I woke up surrounded by an oppressive fog. It obscured my vision and hindered my breathing. I couldn’t remember where I was or how I had gotten there. It was eerily quiet…

Until it wasn’t.

The silence shattered. All around me, I could hear mechanical screeches and squeals. The echoes and shadows of voices broke through my muted musings. My brain was having trouble processing. I felt blinded by the sudden onslaught of sensory overload and was lost in a hazy version of my own reality.

Then, suddenly, the fog started to lift, and my vision cleared. I was in a room, attached by long strings of wire to more beeping, sputtering machines than I had ever seen in my life. People dressed in white and blue and green and pink danced around the corners of my eyes. They were talking calmly to one another, though I could feel the urgency of their practiced movements.

I remembered.

Reaching down to turn on the radio. Looking up at Paul. Then headlights streaming through the passenger-side window. Screaming brakes. Crunching metal. And nothing.

“Paul,” I managed to breathe through parched lips. The unexpected sound forced the dancers to a halt.

“Paul,” I said even louder, though it still couldn’t have been more than a whisper.

“He’s fine, son. Your friend will be fine,” someone responded.

He was alive. And I was alive. And neither of us would ever be the same.