

## In a Blink of an Eye

The tenth of June. It was a Saturday. Winter was settling in. There was frost on the grass. That day, my best friend and I were going to attend a friend's sixteenth birthday. Rose and I were discussing what we bought for presents while Mum drove. We were singing to the radio, enjoying ourselves. I glanced out the window and saw cars giving way to us and a man walking his dog, sipping a hot cup of coffee.

A second later, I felt a jolt on my side of the car. I whipped my head around, quick enough to see that someone had misjudged their left turn and collided with the left hand side of our car. It sent us spinning onto the other side of road. I clutched my seatbelt. We spun; it felt like a broken fair ride. Our car spun into oncoming traffic, collecting a car travelling from the opposite direction. The reaction from the driver wasn't quick enough and the bonnet of their car rammed into the same side that had already been damaged.

The impact forced my head to connect with something firm. I couldn't hear anything. I didn't hear the screams. I didn't notice someone had shouted, "Call triple zero! Ambulance! We need an ambulance!" I couldn't feel anything. I didn't feel someone put two fingers on the side of my neck, checking my pulse. I couldn't see anything. I only welcomed the numbing darkness.

Head pounding, I dared to open my eyes. The lights were too bright. I quietly groaned. I swallowed into my dry mouth. I slowly, only slightly, tried to move my fingers. They seemed to be in a tight hold. I started to get feeling in my legs. My body felt stiff. My nose overflowed with the smell of vanilla and coconut. I tried to tilt my head to notice my surroundings. My neck only allowed me to go so far but I saw a few flowers, slowly drying out, machines actively working and uncomfortable chairs circling the bed. My guess was I was checked into a hospital. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

With my mind racing, I didn't hear a door open. A pair of footsteps stopped walking, close to my bed. I felt a soft kiss on my forehead and my hand being squeezed.

"How are you, Lucy?" a woman's voice spoke to me. She sounded familiar. Her voice was soft and gentle yet held emotion of sadness. "Come here Brady. Tell Lucy what you did today."

"Do I have to? She can't hear me anyway." a boy spoke. He too sounded familiar. I tried to remember their voices. They seemed so distant from my memory.

"Brady! Don't say things like that! She's your sister!" the woman's voice was sharp. Sister? That boy, Brady, my brother?

"But she's been in a coma for two months now! If she wanted to wake up, she would have!" Two months? Coma? Wasn't the crash yesterday?

"How...how could you say such a thing?" She was on the verge of tears. "Lucy is a strong girl. She'll pull through." Her voice was breaking. Another squeeze to my hand, and a pair of footsteps exited the room.

I heard a heavy sigh and someone flop into a chair.

"Talk about drama queen. Things you've missed, Lucy." Brady chuckled. "Every day is the same. We come, you sleep, we talk, you don't reply. For once, do something."

I silently laughed. I thought of what he said. Every word he said brought back childhood memories; Brady being a brother, playing in the mud, putting a spider in my pencil case. I remembered the fights and the laughs. The more I remembered, the happier I got.

I tried wiggling my fingers. I felt weak throughout my body. I lifted my eyelids once again, adjusting to the light.

"Lucy?" Brady whispered. He came over and hovered over my face, blocking out the lights. "Are you waking up?"

I tried to smile. His face lit up like a firework. He jumped up and kissed my cheek before he pressed the nurse button. Brady held my hand while a nurse entered the room. "She's awake." Someone shouted for a doctor. A lady with honey eyes laid a hand on Brady's shoulder and said, "Why don't you phone your family while we check over Lucy?"

The door opened and the woman from before came in, with a hopeful expression on her face. "My baby! Lucy! You're awake!"

She rushed over and tried to hug me but a nurse stopped her. Her nametag read Sharon. "Ma'am, the patient is tired and weak. We suggest you wait outside so the doctor can do a full examination, then you'll be able to see your daughter." The woman protested and demanded to stay but she was ushered outside with Brady comforting her. I was exhausted. I lost the ability to open my eyes. My mind ran over one thought. '...you'll be able to see your daughter.' It only meant that the woman was my mother. But she didn't resemble Mum. Mum wore appropriate clothes in respected places. Mum didn't have a hair out of place either. This woman had bags under her eyes, tear stains on her shirt and was wearing gardening clothes. She had stress written over her face; Mum was calm and collected.

I felt a tap on my shoulder. I opened my eyes with newfound strength. "I'm Dr Daryl Lester. I've been looking after you while you have been here. I'm going to check how you are now. I'm going to dim the lights and check you pupils. Okay Lucy?" He

organised himself to prepare. "Now this is your nurse, Daniella. She'll be here throughout your observation."

I'm sure I was half asleep during the examination. Dr Lester listened to my heart and lungs then he checked my reaction time in my muscles. I still couldn't talk but we communicated by them asking me a closed question and my response was a single blink for yes and two blinks for no.

After the doctor was comfortable enough, he removed the life support from my mouth. The first breath was like walking past the tip; the collected rubbish smell, a fruit rotting, a new coat of paint and that spilt second of fresh air.

"Well Lucy, you're a strong soldier, you are pulling through just fine." Dr Lester said. "Over the next twenty four hours we'll be observing you closely. We'll be checking your blood pressure, pulse, temperature, respirations, oxygen saturations, blood gases, urine output and level of consciousness. If you are stable enough, we'll be testing your strength. We will have a physiotherapist come in and they will be like your personal trainer; they will help you stand, sit in a chair and walk. We will help you return to your normal state as soon as possible." Dr Lester smiled. Nurse Daniella brought Mum and Brady back into my room. Mum rushed over to me, with a sense of relief. Dr Lester and Daniella left to give us privacy. Mum sat on the edge of the bed while Brady sat on the closest chair to me.

"What happened?" I asked through the oxygen mask. The words came muffled.

"What was that, sweetie?" Mum peered closer at me.

"What happened? Is Rose okay? What about the other drivers?" I had to concentrate on my words. They sounded slurry. Mum bit her lip and looked at Brady. Then the doors opened and all I saw were balloons and flowers. People gushed into the room, family and friends gathering around me. Questions were fired at me. The room was too crowded; it felt like the walls were closing in. Then someone shouted, "This many people visiting an ICU patient is prohibited! Please, some of you exit and wait in the waiting room." Muttering, the majority of them left, leaving chocolate and teddy bears. Feeling drained, I sighed and closed my eyes, slowly drifting off to sleep leaving the world behind.

I woke up to Sharon, checking my temperature. She smiled at me.

"Morning, Lucy. A bit overwhelmed?" Sharon said. I nodded slightly. "Well today, only a few people are allowed to visit you at a time. Okay? Later, I'll introduce you to Debra. She'll be your physio, helping you get back on your feet!"

"How long?" Sharon looked at me, confused. I still had my mask on. "How long will it take for me to get back to normal? To get back on my own feet? I've missed so much, Sharon. I've missed my own sixteenth birthday!" She sighed, sadly and gave my shoulder a squeeze.

“Honey, it’s going to take a while. You don’t have enough strength to go back to normal. A couple of months of physio and you should be on your way.”

I closed my eyes again as Sharon checked my blood pressure, thinking how one moment, one decision, can change not one life but the lives of many.