I pecked at my shell, hitting hard and trying to break out. Crack! A thin web of cracks spread along the shell in front of my beak. I hit harder until I could poke my beak out of the shell, and continued wriggling until I broke free of the egg. Finally! I'm out of my egg! I thought. As I looked around, I saw that I was in a large metal bin with many other chicks. I seemed to be the last one to hatch from my egg. I tried to hop over to another chick, but the tub that we were in starting tilting downwards until it was upside-down, and I tumbled headfirst into a crate. The lid was slammed down when all of us were inside. I heard a loud cry of pain and looked up. There, hanging above me, was a chick with its wing stuck in the lid! He screeched again as the lid was thrown open, and the chick was thrown roughly to the bottom of the crate.

"Are you okay?" I asked, immediately very concerned for the other chick. He mumbled a halfhearted, "Yeah," before curling up on the floor.

Soon, the lid of the crate was opened and we were dumped onto a conveyor belt. We moved forward slowly
until we reached a pair of humans standing on either side of the belt. They grabbed the chick sitting right next to me and tossed him into a metal chute. I heard frantic cheeps and cries of pain coming from the chute. I was thrown into a tub where we could see into the chute. What we saw could scarcely be described. Workers were grabbing all the male chicks and sliding them down to a high-speed grinder - all of them except me. I sat, feeling both relieved that they had missed me and terrified of what fate awaited me later on. We were soon grabbed out of the tubs and had our beaks held up to a red blade. At first, I was quite curious about why this was being done, but then, I felt the pain. The searing, hot pain that coursed through my body. With one last push of the blade, half of my beak was gone. I was dropped back into a crate and blacked out from the immense pain.

Next thing I knew, we were in an enormous warehouse. At first, I thought looked spacious until I saw that there was a seemingly endless swarm of chicks kept here. Soon, I was crammed so closely with the others that I could barely move around. There was no natural lighting, only the harsh glare of the lightbulbs from above. I was starving after my journey here and despite the agonizing pain shooting through
my beak, I pushed my way through the throng of chicks to get to the food dish. I tried to eat some of the grain, but as soon as my beak came in contact with the grain, I felt sharp pain sear through my body just like it had earlier. It was obvious to me that my beak simply wouldn’t work, perhaps ever again. I suddenly felt very dizzy and ran as quickly as I could in the opposite direction. I tripped over a large object and tumbled to the floor. I looked back and saw that it was the lifeless body of a chick just like me, who looked like she had starved to death. At this point, I just huddled up against a wall and tried not to think about what I had just experienced. As my harsh reality dawned upon me, I wondered what I have done to deserve this cruelty and this life. I slowly drifted off to sleep, though it was hard.

 Whoosh! A gust of cold wind blew into my face, awakening me from my restless slumber. As I blinked open my eyes, I saw a white shape moving in front of me. It was a young female chicken, not an adult yet, but not a chick like me. She moved towards the food dish and pecked at the grain, and sipped some water, but noticing someone was watching her, turned in my direction. As she turned I saw her beak was seared off too.
“Who are you? Why are you here?” I asked, a little frightened.

“Oh, hello! I don’t have a name, but I came here the same way you did. I’ve lived here for 4 months and hid in the shed when all the other chickens were collected to go to the laying farms,” she replied.

“What are laying farms?”

“They are brutal places where hens are forced to lay eggs for 1 year until they can’t lay eggs anymore. Then they are slaughtered to be used as low-grade meat. “

“Oh my gosh…”

“It’s almost as bad here. The workers don’t change the flooring until all of you are taken to the other farm, so ammonia builds up. It can cripple, or even kill us.”

In a pained voice, she continued, “My sister died here a few weeks ago. She couldn’t eat after she was de-beaked. Anyways, I can’t be here much longer. The workers check in here, and I can’t let them see me.”

With that, the hen fluttered away into the shadows. It was still very dark, so I went back to sleep.

The next morning, as I walked over to the water dish, a worker spotted me.
He grabbed me by the neck, and muttered, “You’re a male!” I flailed around, frantically trying to escape his grasp, but my struggles were to no avail. The worker took me outside and held my neck next to the side of a metal table, ready to kill me. I slipped out of his grasp, fell to the ground, and began to run as fast as I could. As I was running, I ran into a grate in the sidewalk, and fell down, down, down...

*Splash!* I fell into a gushing torrent of water which swept me forward at an alarming rate. I was in a storm drain! That was the last thought in my head as I crashed into a pole, blacking out.

Light shined brightly on my face, and I blinked open my eyes. I looked ahead and saw I was still in the drain, but now I was heading straight for a steep drop. I tried to cling to the pipe, but it’s smooth metal surface did not allow me to, and I was shot out over the edge of the pipe and underwater. I frantically tried to get to the surface, but I couldn’t tell which way was up. I tried to calm myself, and let out a small breath of air, and followed the bubbles to the surface of the water. I stuck my head out of the stream and propelled myself towards the shore. As I clambered onto solid ground, I heard loud barking. An enormous dog raced towards me, eyes glinting. I ran as fast as
my legs could take me, but the dog was catching up with me. Just as the dog’s gaping mouth was behind my neck, the thrumming of its paws stopped. Confused, I peered around. A young human had grabbed its leash and was now peering at me with concern.

The human walked up to me and gently picked me up. I firmly shut my eyes and silently pleaded with him not to hurt me. I just wanted him to look within himself and ask whether it was right to treat me like I had been treated my entire life. Finally, I opened my eyes and looked into theirs, and I saw not a person who wanted to hurt me, but someone who genuinely cared. For the first time in my short life, I met someone whom I mattered to. I buried my head in their hand and fell asleep.