

SABRE

Written by

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INT. HAL'S CAR - AFTERNOON

HENRY ALICE, known as HAL, sits alone in his car outside of practice. He grabs his fencing equipment bag and puts his headphones on before stepping out towards practice.

INT. FENCING CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

Team members look to Hal with confusion as he enters, with whispers unheard by him due to the volume of his music.

TEAM MEMBER #1

What is he doing here?

TEAM MEMBER #2

Maybe he didn't get in trouble, Johnny called his mom a bitch or something.

TEAM MEMBER #1

Yeah and now Johnny has a broken nose. That's crazy for a chirp.

Hal walks to the equipment room to unload his gear and suit up. Another teammate of his, NICHOLAS, enters behind him. He stares at Hal, who turns to see his gaze.

HAL

What?

NICHOLAS

Why are you here?

HAL

Because we have practice and a regional on Saturday?

NICHOLAS

You broke Johnny Slipp's nose, you're not going to be competing at the regional on Saturday.

HAL

I broke his nose because he deserved it and I only got ISS so how about you blow me? Just keep your mouth shut.

Nicholas shrugs and puts his gear on as well.

INT. FENCING STRIP - AFTERNOON

Hal holds his mask under his arm as he lines up against Nicholas. Their coach, ROB, stands between them.

COACH ROB
Big weekend, Hal. Did you get in touch with those schools?

HAL
Manhattan Fencing, NYFA, Columbia, St. John's. Should all be there based on my talks with them.

COACH ROB
Then you better win. There shouldn't be anyone better than Nicholas there. Sorry we can't slot you in too, kid.

He turns to Nicholas with that last statement. Nicholas nods.

COACH ROB (CONT'D)
First to five, en garde.

The boys line up on the strip and put their masks on.

COACH ROB (CONT'D)
(a beat) Salute each other, this isn't a fight club.

They salute reluctantly.

COACH ROB (CONT'D)
Allez!

Hal dives forward with an aggressive slash. They exchange parries and priority before Hal strikes and both lights flash. Hal turns with a cheer.

COACH ROB (CONT'D)
Attack no, riposte-

HAL
What? Are you joking?

COACH ROB
On the right, touche.

Hal tries to argue on the point he just lost, thinking that he won but is waved away. They resume. Again, Hal lunges forward, and both lights alarm.

COACH ROB (CONT'D)
 Attack no, riposte on the right.
 Touche. 2-0, Nicholas.

Hal is furious. He takes it out on Nicholas. He pushes him to the back of the strip and gets a quick point. He repeats his 4 more times, closing out the match. He rips his mask off, still worked up over the earlier points.

HAL
 Dog walked, should've been 7-0 too.

Nicholas takes his mask off too.

NICHOLAS
 Should've been a DQ for you acting like a baby over my points.

HAL
 Sick one buddy, you're so cool.

He holds up an L and flips it into a middle finger.

NICHOLAS
 (under his breath) You shouldn't even be competing, you-

Hal only hears the mutter and reacts.

HAL
 What did you fucking say?

COACH ROB
 Boys, please, can we just cool-

NICHOLAS
 I said you shouldn't even be here!!
 You can't even compete, you're
 fucking suspended!!! He beat a kid
 up at school he shouldn't even be
 at fucking practice!!

Hal changes quick to fear as he turns to look at his coach.

COACH ROB
 Hal, is this- is he telling the
 truth?

HAL
 I- yeah, I mean- no, yeah I punched
 him but he was saying- he said a
 lot of- look, it is just ISS, I can
 still-

There is a deep sigh from Coach Rob followed by a pregnant pause.

COACH ROB

You can't keep doing this, man. You just can't. You're out for this weekend, you know the rules. Nicholas, you're-

HAL

Are you joking?? Coach-

COACH ROB

Nicholas, you'll take his slot. Hal, take a moment to calm-

HAL

Coach, please you can't be serious. Coach I need this, please man, are you- is this a joke, like. Those are my scouts, Coach, I called them, I did this. I fucking made this happen, I need-

COACH ROB

Take a moment outside.

Hal throws his mask and sword down, shouting as he walks.

EXT. FENCING CLUB - AFTERNOON

Hal sits on the curb alone as his coach walks up to him. They sit in silence for a moment.

COACH ROB

You know you did this to yourself.

HAL

No I didn't.

COACH ROB

I don't care if you think he deserved it, people deserve to get punched every day. That doesn't mean you can be the person to deliver that. Consequences.

Hal wipes the water from his eyes quickly.

HAL

Please, coach. Those scouts are my scouts, I called them.

(MORE)

HAL (CONT'D)
You *know* I need this. I can't
afford it without them.

Another pause between the two of them lingers.

 COACH ROB
I'm sorry. You can still join us,
be an alternate in case something
happens with Nicholas, but I can't
in good faith let you compete.

He stands up.

 COACH ROB (CONT'D)
You cannot just react, Hal. You
have to think. This will be good.
Call your mom up as well, you said
she was planning on going.

He walks inside, leaving Hal alone as he pulls out his phone.
He hesitates, then calls his mom.

 MRS. ALICE (V.O.)
Hey, punk, you okay?

 HAL
Yeah, just calling about this
weekend, I'm at practice now-

 MRS. ALICE (V.O.)
Oh, I just cannot wait! I'm so
excited, hotel is booked, and I
have a surprise too for us.

 HAL
A surprise?

 MRS. ALICE (V.O.)
Yes! I mean, not really, I'm
probably getting your hopes up. I
got tickets to the Natural History
Museum already booked for the day
after. This is such a big weekend!

 HAL
Yeah, yeah it is.

 MRS. ALICE (V.O.)
Did you have something special you
wanted? Sorry- I cut you off just
now. What did you need for this
weekend?

Hal sits for a moment.

HAL

Nothing, just wanted to let you know I was excited too. Practice went well, I think I can really impress those scouts.

MRS. ALICE (V.O.)

Oh, good, baby I can't wait. That would just be so amazing if you could go to a school like that. Love you no matter what, though.

HAL

Yeah. No matter what.

He sits in silence for a moment.

HAL (CONT'D)

You don't think Dad will show up, right? I know we talked about it, and I texted, but...

MRS. ALICE (V.O.)

No, baby. I don't think you can count on him to.

HAL

Okay. Good.

INT. REGIONAL TOURNAMENT - FOUR DAYS LATER

Hal sits alone in a haze as people move around him prepping for the tournament. He sees Coach Rob walk up to him.

COACH ROB

Saved you and your mom a seat up with me. She here yet?

Hal looks up, dejected.

HAL

No, not yet. She texted me, she said almost.

COACH ROB

Nice of her to still want to come then.

HAL

Yeah.

There is an awkward pause.

COACH ROB

Look I know this isn't ideal, but your scouts are still here today. If you want we can at least meet them? Salvage something out of this for you?

HAL

Sure.

As the two get up, Hal sees Nicholas walking off to the equipment room to prep. His face sours and the haze is lifted. Without thinking, he shifts to the room and walks.

COACH ROB

Hal?

As he stalks away, he notices his mother enter the room, scanning her eyes around to look for him. He pauses for a moment, before continuing off towards Nicholas.

INT. EQUIPMENT ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Hal sees Nicholas' back turned with headphones on in the room. He stops for a moment, then sees a practice bin of swords. He grabs a sabre from it. Hal walks up towards Nicholas and delivers a blow with the bell guard to his side. Nicholas winces, turns around in shock, and Hal throws a punch right towards his face with the bell guard. Nicholas drops down onto the bench to avoid it.

NICHOLAS

Are you psychotic??

HAL

Coach said if you don't compete I will.

The two boys stare at each other, Hal intent on hurting him. The silence is broken by a laugh.

NICHOLAS

This is the dumbest thing I think I've ever heard. I mean is this a prank? Are you streaming? What's your plan, dipshit?

HAL

I told you. If you don't compete, I will. So stand up so I can make sure you don't.

NICHOLAS

And I'll walk out of here with what, a broken leg or something, then you expect me to just say "Oh, I tripped! Please, put Hal in instead!" You fucking idiot, I'll tell them all what happened.

HAL

No you won't, because if you do, I'll do more than break your leg.

Hal is breathing heavy, with a glaze over his eyes. Nicholas has not seen him like this before.

NICHOLAS

Jesus man, you really are messed up. They weren't kidding. Take a breath dude, it's weird.

HAL

STAND UP! I said stand up! I'm doing this!!!

NICHOLAS

NO! (a breath) No, man. No. What do you want from me? You want me to fight back? You want me to crash out with you, give you your win? I couldn't give enough shits about this, Hal, take my spot, just away from me like this.

HAL

That's- no, I don't want.. Fucking STAND UP, NICK! STAND UP, I'm taking your spot!!! I need it! Stand up!

NICHOLAS

You can *have* it Hal, but I'm not gonna fight you for it, this is stupid!

HAL

You're stupid!! Fight back!!! FUCK!

Hal slams the sabre against the locker in front of him, trying hard to goad Nicholas and to outlet his anger. There is a silence as they stare, when a voice calls out from outside.

MRS. ALICE (O.S.)
Hal? Are you in there, honey? Do
you start soon?

Hal and Nicholas look at each other. Hal tries to speak up but his face has changed from the rage to a fear after hearing his mother's voice. Nicholas clocks this.

NICHOLAS
Just a moment, Mrs. Alice. Hal is
in here with me, just helping me
with something.

Hal drops the sword.

HAL
What are you doing? What is your
fucking problem?

NICHOLAS
What is my problem? What is your
problem, Hal, you're deranged. Do
you even want to compete? Cause you
wouldn't be with your plan. You'd
be banned for life. Sick look in
front of your little scouts.

HAL
If you don't compete, I do. That's
the rule, that's what coach said.

Hal is exhausted as he has been shaken out of his state. He drops onto the bench next to Nicholas.

HAL (CONT'D)
I have to. I have to compete, you
don't get it. You have to be hurt.
I have to do it. I have to compete.

NICHOLAS
Yeah, fucking clearly, dude. Jesus.
Why do you need this so bad?

Hal stares forward for a beat.

HAL
You're going to take my
scholarships. I need these scouts
to go to school, I can't... I just
need them.

Nicholas looks over to him to try and understand.

NICHOLAS

I'm already enrolled man, I'm not taking your scholarships. My dad bankrolls the Columbia team, I've had a spot since I started. I'm not trying to flex but like, you're wrong if you think we are the same.

Hal stays staring forward. There is a beat.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

Because we aren't the same. You're better than me, Hal. You're a better fencer. You want it more. I will never be as good as you. And I hate that. You're good at this, Hal. You will make a team. But this-

He points at the sabre on the ground.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

This whole fucking... everything else about you.

The two boys share a soft laugh.

NICHOLAS (CONT'D)

That shit is a liability, bro.

Hal breaks his stare to turn to Nicholas, and the two boys see each other at the same level for the first time since they have known each other.

HAL

You're a good ass fencer, Nick.

The two both look forward in silence after that. Finally, Hal breaks down.

HAL (CONT'D)

I lied to my fucking mom. I lied to her. That's all I can think about.

Nicholas hesitantly holds his hand up to give him a supportive tap on the shoulder. It is quick. Hal wipes his face and stands up.

HAL (CONT'D)

Please get the hell away from me.

Hal tosses Nicholas' mask towards him. They share a nod.

INT. REGIONAL TOURNAMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Nicholas walks past Mrs. Alice, who is confused seeing him in gear.

MRS. ALICE

Wait - Nicholas! Are you... is Hal okay?

NICHOLAS

He will be out in a second, I think. He's good.

He gives her a smile, and walks off towards the strip. Mrs. Alice turns to see Hal slowly walking out of the room.

MRS. ALICE

Where is your gear? Why is Nicholas dressed? Did something happen? Hal, baby, what is-

Hal interrupts his mother with a tight embrace, as he begins to stifle tears into her shoulder.

HAL

I'm so sorry, mom. I'm sorry.

She holds him out in front of her with a concerned look on her face. She is about to say something, to question him, but sees the hurt on his face. She decides not to say anything, and brings him in again.

INT. TOURNAMENT STRIP - AFTERNOON

Coach Rob, Hal, and his mother sit along the side of the strip, as Nicholas is competing. Hal watches with a solemn look, a sense of longing at each point as he slowly claps and nods his head. It should have been him. But it wasn't - and he knows why. There is a quick exchange of slashes, and an out of character cheer from Nicholas as he scores a point. Hal stands up to join the cheer before even realizing what he did. He awkwardly sits back down.

HAL

That was a nice point, he played that well.

He clears his throat uncomfortably. Each point back and forth he finds himself more and more invested. Nicholas loses a point and he turns to look at Hal. Hal holds up an L, flips it to a middle finger, and smiles.