed a friendship over the course of the year.

And obviously, that friendship had blossomed into something more.

God, she hoped he won today.

### **Chris**

"Halt!" shouted the referee. "One minute rest period."

Chris looked at the scoreboard satisfied. He was winning 7 points to 1 in a bout to 15. The bout lasted nine minutes, with stoppage for points, penalties, and injuries, and there was a one-minute rest period every three minutes.

"You're doing great," his coach came over and handed Chris his water bottle. He removed his mask and took a long swig. "Just keep doing what you're doing," she said, "And don't get overconfident, alright? It's not over yet."

"Got it, coach," Chris handed his water bottle back to her and looked at his crowd of supporters. It was mostly made up of his teammates, but his dad and uncle were also there, both beaming at him. No doubt they all thought that Chris had this in the bag.

"And hopefully I do," Chris muttered to himself as he continued to scan the crowd, looking for Lena. He didn't actually expect her to be there that soon. He hoped she'd hurry up though, as the bout probably wouldn't last much longer at the rate Chris was going.

"The one minute rest period is over," the referee said. Both Chris and his opponent took up the 'En Guard' stance.

"Ready?" asked the referee. "Fence!"

**Lena**

The PT Cruiser rolled to a stop as the light in front of Lena turned red. She groaned in frustration. She had to be there to see Chris win. She simply had to.

Lena thought of all the times Chris had been there for her, not least of which was her parents' divorce last year. Without a doubt, that had been the toughest time in her life. Her world split in two, both her mother and father fighting over her like she was a piece of meat. Lena's grades had dropped and she started to even get sick from the stress. The only thing that kept her head on straight was Chris. He spent all the time he could spare with her, and even when he wasn't with her in person, the knowledge that he was only a phone call away was like a life preserver to her.

The light turned green, interrupting her from her thoughts, and Lena took a right. She knew she was going a little fast, but she didn't care. All she wanted was to get to the school, which she could up ahead on her left, while the entrance to the supermarket was a bit closer on her right. One more traffic light to go through and she was there. She hoped Chris was winning.

**Chris**

His opponent lunged clumsily at him, and Chris easily retreated out of his reach. While his opponent was still off-balance, Chris made a lunge of his own and hit him. The red light went off.

"Halt! Point!"

Chris soaked in the cheers of his supporters, as he got ready for the next point. He spared a quick glance at the scoreboard. It was now 8 to 1.

**Lena**

Just as Lena was going past the entrance to the supermarket parking lot, a white Prius pulled out directly in front of her. Screaming to herself, Lena slammed on the breaks, but she was going too fast, 15 miles per hour over the speed limit. She crashed into the back of the Prius. Her seatbelt snapped and she went flying into the windshield of her own PT Cruiser. Lena was vaguely aware of the sound of broken glass, and then she was aware of nothing at all.

**Chris**

"Halt! Point!"

*Huh?* Chris thought to himself. *I didn't score.*

He turned around and looked at the machine that kept score. The green light was hit up. His opponent had scored. *That was fast. I didn't even notice him hit me.*

“Don't worry about it, Chris! Shake it off,” his coach yelled.

Chris gave a thumbs up in acknowledgement. He was determined to make sure that it didn't happen again.

### **Lena**

Lena was having the most wonderful dream. It was Christmas and there was a huge brightly lit tree. Also, there were bells ringing everywhere. She was lying down on the floor in her living room. She wasn't exactly sure why she was doing that, because the floor of the living room was very uncomfortable.

But that didn't matter, because Chris was on his knees leaning over her. He was bending lower and lower until his lips were on hers. Lena sighed contentedly as they kissed. This was perfect.

Without warning, the dream began to change. The beautiful Christmas tree turned into an ambulance with its lights flashing. The bells changed to the sound of wailing sirens. The floor turned to rough gravel. And it wasn't Chris kissing her. It was some man in a deep blue uniform.

Why was he kissing her? Nobody should kiss her but Chris. This was so wrong. Chris was going to be so mad.

Lena tried to push the man off her, to scream, to do something, but she couldn't.

It was like she was in a dense fog that restricted her every movement and enveloped both her mind and body.

### **Chris**

“Damn it!” Chris cursed under his breath as the second one-minute rest period began. Things had gone downhill quickly, as his opponent had made a huge comeback. Chris was now only one point ahead; the score was 13 to 12. He only needed two more points to win, but at this point it wouldn't come easy.

He didn't know what was going on. None of his attacks were working. His opponent was easily getting through his defense. Nothing he did worked.

His coach was talking to him, trying to give him advice, but Chris wasn't listening. At this point, he didn't think anyone could tell him anything that would make a difference.

Instead, his eyes were wandering through the crowd again, looking for Lena. He still didn't see her.

*She should be here by now.*

"Time is up!" called the referee.

Chris's mind whipped back to the match at hand. He could worry about Lena later. Right now, he needed to focus on winning. He wasn't going to let victory slip through his fingers again, not like last year.

Because Chris knew now what he had to do to win. He had to fight.

### **Lena**

"Fight!"

A voice penetrated the fog.

"Come on, Lena! Fight!"

*I recognize that voice. Whose is it? Why can't I remember?*

The fog around Lena was getting heavier and heavier. She couldn't tell what direction was up, what was down, what was left, or what was right. She didn't remember how long she'd been in the fog. Ten minutes? Ten days?

All she remembered was her own name, and...

*Chris! That's whose voice it is. It's Chris.*

### **Chris**

Chris lunged at his opponent. But the other boy parried his blade, and riposted to hit Chris square in the chest. 13 to 13.

### **Lena**

"That's right, Lena. It's me! Fight the fog. Come on now, push it away."

*I'm trying. It's so hard. I'm so weak, Chris. I'm so weak.*

### **Chris**

He was beyond frustration; Chris couldn't believe he'd lost his lead. Abandoning all sense of logic and strategy, he ran at his opponent. His attack was easily deflected. 14 to 13. He was losing.

**Lena**

“Focus, Lena. You can do it.”

Lena concentrated all of her remaining willpower on clearing the fog. She didn't want to, it was so hard. But Chris wanted her to, so she did.

For Chris.

**Chris**

Chris took a deep, calming breath. This was it. Do or die. He had to win. He had to.

He remembered being in the same position in the finals last year. Down 14 to 13 right before the last time period, wanting so badly to win. The only difference was that last year, Lena was there.

Chris smiled at the memory. Despite the fact that she was going through her parents' divorce, which got quite messy from what he understood, she came to support him anyway, smiling through her pain to support Chris.

He knew there had to be an important reason she wasn't there. He could tell from that last call with her that she wouldn't miss this for the world. She wanted so badly for him to win. Maybe even more than he did.

Chris had to win this bout. Not just for himself, but for her.

For Lena.

**Lena**

The fog wasn't clearing.

No matter how much Lena tried, no matter how much she wanted to, she couldn't do it. The effort exhausted her. She just wanted to go to sleep.

*I'm sorry Chris.*

Before she could drift off, a bolt of lightning burst out of the fog and hit her right in the chest. The fog retreated to the edge of her vision. She could hazily make out the ambulance and the man in blue from her previous dream. She heard lots of voices shouting and sirens wailing. But they sounded weird, like they were coming from the other end of a long hallway.

**Chris**

His opponent was obviously excited, realizing he was on the edge of victory. In his excitement, he made the same mistake Chris had made earlier out of frustration. He easily blocked his opponent's attack and scored. 14 to 14. Next point would win.

**Lena**

"We've got something!" an excited voice from off to her right shouted. It sounded weird though, as though the voice was coming from the end of the long tunnel.

But where was Chris?

She knew there must have been an important reason he wasn't there. He was probably on his way, maybe bringing her some flowers. She smiled at the thought.

*I love you, Chris.*

**Chris**

It was a standoff. Chris didn't want to make the first move. Too much was at risk. His opponent obviously didn't feel the same way, as he lunged at Chris. Chris blocked the attack and riposted. It just missed.

His opponent recognized the opportunity and tried to catch the off balance Chris on his flank. Chris regained his composure and dodged it, while making an attack of his own at the same time. It landed.

It was over.

15 to 14.

Chris won.

**Lena**

Lena was beginning to get frustrated. Where was Chris?

She could feel her eyes growing heavy and her mind becoming numb. The fog was returning. Lena was too tired to fight it.

*Maybe he wants to surprise me while I'm sleeping. He's done that before.* Lena giggled to herself.

With that in mind, Lena let the fog envelop her as she fell asleep.

**Chris**

Chris was immersed in hugs from his teammates as soon as he was off the strip. Congratulations were shouted in his ear from every direction.

"Thanks guys!" he laughed.



“Great job!” his coach patted him on the back. Chris nodded his thanks in acknowledgement.

He ran over to his dad and uncle and embraced them as they jumped up and down in excitement.

Chris sighed in content as he broke away from them and scanned the crowd, looking for a pair of deep brown eyes, accompanied by a beautiful smile.

But Lena still wasn't there. He wished she was.

After all, he'd won this for her, too.