Missing Moments

by glennjaminhow

Summary

Behind the scenes of Leslie and Ben’s relationship starting with "The Master Plan" and ending with "One Last Ride." A one-shot from every episode to showcase wonderful Ben and Leslie moments that I feel should have happened in the show, especially the domestic bliss we never get to see.

Notes

Leslie visits Ben’s motel to prove to him how great Pawnee is.
The Master Plan

“Effective tomorrow morning, the entire government will be shut down until further notice.”

With the uttering of that unforgiving, irrevocable statement, the opening of John Philip Sousa’s “Stars and Stripes Forever” repeats relentlessly in Leslie Knope’s mind. Shut down. Shut down? Shut down! What in the flying fudge did those asshole butthole-ish mother frickers from Indianapolis feed these two peasants? Chris Traeger and Ben Wyatt are the absolute definition of the saying “scums of the earth,” and Leslie just wants to beat them to a pulp with a waffle iron from JJ’s until they un-shut down the great, beautiful city of Pawnee’s government.

As she sits in her cluttered, peaceful house, the banging ferocity of her heart refuses to let her stop breathing so shallowly. It’s 10:49 PM on a sad, miserable, humid night in late May; color coded and alphabetically organized binders line her messy kitchen table. She’s currently digging through The Master Plan, riffling through her Jack London quotes to find something about dicks cramming her dreams up her own butt... But then she quickly reconsiders that phrasing because it implies dirtier and darker things than she originally anticipated. What she means is that she wants to find a quote that personifies how big of asses those state auditors are.

Especially Ben Wyatt.

Really especially Ben Wyatt.

Despite the fact that he’s Benji Wyatt, former teen mayor of Partridge, Minnesota, whom she was jealous of for an eternity, she definitely knows now that he’s a huge jerk. He’s hopeless and judgmental and overall just a terrible, horrible person. He thinks Pawnee is some stupid crap town like all the other dumps he’s visited over the years, but he doesn’t get it. Pawnee is special. Pawnee is different. And she is going to make sure he understands that.

So, she does the only sensible thing and gathers up as much information about this amazing town as she can find under such late, last minute notice. There are 133 binders in her attic, but the bats, Sherman and Chester, like to use those boxes as their mating ground, so she’s not going to test the waters tonight. She settles on her top seven, along with two posters and one historically accurate map of the town. Leslie grabs her jacket, tugs on her shoes, and heads to her car, her frantic breathing from frustration and anger coming out in aggravated huffs.

And she drives all the way to Pawnee’s infamous triple accidental homicide committed by raccoons motel and harshly knocks on the door to room five. Her pulse pounds in her ears, and her heart wacks itself into her chest cavity restlessly. Binders tucked in protectively to shield them from unknown danger, she inhales sharply when the door unlocks. The peek in reveals a rumpled, yawning Ben Wyatt, whose eyes are no more than a quarter of the way open.

“Leslie?” His voice is low and quiet, laced with exhaustion.

“Oh my God. Were you already asleep?” She glances down at her watch. “It’s only 11:15!”

He groans, ignoring her statement. “What’re you doing here?” He scrubs a hand down his stubbly cheek.

“I’m here to change your mind.”

And, with that, she pushes her way inside without asking or any warning, binders still in hand with a bright glimmer of determination in her eyes. The room is tiny, but neat. But she can see her breath,
even though she’s inside. There’s a television set from the ‘80s on a wooden dresser, and the bed is queen sized, adorned with granny-looking sheets and a comforter. She takes a seat at the small coffee table in the corner of the room, shivering slightly.

“Um... Are you going to murder me?” Ben questions, a little more awake with his brown eyes now almost fully open. “This is a murder, isn’t it?” Leslie takes in the rosy cheeks, messy hair, and ridiculously oversized grey hoodie with sleeves drooping way past his fingertips paired with flannel pajama pants, and she gulps. But he sits down anyway, slowly and cautiously. And she tries not to notice that he’s... kinda cute. But in a horrifyingly awful way because he’s mean and rude and a jerk.

“I don’t think you get it, Mr. Wyatt,” she says professionally. “Pawnee is amazing. Pawnee is wonderful. Pawnee is a gorgeous, lovely sea turtle with wings that transport her to unknown, but lovely origins.”

Ben’s eyes widen, but he doesn’t say anything else.

“You see, in 1817, Reverend Luther Howell traveled from Terre Haute...”

~

“You told him the history of Pawnee?”

“Yep. The complete, chronicled, 100 hundred percent truth.”

“Leslie, you’re supposed to try to get him to help Pawnee, not decimate the town forever.”

“I will stand by Pawnee ‘til I die. Even after what the original settlers did to those poor otters.”

“What did they do to the otters?” Ann asks with a terrified expression.

Leslie shakes her head. “It’s not important.”

They continue walking and talking down the magnificent hallways of her most favorite building in the world, beside the White House and, of course, JJ's Diner. Eventually, Ann tells her she has to head to work, and Leslie’s left alone, meandering and focusing on what her next move should be. What if her explanations to Ben didn’t work? What if the government is still shut down? The workday hasn’t even started yet, seeing as it’s barely six AM, so she doesn’t know the prognosis. And it’s killing her. She threw up four times after exiting the motel around three this morning. Ben fell asleep during the early 2000s section of her Pawnee story, which didn’t necessarily bother her because that’s just the whole raccoons on speed part everyone wants to forget, head resting on folded arms and snoring cutely. Wait. Not cutely. Annoyingly. Yes, annoyingly. Focus. Focus on making everything right again. She ended up leaving Ben slumbering at the table, hoping he’d wake up with a crick from Hell in his neck.

Leslie nearly jumps up from the bench she’s taken residency at during her struggle with inner turmoil when she spies Chris and Ben walking toward a conference room down the hall. Even from a distance, she notes the jerk’s slow, stiff movements and even spots him rubbing his neck. His tie crooked and hair more than just a little messy, Ben sips at his coffee like it’s the only drinkable, non-contaminated water on a deserted island. Instead of sprinting and proclaiming, once again, how great Pawnee is, she sits there, glancing at her watch every few seconds and waiting for the fateful decision.

And, as they enter the room, Leslie catches a glimpse of Ben’s butt in those khakis, and her insides flutter.
Dammit

Focus.

She has a town to save, after all.
Freddy Spaghetti

Chapter Summary

Ben hangs around after the Freddy Spaghetti concert.

Ben Wyatt wishes he could enjoy his job.

Seriously, he wants the luxury to make decisions without harsh, radical judgment. He wants to walk around whatever town he's cutting to bits and eat at restaurants or go to the movies or shop at fucking Walmart without the word spreading like wildfire. The inhabitants of the places he's been during his career are brutal, harsh, unforgiving. Once, he strolled out of a local grocery store only for a beer bottle to be chucked at his head. He shudders and grimaces and rubs the year old healed laceration beneath his hair that required over twenty stitches. And he remembers the nurses who hated him and the doctor who nearly refused to mend the cut closed, and he shivers even more.

So when Leslie tells him he should just clam up and realize he did a good thing for Pawnee, he knows he's in way too deep already. He's never done anything like that for anyone, but he did it for her. He stepped outside of himself and his job for her. He saw how much this Freddy Spaghetti concert meant to her, and he picked up the phone, and he did something about it. And he recalls her late night motel visit a few days ago, and he feels weak at the knees even though he's sitting down.

He cradles his head in his left hand, using the fingers of his right to trace unknown patterns on his khaki covered leg. Ben can't will himself to move from this park bench he's occupied for nearly two hours. He bounces his heel into the concrete and tries to steady his rapid breathing. This isn't right. This isn't how it's supposed to work.

"Hey." He glances up to see the talented, passionate Leslie Knope standing in front of him with her hands shoved in her jacket pockets. "What're you still doing here?" And, of course, he can't tell a woman he barely knows that he's contemplating his entire career choice on this slightly chilly spring night. Because, whether she meant to or not, Leslie caused him to smile, actually smile, due to his job for the first time in years. But he knows it's all a lie, and he'll go back to being hated in the morning.

She takes a seat beside him, and their legs touch, and Ben really doesn't want to make a fool out of himself tonight. But she's still here picking up trash, even though she hired someone to specifically do that job. Leslie Knope marches to the beat of her own drum and flat out refuses to take no for an answer. And he kind of admires that about her. Ben's always the one to push and shove, fight, argue. It's almost comforting to know there's someone out there like Leslie who battles him with intelligent words and points rather than throwing beer bottles at his skull.

"I didn't feel like going back to the motel," he finally says, probably a bit too quietly.

"Well," she says. "Are you at least enjoying the view?"

And she gestures to the kind of murky lake to their left. His heart thumping in his throat and his mouth extremely dry, he briefly wonders if she means her sitting next to him. But he knows that's a mistake. Though, a woman who can make Ben Wyatt question his meticulously calculated decisions definitely deserves a medal or trophy. He makes these decisions and cuts these budgets and ruins these towns because that's what he's supposed to do.
“It’s really nice,” he says lamely, barely able to formulate words.

“You know, when I was little, my dad used to take me fishing at this lake, and it was always so much fun. This one time I flipped out…” She pauses to giggle, and Ben nearly loses it right there. “Because he refused to bait anymore of my hooks. He told me that I had to be a big girl, face my fears, and just do it, and that I would be proud once it was over, and I could fish without him.”

“So did you do it?” he asks.

She shakes her head, still smiling, but sort of sadly now, but he’s not exactly sure why. “No. I cried and eventually threw up because I didn’t want to kill a harmless worm.”

"I bet your dad still baits your hooks to this day, isn't he?"

And the expression on her face almost kills him. It's painful, and tears instantly swell in her eyes, and Ben, if he wasn't completely sure of it already, knows now that he's a huge fucking jackass.

"He, uh... He died when I was ten."

"Leslie, I'm so... I'm so sorry. I didn't..."

"Relax, Ben. It's okay. There's no way you could've known." And this time she finishes with an actual smile. "I don't... I don't really know why I told you that story."

He shrugs. "It was a nice story."

Ben taps an unfamiliar, jumpy rhythm with his heel, and his heart scrunches up in his chest. Normally, he’d be dead asleep by now, lulled by the increasingly freezing motel room and the sounds of drunks screwing around in the parking lot, but this silence next to this woman is not what he expected. Yet, it’s what he needs. Because tomorrow Leslie will continue to battle the lack of government in Pawnee, and Ben will have to slam her down over and over again, and he really really doesn’t want to.

“You’re quiet,” she notes. And her leg bumps his again as she squirms. His heart thumps harder, and he gulps. God, does she hate him? Is he boring her? Wait, why does he care? Abort. He’s not supposed to get involved with this kind of stuff. He’s supposed to do his job, slash up some budgets with a machete, have beer bottles thrown at his head, and walk away. “Are you okay?”

He nods a little too fast. “I’m good.”

She gives him a brief smile before standing up. “I’m gonna go clean off the swings. Wanna join, or do you wanna wallow a bit longer?”

“I’m not wallowing,” he points out.

“Uh huh. Sure. Wallower.”

And she turns around and starts to leave, and Ben jumps up like a sugar rushed puppy to follow alongside her. It’s just for the night. She’ll be back to calling him Mean Ben in the morning, and he’ll be watching Battlestar Galactica alone in bed by dusk.

For now, though, Ben Wyatt choses to forget about it, leaving his worries behind.
Ben's back hurts, and Leslie just wants to bounce ideas for the Harvest Festival off of him (a.k.a. more motel room interruptions).

She doesn't have a whole lot of faith in Ben Wyatt. Yet, she's trying desperately to get him to see the light. Of course, it's the light provided by the greatest building in America, Pawnee's City Hall, but it's also provided by her twenty assorted, color coded idea binders. With the Harvest Festival planning in the works, she's in real need of a "yes or no man," someone who is more than willing to tell her what's a good idea and what's a bad one.

Ron would agree with her on anything if it meant getting her out of his hair, even if it is for only an hour because, come on, government work is simply fantastic, and it must be discussed. Ann is always a good sounding board, but her own ideas are a bit questionable at points. Why would Pawnee be interested in opening an aquarium? She's searching for brilliant, life shattering solutions to their issues, not a lame tourist attraction (that is, until Leslie came up with bringing the Harvest Festival back). And Donna would probably just ignore her and continue scrolling through her phone for pictures of dogs in fedoras or narrating every fraction of every second of her life on social media.

She thinks she found her match in Ben. He's decisive and calculated and not afraid to speak up. It's kind of admirable, the way he does his work with little regard to opinions. But only kind of. At least sixty-five percent of the time, Ben Wyatt is a major jerk who needs to take a massive chill pill. But, still, he's helpful and can be nice and works as hard at his job as she does hers.

So, filled to the brim with possibilities and ideas and news, she heads toward his shared office with Chris, hoping to bounce her blue and yellow striped ball back and forth until they come up with something magnificent. But, when she enters, there's only the overly chipper, enthusiastic man doing push ups on the carpeted floor, headphones on and jamming to positive vibes.

"Leslie Knope!" he announces happily.

Good God, how did he hear her?

She jolts and nearly drops binder number eighteen on the floor. "Where's Ben?" she asks.

Chris stands up, taking a swig of water in the process. He's not even sweating! "He actually just left a few minutes ago."

"But it's only 5:30," she notes verbally. Chris and Ben are both normally here until six, and, usually, she runs by around seven, and Ben will still be in the office, working away.

He nods. "He left a little early. He looked very tired. I tried to get him to take a vitamin B12, but he refused. I really think the B12 would've kept him alert too."

Huh. He did look exhausted when they spoke briefly during lunch earlier, but she didn't think it was bad enough for him to skip out on the last thirty minutes of work. Thirty minutes is enough time to finish paperwork, delegate further responsibilities, and even enough time to start a brand new project.
She could go home. Or she could stay here and get more work done.

Or she could pay Ben a brief, quick, fast as lightning visit and run through these ideas with him.

~

By the time she reaches Ben's motel, she's finished her cherry Slushie from the gas station, and she's munching on the last of her NutriYum Bar. Sugar courses through her veins, leaving her heart jumpy and her mind speedy.

It's the first day of September, the Harvest Festival is late next month, and there are so so so so many things to do! Pawnee's socks will be knocked off, and people will have a flawless, wonderful, perfect, impeccable time, and they'll tell their great great great grandchildren about how amazing it was. Leslie smiles brightly as she gets out of her car and knocks on the door, there binders in hand and more in her "ridiculously oversized, oddly convenient" purse.

As soon as Ben unlocks the door, all she sees is hair. It's messy and wild and all over the place. And the next thing she takes in are the deep bags beneath his brown eyes. She gulps and almost bites her lip, worried that she may have overstepped the boundaries a bit. Okay, so whatever, she told him to forget about trying to make small talk and to walk the other way from her down the hall earlier today, but she was livid. Ben's a jerk, and he knows she knows he's a jerk, and he should simply stop being such a jerk.

But she can't help but feel a little remorseful about coming here, especially after Chris said he went home because he was tired. And, trust her, he definitely plays the part well. He invites her in wordlessly like he knew this exact moment was bound to happen eventually. Leslie should have known to leave well enough alone; she hasn't quite reached that lesson in her life yet, though.

"I wanted to run some things by you."

"Chris wasn't in the office?" he asks.

Leslie watches him wince and grimace as he collapses face first on to his bed, pulling the comforter up to his shoulders and snuggling the pillow under his cheek. He's already in his pajamas, and Leslie kind of forgot how freezing cold this room is. She resumes her old spot at the coffee table, and the overwhelming sense of déjà vu smacks her in the face. She nearly smiles when Ben reaches for the remote and turns the TV down, as if he's giving her the floor even though she's not sure she should be here.

And she braces for some annoying quip about why she's here.

"He was. But... Chris is so..."

"Positive?"

"Exactly."

"Understandable. But why me, though? You call me Mean Ben and made me walk away from where I was going earlier because you didn't want me around."

So far, so good. Ben doesn't seem irritated that she showed up unexpectedly again.

And she knows she's been rather harsh to Ben since he started working in Pawnee. Between yelling at him three times within the first twenty-four hours of meeting him and the incident earlier today, she figured they shouldn't be on the best terms. But she thinks back to the Freddy Spaghetti near-fiasco,
and Ben came through for her and the town. And he seemed... different when she saw him on that park bench later that night, long after everyone else had left. He stayed, seeming a little anxious and quiet, but definitely different.

"I'm sorry about earlier. I was just peeved about the money thing. I want you guys to have faith in us."

He nods. And then he tries to shift positions and instantly reached a hand to his back, rubbing it as best as he can. He rolls over to where's lying on his back instead, but his cheeks flush, and he inhales extremely sharply. "Sorry. I slept wrong, and now I can barely move," he informs her through clenched teeth.

Leslie forgets about her pitch and ideas, immediately wanting to spring into action. "Are you okay?" It's a dumb question because it's fairly obvious that he's in pain. He's sweating, hair sticking to forehead, and he looks like a sad, floppy fish trying to figure out how to get back into the ocean. "Do you have any Tylenol or ibuprofen?"

"I took some about an hour ago."

And Leslie opens up her "ridiculously oversized, oddly convenient" purse, digging around its contents for something that could help. Even though Ben's a jerk, he doesn't deserve to be hurting. She locates some Icy Hot balm in one of the multiple pockets and grins slightly. She stands up and proceeds to walk over to the bed until she's sitting down right beside him. "This'll probably help."

He scoffs. "Like I can get it on me by mys... Oh. Okay... You're gonna..." He trails off near the end, flustered and confused.

"Yeah, I mean..." And, great, now she's stammering too. "If it's okay with you. Better than being in pain, right?"

Ben doesn't even briefly reconsider it. He rolls on to his stomach, lifts up his green long sleeved shirt, and lets out a massive sigh of relief as Leslie rubs it on his skin as gently as possible. The muscles in Ben's lower back must seriously be jacked up because they're visibly spasming, and she has half the mind to massage the area with her hands. Is that weird? Yes, right? Maybe? But she just keeps applying the relaxant to the afflicted area until it's fully covered.

"What'd you wanna talk about?" Ben slurs sleepily.

And Leslie takes in the droopy eyes and crazy hair and adorable... Wait. Not adorable. Annoying. Annoying and barely noticeable, crooked smile. "It can wait til tomorrow. Get some rest." And she carefully lowers his shirt before getting to her feet. Ben's already snoring quietly, and, yeah, maybe that is kind of cute. "Goodnight, Ben."

Of course, though, she doesn't leave without placing binder number twenty on the coffee table first.
Flu Season

Chapter Summary

Because we all know Ben catches Leslie's flu (and it's a lot less glamorous).

After three hours of continuous, copious amounts of vomiting, Ben's positive there's nothing other than his organs left to up chuck. He's been wrapped around the toilet for what seems like decades, and it's to the point where his knees no longer know exactly how to be knees. They refuse to stay locked, so Ben assumes the position of putting a mini trash can in his blanketed lap, using that as his patented puke catcher.

His nose horrendously clogged, his breathing nearly spirals out of control. He's still so queasy and exhausted and congested and wants to take a nap, but it's six in the morning, and he has to be at work by seven. Ben's called out of work only a very few amount of times, even though he's known to catch colds and flus left and right. And he knows hanging around with and helping Leslie this past week was bound to bring him trouble, but he wanted to ignore that factor for as long as possible.

He groans as another round of nausea rips through his body. Ben quickly drags the trash can beneath his chin and tries to count the seconds until he can breathe again, but his head hurts, and simply thinking causes even more pain. His long sleeved shirt sticks irritatingly to his slick skin, and he coughs wetly, the plastic lining crinkling in his hands. After the latest expulsion, he wipes his face dry with cheap toilet paper and contemplates lying in the fetal position on the cold ground, avoiding his responsibilities for the day.

The flu has already spread through almost everyone at City Hall, and he's going to go in there riddled with germs and fatigue and fever right as people are getting over it. If it weren't for the massive Harvest Fest related meeting today with the Parks Department, he would definitely say "screw it" and call in.

Ben somehow musters the strength and courage to hoist himself off the bathroom floor. His legs quiver intensely, and, holy fuck, it's so fucking cold out here. His teeth chatter, and he shivers violently as he grabs the first button up and slacks he spies. He uses his shirt as a tissue when the mucus in his left nostril breaks free and starts to dribble into his parted mouth.

And, of course, Ben sneezes harshly, and his stomach drops, and he reclaims his spot in front of the toilet.

~

By the time he actually makes it to work, he's thirty minutes late and seriously dragging ass. The collar of his shirt soaked and his hair glued to his forehead, he enters the Parks Department and really wishes he had brought a sweater or something. With it being September in the Midwest, it's still relatively warm and humid outside, but his feverish body makes everything that touches his skin seem likes it thirty below. He sniffs and grabs a few tissues from April's desk, hastily blowing his nose before chancing engaging in the meeting.

Everyone eyes him instantly as he opens the conference room door. "Sorry I'm late," he mumbles nasally, taking a seat in a swiveling chair next to Leslie, who immediately touches his arm. Trembles
wrack through him, and he squirms away from the agonizing, but somehow comforting, touch. He stifles a cough as he tries to listen to Chris explain the ins and outs of their newest project.

"You look awful," Leslie whispers. She's been over her flu for a few days now, so she's back to her normal chatty and informative self. Although, Ben found delirious, rambling Leslie to be quite entertaining and cute. "You should've stayed home if you feel as bad as you look."

He shrugs. "I'm okay."

But he knows he's not because his stomach is doing that "I'm going to kill you, Ben Wyatt" thing again. It's twisting and turning, and his head is super spinnny as he glances down at the budget reports on the brown table in front of him. He should have went over them before coming in here, but he's pretty sure he lost the ability to read centuries ago. Sweat drips into his eyes, and his entire body twitches in pure, clear agony.

"And now my partner Ben wants to say something," Chris suddenly says, motioning to him. He swears his heart stops for a brief second before he reigns in the leash on his anxious, exhausted emotions. Ben shakes his head and absentmindedly waves his hand, trying to signal to Chris that he's in no condition to talk in front of people. But Chris has never been one to understand these types of messages, so he stands up anyway, wiping his wet palms on his black slacks. The PowerPoint presentation is frozen on a screen that says something in Egyptian Hieroglyphics, and Ben gulps nervously as his stomach flips.

"Okay, so..." is all he brilliantly manages to get out before he doubles over slightly, clasping a hand over his mouth. Breathe. Breathe. He cannot throw up here. Except Ben can't breathe out his nose, and his moth is clamped shut, and his oxygen deprived mind is sleepy, and nausea steam rolls right over him until a Jetstream of bile spills through his fingers and on to the floor. Horrified by this and the fact that it's not over yet, Ben half sprints down the hall and into the bathroom.

The instant his bruised knees slam into the tile below, vomit rises up his throat and splashes into the toilet water. God, he so should've stayed at the motel. At least he wouldn't have almost, but still sort of, did that in front of his co-workers and Leslie. He pants and tries to catch his breath, but it's stuck, and he's hiccuping, searching for a gasp of air.

And then there's a warm hand rubbing his overheated back through his button up, and then there's something cold placed on the back of his neck. He quivers, and then there's gentle fingers running through his hair, shushing and trying mercifully to soothe him. Ben coughs and gags and hears a quiet, soft, "Shh... It's okay," from behind him. He attempts to sniffle, a poor test in seeing if his mucus will shuffle around, but nothing happens.

Soon, Ben crumples against the stall wall to see through bleary, tired eyes that Leslie Knope is the one who followed him in here. She maneuvers herself to where she's sitting shoulder to shoulder with him, holding an ice pack to his forehead as he gets a grip on himself, securely palming the other ice pack on the back of his neck. Eventually, his breathing evens out as best as his congestion will allow. "I'm sorry..." he mutters, closing his eyes and leaning his head against the wall.

"Don't be sorry, Ben. We're all really worried about you."

But it's Leslie who followed him into the men's room. Not Chris or Tom or Ron. And she rubbed his back while he puked and tried her best to calm him by keeping him cool while he damn near had a panic attack.

"I guess it's safe to say you caught the flu," she says a few moments later.
He pulls his knees up to his chest and rests his head in the middle. He bites his lower lip when Leslie takes the ice pack on his neck and begins to rub it around beneath his shirt. "I guess so..." And his breath is, once again, caught in his throat when Leslie grabs his right hand and massages it with her thumb.

"Tell you what," she says, and he smiles because he knows Leslie Knope always has a plan. "We're going to sit here a few more minutes just to make sure you, Mr. Pukey Pants, are finished. And then I'm going to drive you home, and you're going to shower and then go to bed."

He shakes his head. "I don't think that's such a good idea."

"Why? I already had the flu. You caught it from me, remember?"

He nods. "True. But you have that big meeting today."

She shrugs. "There's no reason to continue with it until you're better. Chris was mostly just stalling before you got here anyway."

Leslie brushes up his leg, and he blushes.

And, even though he's out of his mind sick and feverish and pukey, sitting here with Leslie somehow makes him feel better.

There's nowhere else he'd rather be.

Except maybe in bed, curled against her while she runs her fingers through his hair until he falls asleep.
Ben Wyatt's been to a lot of towns, and most people don't care about anything at all.

He can count on one hand the amount of times someone in whatever city in Indiana actually gave a percent of a crap about government related activities. But Pawnee is different. He met his match in Leslie Knope, a passionate, driven Parks Department employee who kind of ruined everything for him.

Okay, maybe "ruined" isn't the right word, but Leslie... She makes him do things he ordinarily wouldn't do, such as call up a creepy children's performer to sing at a concert in the park and make extreme plans for Harvest Festivals. She's constantly searching for new and improved ways to help her town, and the people seem to reciprocate because this whole time capsule fiasco, while it bored the shit out of him, really made him appreciate the woman that is Leslie Knope.

He's worked for the government for twelve years, side stepping political parties and cutting up budgets and just wreaking money-related havoc, and he can't believe it took this long to find citizens that actually care. Sure, the people of Pawnee believe in dragons and most are convinced that broccoli is honestly evil, and they totally just spent over five hours yesterday deliberating between cat ashes and horrible romance books to go in this time capsule. Sometimes, he wonders how he put up with the negativity and hatred for so long before he came here, and he ends up massaging the buried scar on the side of his head.

Ben guesses their positivity is part of the reason why he's out here tonight watching Twilight with the town, as opposed to being bundled up in his motel bed by nine, dozing off in between episodes of Twin Peaks. By the time the movie ends, it's chilly outside, and he's wrapped his arms around himself. He swallows and glances around, fidgeting slightly when Chris and an overly excited Tom leave, followed by an immensely hyper, apparently now vampire Andy being half-towed by an amused April.

And then he notes that Leslie still hasn't left her folding chair yet. Come to think of it, he hasn't heard a peep from her for a bit now. While his co-workers gabbed and gossiped during the film (even though Tom was adamant about them shutting the hell up), Ben stayed silent, not really sure of what to say. But Leslie was a constant in the conversation, until she stopped speaking altogether.

Ben stands up, stretching his stiff, still sort of sore muscles as he plants his feet in the dewy grass. He doesn't have to go far to find Leslie since she's sitting right in front of him, and, when he spies her with chin to her chest and blond curls falling into her eyes, he can't help but smile. As cute as she is asleep and calm instead of riled up and energetic, she can't rest out here all night.

He gently shakes her shoulder. While he gets more than enough sleep for one man each night, he can only imagine what it's like to be her. The woman is wound up and calling people out and probably debates superbly during her slumber, which he doubts she gets a lot of. Winding down for her is most likely baking the amazing treats he occasionally finds on his desk into the wee hours of the morning and creating a plethora of scrapbooks; Ben prefers watching TV and reading until his eyes
are too heavy to stay open.

And she jumps, on her feet in a flash, her blanket falling to the ground. Ben picks it up while she straightens out of sort of messy, but undeniably pretty, hair. "I wasn't asleep," she proclaims.

He nods. "I know. I just wanted to... see if you needed a ride home?" he tells her with a shrug.

Leslie glances around her surroundings as if she's not sure why or how she's here. Her eyebrows furrow, and Ben's heart skips a beat or two, and he shoves his shaking hands into his pockets, trying to distract himself from the beautiful woman standing in front of him. Ben Wyatt's been to a lot of towns where people don't care about a single thing, but Leslie Knope is Pawnee's super glue, and it drives him kind of crazy.

"That'd be nice," she says with a bright smile, one that makes Ben's stomach drop to his toes.

They stroll to his car in a comfortable silence; usually, he struggles to find words and formulate conversations, especially after one too many punches to the face whilst working. But Leslie's walking close to him, and he feels her shiver each time she accidentally brushes up against him, so he does another thing he's never done before. Ben sheds his jacket, carefully placing it over her shoulders. Leslie shrugs her arms into it without a second thought, relishing in his warmth, and she grins at him.

He holds the door open for her as she gets in his Saturn, and he instantly turns on the heat. Ben's trembling hard, and he just wants Leslie to warm up and be okay with riding in his car in case she's not.

Of course, he can see how that thought is stupid and trivial. Leslie's visited his motel room multiple since he's gotten to Pawnee, even when he was extremely sick and nearly dying from the flu.

Maybe it's him that's not okay with it.

God, he's not supposed to form friendships with people. He's only here to fix the budget crisis, not to screw around and ultimately like someone he's not supposed to like. Ben grips on to his steering wheel until his knuckles turn ghost white, and he sucks in a shaky breath. Leslie's just... different than anyone else he's ever met in his lifetime. And he doesn't want her because he can't have her; he wants her because she's smart and funny and enticing and gorgeous.

He pulls into her driveway, and he knew she was a little too quiet on the way here. Her face snuggled on to his window and her cheek smushed against the glass, she's sighing contentedly in her sleep. Ben bites his lower lip before nudging her softly, not really wanting her to leave but knowing she has to.

"Hey," she says, exhaustion punctuating that one syllable.

"Hi," Ben says back. "We're at your place."

She smacks her lips, and Ben thinks he might die. But there are smudges beneath her wonderful blue orbs, and she just looks so so tired. He surprises himself when he unbuckles both of their seatbelts before exiting his car, immediately going to her side to open the door. Tentatively, he reaches for her hand, and she accepts it, and Ben's head spins. Her touch is silky and smooth, and his pulse thumps in his ears.

Their hands stay interlocked until they reach her door.

"Thank you for the ride."
"No problem."

And, after she unlocks her door, she lets Ben's hand go and gives him a quick hug.

"See you later, alligator," she tells him.

He smiles. "After while, crocodile."

It takes Ben until he's at the motel to realize she still has his jacket, but, at the same time, he doesn't really care.
Ron and Tammy: Part Two

Chapter Summary

Over dinner, Leslie discovers why Ben doesn't socialize outside of work.

By the time they arrive at JJ’s Diner, there’s a soft, warm glow in Ben’s exhausted eyes, and he gently slides into the booth across from her, grinning from behind the menu. She kind of wants him to sit beside her, smushed in the confides of each other’s proximity with his body snug against hers.

“You should really get the waffles,” she tells him. “I promise you won’t be disappointed.”

Ben’s lived in Pawnee for nearly six months now, and, while he brought her these very same waffles when she was hospitalized for the flu, she figures he’s never actually eaten them himself, which is something every single living soul on this planet should do because they’re so so so good. But Ben tends to avoid crowded situations and just people in general. He doesn’t really hang out with anyone outside of work, and she frowns when she thinks of it.

Truth be told, Ben most likely knows a whole lot more about her than she knows about him. Andy and April wanted to take him to the Snakehole Lounge last week; of course, Leslie ultimately found out it was to get him beyond wasted so he would do crazy, humiliating dares. But he politely declined, claiming he had work to do. Leslie imagines him buried beneath the covers in his tiny, freezing motel room, dead to the world by ten, much like the version of Ben she’s encountered during her brief visits with him.

Honestly, she doesn’t quite know why he suggested going to a late dinner with her.

All she knows is that she’s surprisingly okay with it.

JJ takes their order a few minutes later, and Ben orders waffles; Leslie gets the same, but with three extra cups of whipped cream on the side and a pile of strawberries on top. Sitting here with Ben somehow feels right, and it’s not awkward in the slightest, even though they’re barely talking.

“Why don’t you ever go out with people from work?” Okay, she really just has to ask. Ben’s definitely a jerk, but much less of one than she ever cared to realize in the beginning. He can be tough and stubborn and think that he’s correct about everything when he’s not, but he’s, by no means, a bad guy. Once again, her heart beats a bit too rapidly for her taste because she thinks she may have bypassed yet another boundary.

He shrugs. “I dunno... I guess I’ve moved around so much that it kinda gets old.”

“But Pawneeans are nice,” she counters simply; it's so very true.

Well, mostly nice. Sure, Leon von Stratton occasionally will set a birdhouse on fire, and Mrs. Pudge down the street from her place sometimes pees on the fire hydrant. And most Pawneeans only brush their teeth every other day and think that green vegetables are from Hell (although, as a Pawneean herself, she’s not exactly sure that’s not at least partially true). But they’re nice and welcoming and overall good people that Ben should give chances to.

He nods. “They are. But, I dunno; I’m just tired.”
“Tired of what?”

And Ben turns his head to the right, using his fingers to part off a section of his hair. And Leslie spies a three or four inch scar that’s still a little pink and puffy around the edges, and she gulps automatically. “Some dick threw a beer bottle at my head when I was in Bloomington. It shattered, and, when I went to the ER, it took four hours for me to be helped, even though it was a head injury. I was bleeding everywhere, but none of the doctors or nurses really wanted anything to do with me.”

“But why?” Her eyes nearly swell with tears, and she can only mentally picture a frantic Ben Wyatt with blood flowing from the obviously well sized, very open wound with no one around to aid him. Instantly, she grabs his hand after he soothes his hair back down, and she rubs it with her thumb. Leslie scowls just thinking about Ben’s experience, and she knows that no one in Pawnee would do something like that to him.

The only one who would throw a beer bottle at Ben is Jasper Martin, and he’s normally at the fishery six nights a week.

“It’s my job, Leslie. No one really likes a guy who slashes budgets for a living.”

"What about Chris?"

Ben’s eyebrows rise. “Are you kidding me? Everyone loves Chris. I always have to be decisive and thorough, and he just gets away with everything because he’s so nice. He’s still my best friend, but I get kinda tired of always cleaning up the messes and having beer bottles thrown at my head and being punched in the face.”

Leslie’s jaw drops slightly. “You’ve been punched in the face?”

Oh, dear God, how could anyone mess up his face?

He nods. “One guy nearly broke my nose a few years back.”

It’s like she’s opened a spoiled, expired can of worms because suddenly Ben’s telling her about the violence and how much he used to not be able to stand his job. After Partridge and the Ice Town debacle, Ben fled to Indiana, where he became a budget specialist to show people he was responsible. His callous attitude got him into even more trouble, even though he swears he was just trying to help. And Leslie knows he doesn’t mean any harm in what he says or does because she sees the expression on his face when he has to rip away another department and sees the sad gleam in his eyes when he has to confront others about what’s going wrong.

Now, he still speaks up, but it’s almost as if people automatically write him off as a rude, jerkish nerd who gets his jollies off by hacking up budgets.

“But it’s not all bad.” Ben tells her. It’s a while after they’ve both gotten their food, and they’ve been picking at it. Leslie feels like she’s been on a Tilt-O-Whirl, and her eyes droop in sadness because she acknowledges she’s one of those people Ben’s talking about. “I’ve met some really good people too.”

And they’re holding hands, and Ben spears a cut up piece of her waffle with his fork, and Leslie steal a bite of sausage off his plate.

“I’m sorry,” she says. “I never meant to make you feel that way, especially about Pawnee.”

He shrugs cutely and smiles crookedly, and Leslie’s heart beats restlessly in her chest. “You never made me feel that way. Pawnee’s the best place I’ve been in twelve years.”
They continue smiling and chatting as if the previous part of the conversation never took place. Ben tells her about Minnesota and his forever fighting, divorced parents and older brother and younger sister and growing up playing baseball (which perfectly explains how his butt got to look so fantastic). And Leslie tells him about beautiful secrets spots in Pawnee and the newspaper collection in her house and the gorgeous Ann Meredith Perkins and her father teaching her to ride a bike.

When dinner’s over, Ben pays and then shuttles her to a park bench, and she can’t help but beam brightly because she loves it out here. It’s chilly, so much so that she sees her breath as Ben wordlessly takes off his jacket, once again, and wraps her up in it. Soon, Leslie finds herself smiling and ranting about organizational tactics and how to assemble a replica of the raccoon statue in this very park, and she’s never talked about these things with anyone else before.

Ben places a careful, cautious arm over her shoulders, and she notes that he’s trembling, and she’s not sure whether it’s from the cold or from the anxiety that obviously plagues him. She almost snuggles her head right into the crook of his neck. Crap on a cracker. Her pulse thumps, and her heart swells in affection toward Ben Wyatt as he rambles about his big brother Henry pushing him down the slide when they were seven and ten, fracturing Ben’s right elbow in the process.

Before long, it’s midnight, and they’re both struggling, searching for words through their sleepiness, and Ben’s passed the point of shivering from the frigid early October air.

“Hey,” Leslie says quietly, long after her story about raccoons attacking Pawnee’s notorious mailbox on the corner of First and Pine in 1995. “We should get going. We have work tomorrow, and you’ll get sick if you stay out here too much longer without your jacket.”

Instead, though, Ben wraps her up even tighter, and he’s half asleep on a park bench in the middle of the night with her, and he’s so adorable. And he’s very very cuddly, apparently. And, this time, she has no trouble admitting that to herself.

“Beenn,” she whines, grinning as she pulls herself away to stand up. “C’mon. You need to sleep.” She extends her hand, and he grabs it. She tries to give the jacket back to him, but he refuses.

“Keep it until we get to your car,” is all he says, even though he’s shaking hard.

They walk the block to both of their vehicles in silence. Leslie stretches on her tiptoes to throw the fabric over his shoulders once they reach their destination, and she immediately misses the comfortable warmth.

“Thank you for dinner,” she whispers, stilling holding his hand.

“You’re welcome.” And his eyes are droopy, and his hair’s all messy, and his cheeks are tinged red from the wind biting at him all night. Leslie hugs him tightly, even though he’s quivering and stumbly, and they're both really tired.

“Goodnight, Benjamin.”

“Night, Lesliemin.”

Leslie grins the entire drive home.
Leslie offers some comfort to a distraught Ben after his TV interviews.

He’s humiliated and so exhausted and threw up in the shower twice before he could finally pull himself away from drowning in his sorrows. He’s an idiot, a big fucking idiot with a screwed up political past and no multimedia skills to get him out of this disaster. Tom said he would be with him one hundred percent of the way, and he guesses this is what he gets for believing in a tiny man with a huge mouth and an even huger imaginary dick taped to his forehead that screams, “Why is Ben Wyatt such an idiot? Asks everyone ever.”

Ben dry heaves into the toilet, towel still wrapped around his waist and wet hair dripping on to his chest, but he’s sure his nausea should have dissipated by now. It was just an extremely unforgiving, harsh reality that kicked dirt in his face; he can’t escape Ice Town. Human disaster. Human disaster? He may be the closest he’s ever been to full on human disaster mode right now, but he was just so nervous. After what everyone now knows happened, practically anything having to do with multimedia coverage sends him into a panicked frenzy that includes, but isn’t limited to, him widely discussing sexuality on live TV and slash or telling the world about the time Henry forced him to kiss a dog when he was in sixth grade.

He towels himself off before changing into a hoodie, sweatpants, and thick socks. His head swims in the pit of his stomach, and his vision blurs as he exits the bathroom. He wants to sleep this off and go back to his numbing, useless existence where very few people reminded him of his failures as an eighteen year old. Sure, he hears crap about it from time to time, but he hasn’t been this exploited since 1996 during his junior year of college when some douche bags wrote a rather unflattering article about him in their local newspaper with yet another ridiculously rhymy title.

Collapsing face first on to his pillow, Ben pulls the hood over his head and bundles himself in the sheets and comforter. Shivers wrack his body, and he tries to search for something else to think about. He wonders about baseball stats very briefly before today’s events pool up in the base of his skull, and, Goddammit, he’s such a fucking idiot. Jesus Christ. And, of course, this all happens in front of Leslie Knope, and he guesses he should metaphorically just kiss her goodbye.

Because it’s no secret that he has feelings for her, and there’s no denying it anymore. He falls asleep and wakes up the next morning thinking about her and her ideas, passions, quirks. It’s one of the first times he’s willing to admit to himself that she drives him absolutely nuts in the best way possible, and he screwed it up by being a much worse form of his normal, odd self. Yeah, he’s nerdy and a little awkward and can be a bit of a jerk, but good lord.

Tears almost swell up in the corners of his eyes, but he pushes the guilt and remorse and sadness and pity deep down inside when he hears a faint knock at his door. He pushes his rumpled, haggard body off of the bed and clears his throat when he opens the entrance, leaning heavily against the frame.

“Leslie?” he questions quietly. “What... What’re you doing here?” But it’s windy and chilly outside, so he quickly ushers her inside, but it’s not much better in here.

“I got really freaked out when you just disappeared earlier, and you weren’t answering your phone.”
Maybe that's because he smashed it to bits and pieces when he was contemplating driving far, far away from Pawnee.

Instead of assuming her normal position at the coffee table, Leslie takes a seat on the bed next to him, and Ben wants to pull the blankets over his head and fall asleep, but Leslie’s in his motel room, and somehow his heart feels a little lighter.

“Are you okay?” is all she asks next. And then, suddenly, she’s toed off her shoes and pushed him back against the pillows, and it almost reminds him of the first time he made out with Cindy Eckert. She lays her head on his chest, and Ben immediately holds her, placing his chin on top of her head.
“You don’t look so good. Is this about...”

“No... And yes, well, kinda. Today just... brought back a lot of memories,” he tells her softly.

He’s hoping she’ll excuse the rapid pounding of his heart because he’s light headed and turned on and wants to kiss her, even in the midst of his somewhat irrelevant crisis.

“Ice Town?”

He cringes. “God, don’t even say that.” He scrubs his hands down his face. “I can’t believe I ruined all of your publicity for the Harvest Festival.”

And, shit, he’s really really queasy again.

“Ben,” she says lightly. “Let’s forget about all of this, okay? Everything’s fine, and you didn’t ruin anything.”

But Ben knows he fucked up badly this time, and he wishes he could erase Ice Town from his memory or drop an anvil over his own head, which ever is more plausible. Leslie pushes herself up rather hastily, and, dammit, this whole fiasco messed with his chances, and he just wants to not exist at this point. Soon, though, she returns with a cool washcloth that she instantly plops on his forehead, grabs the remote, and turns on the old TV that’s nearly falling apart.

“Well calm down,” she tells him kindly, burying them both beneath the covers and snuggling up on his chest once again. Ben’s heart rate increases dramatically, and he fumbles with the cloth before Leslie swats at his left hand with her right. “Leave it alone, Benjamin.” But it’s sweet and laced with concern and niceness, and she’s not even acknowledging that he screwed up any chances of them being recognized or endorsed for the Harvest Festival.

This is Leslie’s dream.

Good lord, he fucked up Leslie’s dream.

Of course, Leslie has a plethora of dreams, but this is the biggest one right now.

He really is a human disaster.

“Leslie, I-“

“Ben, stop. You didn’t do anything wrong. Quite frankly, I don’t know why people still mention Partridge.” And he nearly breathes out a sigh of relief when she doesn’t refer to it as Ice Town this time. “It happened, like, a bajillion years ago.”

He nods and almost smiles at that. “I don’t get it either.”
Even though he’s still nauseous and pretty much done with the next two weeks until the Harvest Festival is over, he settles into the mattress, and Leslie stays in her claimed spot. They watch the news in silence until she insists they watch Cupcake Wars instead, which Ben really enjoys anyway. They bicker and banter over which contestant’s designs and flavor combinations are the best until there’s no talking at all, and Ben’s eyes close.

~

The washcloth is practically glued to his forehead by the time he regains consciousness, slowly and then suddenly all at once. Leslie. Shit. Leslie. He starts to sit up, pulse pounding and heart racing, before he realizes that she’s rolled over in the bed, covers tangled around her waist and hair splayed across this pillows. He notes through blurry vision that it’s just past three in the morning, and his TV plays static in the background, and he’s still viciously weary.

And Leslie’s lying next to him.

Leslie’s here. In his bed. Asleep.

With terribly shaky hands, he pulls the comforter up over her shoulders.

He tries not to overthink anything else.

And he wraps his arms around her, lulled back to sleep by the fruity scent of her hair.

~

“This wasn’t awkward for you, was it?” is the first thing out of Leslie’s mouth when she wakes up at five thirty.

Ben doesn’t exactly feel human yet and is in serious need of coffee, but he instantly shakes his head. Even though he’s wildly nervous and filled to the brim with anxiety, so much so that his head pounds, and he feels unbelievably sick, he wouldn’t change a single thing about the previous day’s events because Leslie’s here. He holds back the urge to brush a curl behind her ear so he can fully see her eyes. She’s all soft and warm and cuddly and exactly what he needs.

“No,” he tells her. “Was... Was it for you?”

She shakes her head too, sitting up a bit against the headboard. “No.” She’s still for a few moments, and Ben gulps and kind of wants to die because of how awful he still feels. He now wants to forget about his appearances on live television yesterday, and he thinks of showing up to work and being bombarded with inquiries, and he already knows how fucking embarrassing it is. Ben wants to never go back and stay snuggled up next to Leslie for the rest of his life. “But I’m really hungry. Any chance you could go for some breakfast?”

His stomach is unsettled, but Ben looks into her blue eyes, and he suddenly feels better. “JJ’s?” he offers.

“Mmm... Waffles.”

She’s such a wonderfully cute dork who spent the night with him, and Ben Wyatt knows now, more than ever, that he really likes Leslie Knope.
Indianapolis

Chapter Summary

Leslie invites Ben over to her house for the first time.

"Do you wanna come over?"

The words send shivers down her spine as she asks, but she does it anyway. It’s been an increasingly long, difficult day filled to the brim with getting amped up over Chris possibly cheating on Ann and then discovering that he broke up with her a week ago, and Ann just never realized it. Beautiful, wonderful, sun-kissed Ann Meredith Perkins is sad and depressed, and she insisted on taking the rest of the night for herself before Leslie could even suggest drunk karaoke or braiding each other’s hair while jamming to Sarah McLachlan.

And, dammit, it’s Friday night, and she’s nowhere near tired yet.

Ben’s slightly shaky from inhaling so much Tommy Fresh, and he’s panting, doubled over and gagging from the intense smell. He wipes his mouth on his jacket and stares straight up at her. “Me?” he asks, pointing to himself with his thumb, and she nods. “Now?”

"You don’t have to,” Leslie says immediately.

“No no no,” Ben tells her. “I... I want to. Yeah. Yeah, that’d be great.”

She almost takes his hand as if it were completely natural. Instead, though, they walk side by side to their cars, and Ben tries to fan the stench off of his body, earning a goofy grin from Leslie as she rolls her eyes. Ben follows behind her in his Saturn, and she watches all of the windows roll down. The brunette man sticks his head out like a gleeful dog on the highway, and she laughs even harder. Her heart beats wickedly into her chest as they approach her street.

Her only hope is that Ben understands the clutter and mess and doesn’t make a horrifyingly big deal about it like everyone else in her life. Sure, Ann’s been over dozens of times before, but she always forces her to clean up and organize and attempt to throw precious belongings away. She gulps, and they both exit their vehicles at the same time. Ben throws his jacket in the back, wrapping his arms around himself while she unlocks the door, trying to block some of the brisk October wind. Once inside, she toes off her shoes and glances to see if Ben’s still breathing.

He definitely looks shocked with a dropping jaw and wide eyes, but he doesn’t say a word, even though it’s more than clear enough that he’s panicked by the mess. Every time she’s been in his motel room, it’s super extremely tidy, and that’s just not who she is. Even in the midst of the mess, everything has a spot, and it belongs there to her. She likes things a bit too much, and her collection of Time Magazines and political bobble heads are important and classic and cry worthy.

Ben kicks off his shoes and places them right next to Leslie’s. “Um... I kinda stink,” he tells her, still actively fanning himself.

She sniffs. “Yeah, I guess you kinda do... Do you wanna take a shower?"

And she swears he nearly dies at that moment because his cheeks tinge pink, and he rubs the back of
his neck. “Well, um, no... That’s weird, right? And I don’t really have any clothes...”

"I’m sure I have something you can borrow."

He nods. “But, just so you know, leggings aren’t really my style.”

She smiles and laughs, and they walk down the hall to her bathroom that’s stocked full of newspaper clippings and stuffed raccoons. “What?” she asks when he glances at her. “They’re good décor.”

And Leslie almost kisses his cheek before he closes the door. Almost almost almost. She sighs and proceeds to rummage through her closet and dresser as she hears the water turn on, searching for something Ben can wear. The good thing is that he’s sort of small and a little on the scrawny side, so she unearths a plain blue t-shirt and black sweatpants that she’s pretty sure are for men. When she was in college, she found sleeping in these clothes were way more than comfortable.

A few minutes later, a dripping Ben Wyatt emerges with soaking wet hair and a maroon towel around his waist, smelling of her pineapple body wash and mango shampoo. “I don’t have any underwear for you,” she tells him. Ben simply nods, cheeks flushed, and grabs the clothes in Leslie’s hand before closing the door once again.

“How do I look?” he asks a minute later, motioning down to his new attire. Leslie chuckles and immediately hugs him for no other reason than wanting to do so. Both garments are oversized, much like they were on her when she used to wear them, but it’s a little funny, endearing, and cute to see Benji Wyatt fresh from the shower and nearly swallowed whole by old clothes.

“Lovely, Benjamin. Just lovely.”

"Good lord,” Ben says, getting a whiff of himself. “How do I still smell like Tommy Fresh?”

"It’s your boxers,” she tells him with a smile. “But you went from the dead, teriyaki fishy smell to marginally acceptable chicken.”

He cocks his head at her and gives a crooked grin. “Gee, thanks. And how do you know I’m even wearing underwear?”

And, somehow, they end up back in the kitchen, where Leslie brews two full cups of coffee while Ben goes to sit down at her kitchen island. Her Nightmare Before Christmas stuffed animals are in the chairs since it’s almost Halloween, and he chuckles quietly as he moves some to the table.

And, eventually, Ben’s drank more than his body weight in caffeine, and Leslie’s munching on her signature toffee surprise popcorn while they engage in a competitive game of Monopoly. It’s unusual to see him so carefree, relaxed, and not worried about what’s going on in the world, but it’s nice. Definitely amazing. Spectacular even. He smiles nonstop, and he grabs Leslie’s hand affectionately every now and then, rubbing it gently with his thumb.

"No way! You’re a cheater!” Leslie squeals as she hands over way more money than she ever dreamed possible, even for a game. Somehow, Ben owns all four railroads, and it’s really biting her in the ass, and she kind of wants to kick him for it. But he’s clearly excited because he nearly bounces out of his seat from joy and giddiness and probably a bit too much coffee.

"Sorry, Knope,” he says. “That’s just the way the cookie crumbles.”

She hits his shoulder playfully. “You’re such a nerd.”
A little while later, they’re relaxing on her living room floor. The Princess Bride plays in the background while Leslie and Ben sprawl out on their stomach with Uno cards in their hands. Leslie’s whipping his ass and boasting proudly every few seconds, and she laughs and laughs as Ben gets more into it the harder and faster he loses each round.

“It’s a game of chance, Leslie,” he tries to reason.

She shakes her head. “Uh uh. It’s a game for people who have skills; skills you clearly don’t have.”

Ben lays down a blue skip, and Leslie pouts. “I thought I didn’t have any skills?” he retorts.

Of course, this only lasts a few seconds because Leslie places a green seven on the top of the pile, and he instantly throws his cards down. “Ha! Sucka!” she screams.

"Cute. Very cute,” he quips, still smiling with no venom lacing his words.

And Leslie almost counters with, “You’re very cute,” but she doesn’t.

~

It’s nearly four in the morning when Leslie snuggles her face into Ben’s stomach as his legs lounge on her coffee table. He grabs the afghan from the back of the couch and drapes it over her, softly and quickly running his fingers through her hair before returning his attention back to recordings of Shark Tank on her DVR. She glances up at him, and he’s holding up his head with his hand, and she feels his heart beating slowly, calmly against her skin.

"Do you need a blanket?’’

Ben wiggles his bare toes, and she could die from his cuteness. Honestly. “No. ‘m okay.”

“Are you comfortable?’” she asks.

"Very.”

They fall asleep not long after that.

~

Leslie yawns. Her eyes pop open, and she’s all warm and toasty. She shifts, blinks, and gazes around the living room. Instead of her Ben pillow, there’s an actual pillow beneath her head, and she’s wrapped up cozily. Huh. But she immediately misses him and wonders if he left. It wouldn’t be the first time in her life for this to happen with a guy. But, really, it would be the first time for someone to abandon her even though they didn’t have sex.

Her senses are awoken even further when she smells something delicious coming from the kitchen. Leslie places her bare feet on the hardwood floor, grimacing at the fall chill settled in her house, and heads into her favorite room, the one where she makes and eats waffles. And, standing there in at the stove is Ben Wyatt, still in his borrowed pajamas and dark tufts of hair everywhere. He’s humming and flipping pancakes and adding in chocolate chips here and there.

"Morning,’’ she says quietly.

"Oh, hey,’’ he says, turning around. “Good morning.”

God, she wants to kiss him.
Wait... What? Did she just say that?

No. Wait. No.

That wasn’t her.

Ben places the pancakes on a plate, turning off the stove and instantly offering her some. She beams, and they sit at her kitchen table in silence. Ben stays away from coffee this morning, or afternoon she should say because it’s nearly two PM, and opts for water, which Leslie almost cringes at. Bleh. Water is just so bland and boring, and those are two characteristics that Ben definitely isn’t. He’s adorable with scruff and messy hair, and the blue shirt nearly hangs off his left shoulder. He yawns and grabs her hand, and she holds it purely out of instinct.

After a while, Ben finally speaks. “Um, so, uh... Do you want me to, y’know, go?”

“Go where?” Leslie instantly asks, nearly dropping her fork.

"Home?"

She shakes her head and then quickly reconsiders. “Well, not unless you want to...”

He reciprocates the clear “no” and adds, “I’ll need to go grab some clothes.”

Leslie nods. “And then we can watch Finding Nemo!”

“And then we can watch Finding Nemo,” Ben repeats.
Harvest Festival

Chapter Summary

The night before the Harvest Festival means a lot to Leslie, but she's more than willing to leave if it means helping Ben.

Chapter Notes

The opening dialogue was taken directly from 3x7 "Harvest Festival."

"I cannot catch a break," Leslie states, trying to tuck away, hide her panic. Her heart races as she scrubs a quick hand down the side of her face. This Harvest Festival is her baby, her love child; she even got Li’l Sebastian for the event, dammit. It’s the biggest move of her career, so she’s going all out, and she can’t help but wonder if her pushing and preparing are the reasons things are starting to fall apart. There’s a lump the size of the Empire State Building in her throat, and her nerves are so riled up that she has to sing show tunes in her head to stop from trembling.

“Yeah, well, I’ll help you out,” Ben says, following up behind her. “I’m gonna go.”

Her eyes widen. “What?”

"I think I’m jinxed or something."

And, crap on a cracker, does he sound broken hearted.

"What’re you talking about?” The words come out honest and riddled with concern. Ben’s skin pale and flushed, he’s clutching on to his clipboard a bit too roughly. He’s breathing shallowly, rapidly, and she can literally see his mind spinning unbelievably fast. If it weren’t for the fact that they’re in public and teetering on the brink of a disaster, she would definitely grab his hand.

"Look, you were totally fine until I got involved,” Ben tells her. “So I feel like I should probably just go, okay? I’m really sorry... I’m the curse, I think. So... I’m gonna... I’m gonna get out of here.” He doesn’t say anything else before he gently pushes past her and leaves the grounds in a rush, head down the entire brisk walk. She watches him remove the admittance pass hanging from around his neck, and she fights the urge to kick the dirt.

What the hell just happened?

Seriously.

What's going on?

He’s made so much progress, attempting to forget about Ice... Partridge, and, after his media appearances a couple weeks ago, his past was unexpectedly drugged up from the grave he buried it in long ago. Ben’s a great guy with a lot of heart and personality and a fantastic butt, and he’s alright face wise, but he beats himself up constantly, and that just kills Leslie.
But she’s not going to let this ruin his night again. Tomorrow is the opening of the Harvest Festival, and Ben is so pivotal and important, and his support is why Leslie’s standing here with her dreams in reach today. She’s going to get him to see outside of his mistakes and look at the bright side for once. He’s done so much to help her and this town, and, seriously, he just got Sweetums to donate fifteen extra cotton candy machines.

It's been a long road, and she can’t imagine the night before her dream without him.

The Harvest Festival means the world to her, but, honestly, Ben Wyatt means more.

~

She drives by his motel, but his car isn’t there. She checks JJ’s (and ignores her overwhelming desire to purchase some waffles for the road) and Food ‘n Stuff and Fred’s Wheels and Deals and Other Things, but there’s no sign of him. Pawnee is a magical fortress of a city with nooks and crannies and places to disappear, and sometimes it’s a little annoying.

Leslie sighs deeply as she pulls into Ramsett Park, remembering the numerous conversations they’ve shared together on the bench least inhabited by raccoons near the small lake. It’s a bit of a walk to the spot, but, sure enough, Ben’s sitting there, hunched over and staring blankly at the grass. Tension and anxiety roll off him in waves as she sits beside him.

He’s shivering harshly, and his hair is the opposite of neat and kempt, long since losing it’s lively posture due to him running his hands through it over and over again. Leslie carefully places her hand on his back, and he flinches slightly at the touch.

"Please don’t," he whispers.

And, holy cow, this doesn’t sound like the Ben she knows at all. He melts at the opportunity for their hands to touch and loves hugs and lets her sleep practically all over him. He’s never touchy at work, but getting to know him outside of their jobs tells her that Ben Wyatt is definitely a cuddly man. He puts up a massive bad ass, jerkish vibe in front of others, but she’s never actually met some so sweet and loving and caring as him before.

"What’s going on?" she asks.

And she doesn’t remove her hand.

He shakes his head. "Nothing... I'm fine. It's fine."

“Did that reporter say something to you? Because I will find a way to fire him, and, mark my words, I won’t rest until his career is in shambles.”

She doesn’t know how to feel about his past; she wishes he didn’t live in it on a consistent basis. Each time someone calls him Ice Clown hurts her because she knows it’s like a kick in the balls to Ben. To grow up with mistakes following, surrounding, and enclosing him has to be hell. He’s thirty-six and shouldn’t be having this many issues with what happened when he was eighteen.

"I'm tired, Leslie," is all he says.

She bites her lip. "Oh, well, do you want me to take you home?"

"Not like that," he quickly tells her. "And I don't have a home."

"Pawnee is your home, Ben."
He scoffs. "Yeah, right."

Leslie wraps her arm around him and tugs him to where his head rests against her shoulder. He squirms and almost fights the touch, but he stiffens instead and tries to control his breathing. She wishes she could offer more than just words to soothe him.

"What can I do?" she asks, grabbing his clammy hand. She plants a gentle kiss on top of his hair. "There’s gotta be something I can do."

"Teleporting me back twenty years ago would be nice," he mumbles.

She chuckles quietly. "I’m sorry for all of this. I wish people would stop bringing it up. I know how badly it hurts you."

He nods. "I just don’t want my entire life to be defined by mistakes I made as a teenager. If I could take it all back, I would."

"But, here’s the thing, Ben. You shouldn’t want to take it back."

This prompts Ben in removing his head from her shoulder. "What’re you talking about? I ruined my hometown. I caused insane debt and the unemployment rate to triple."

"Sure, you made some mistakes, but you were eighteen. You should be proud to have been a mayor at that age, to make real changes that weren’t all bad, but you’re still paying for it now when you’re nearing forty, and that’s not right."

He sighs. "I get it... I get, I get that it’s not ‘right,’ but it doesn’t matter. Reporters gobble up this kinda stuff, and I don’t want your successes at the Harvest Festival to be overshadowed by the fact that I’m a screw up."

Leslie immediately envelopes him a giant hug, squeezing him tightly and running one hand through his hair while the other rubs circles on his back. "Ben, there’s nothing wrong with you being here. I love having you here, and so does everyone else. You’re a good guy and a good leader. I wish that I could do something to make this easier for you, but you have to follow your heart. You’re doing great things here."

She feels him nod into her neck, and they sit like this for a few moments, enjoying each other’s touch. Leslie grins at him when he lets go, even though it’s painfully obvious that he’s on the verge of tears. Her only hope is that Ben will move on from this and come enjoy the festivities with them for the next week, even in the midst of running the show.

And, seriously, he’s fun and sweet, and he deserves this.

Ben stands up, offering his hand; she takes it, and they stroll through Ramsett Park together until they reach their cars.

"Thank you," he whispers before pulling her into another hug.

"You’re welcome," she says. "Wanna go get some waffles?"

He nods, smiling. "I’d like that."
Camping

Chapter Summary

How do you really think Leslie got seven full hours of sleep?

He's tossing and turning, and there's only one tiny ass pillow beneath his head. He's blanketless and freezing and shivering, and, good lord, all he smells is cat piss. It's a horrifyingly awful scenario in which Ben sleeps on the floor at a bed and breakfast purely inhabited by cats and owned by a massively creepy old lady who may or may not kill them all while they sleep.

Or try to sleep, that is.

"Dude, relax. The floor can't be that bad," Tom says rather harshly from above him.

Tom went to sleep wearing these ridiculous purple silky pajamas that made him glide off the bed more than once. Ben would've shared the space with him, but the idea of resting where two (or three or four) geezers screwed their daylights out during an evening full of ecstasy is less than appealing to him. He kind of likes Tom, but his head and back currently ache, and he doesn't have any fucking blankets.

He doesn't bother with a sarcastic comment, mainly because his brain is mushy, and his eyes flutter open and closed. Ben hoists himself off the hardwood floor, gasping when he accidentally steps on a cat's tail; said demon spawn cat bites the hell out of his ankle. "Shit!"

"For the hundredth time, I need at least nine hours of z's, man."

He wants to tell Tom to fuck off, but he exits the room instead. His nerves rattle, and he may be borderline hallucinating because it's been twenty-four hours since he slept. The rest of the inn is still, silent, and he tiptoes through the hallways, searching for a place to rest. He heads into the living room, and, nope, there are at least two dozen cats crowded around the couch, staring at him with haunting eyes through the darkness.

All of the other bedrooms are occupied, so he resorts to sitting in wooden chair near the kitchen.

It's early November, and the Harvest Festival is behind them, and he's exhausted from evenings upon nights of calculating costs and reassuring Leslie. And this little camping trip she forced them to go on would've been great if it weren't for the fact that he's not overly fond of the outdoors, and the power blew out in Tom's Sky Mall tent. He didn't have to come since he doesn't even work for the Parks Department.

But, he's here for Leslie.

"Ben!"

He quickly glances around, trying to locate where the voice came from. For whatever reason, he looks up while he's roaming the halls again. And, there she is; Leslie Knope is standing ten feet in the air, sealed away by a piece of glass from above a wooden door. "Jesus Christ! What're you doing?"
Because she looks cute, but also a tad bit on the crazy side with wild hair and wide eyes. And, also, she's a tiny fireball with an abundance of energy who's twice his size at the moment.

"I need you to let me out," she tells him.

"Why? Are you locked in?"

She nods. "Yes! Ron did this to me! And then he left! Why would he do this, Ben?"

His eyebrows furrow, but he sort of wants to see Leslie for real, not just like this, so he shrugs. Normally, he's a bit more concerned as to why these situations occur in the first place, but he trusts Ron to an extent, and he has Leslie's best interests in mind. And he also believes this pertains to a certain Leslie Knope's inability to come up with another killer idea.

Luckily, there's no sign of Ron, and there's nothing blocking the door, so all Ben has to do is twist the knob. Okay, magic. Magic must exist because he has no idea how Ron managed to lock the room from the inside... or something. At either rate, though, Ben's heart flutters when Leslie embraces him, giving him a quick kiss on the neck.

"Whoa," he says, briefly running his fingers through her hair. "Are you alright?"

"I'm just... Mhmph, I've never been this mad at Ron before!"

"Leslie, what happened?" Ben questions. "Why did he lock you in here?"

She shakes her head. "I'm done, Ben. Toast. I'll never come up with idea as long as I live. And my idea juicer is old and shriveled up and just aw-"

"Slow down," he soothes. "Come here." He takes a seat on her still made bed, patting the spot next to him. Leslie reciprocates, cuddling her head on to his shoulder and entwining their hands together. She's trembling, so he wraps his arm around her shoulders, and his heart rate increases dramatically as his mind spins. Leslie's nervous and anxious and wants to prove to the world that she still has what it takes, but Ben knows she will always have it.

"What if I never come up with something as great as the Harvest Festival again?" she questions. "I mean, Pawnee's barely back on her feet, and I need to make her great again."

"Pawnee's never stopped being great," he tells her.

But Pawnee is great because of Leslie Knope; he just leaves that part out.

She shrugs, sniffling. "No one's gonna remember the Harvest Festival if I don't come up with something else. And then Pawnee will spiral into a depression, and we'll skyrocket to number one on the most obese cities in America list."

"Leslie, none of that is going to happen. You'll think of an idea that will knock Pawnee's socks off, and no one will ever forget it."

"I should just retire now while I'm ahead and sell otters for a living."

"I think that may be a little-" He pauses. "Wait. What about otters?"

She shakes her head, scrunching her cute nose. "It's not important."

Ben lies down on his back, gently pulling Leslie with him. She ends up on her side, and he spoons up behind her, nuzzling his nose into her hair. "You're doing everything right," he whispers. "Don't
worry about ideas or mistakes or messing up. You're Leslie Knope, and you always find a way. And I know you'll think of something wonderful."

It takes a bit, but she finally relaxes, and Ben lightly rubs her side. They're cuddling in the middle of this foreign bed, but Leslie's touch comforts him in ways unimaginable, and he can only hope he's helping in some way too. Soon enough, she's rolled over, her forehead against Ben's thumping chest, and he kisses the top of her head.

He chuckles quietly when she begins to snore.

"This is so amazing!" Leslie shouts in excitement.

Ben smiles, even though it's not even five thirty yet, and there's a blinding headache nipping at the base of his skull.

He's bundled beneath the exceptionally warm, oddly terrifying comforter at this awful bed and breakfast, curled up on his side while Leslie sits up against the headboard. They didn't have any paper, so she's scribbling ideas all over a doily, and Ben's grinning brightly at her giddiness. She punched (yes punched) him awake almost an hour ago, and, while there's a growing bruise on his upper arm, he wouldn't have it any other way.

He holds his breath and knows that this is only temporary.

"I'm literally bursting at the seems with possibilities, Ben! Isn't this great?"

He nods. "It really is."

She puts down the pen she stole from between a cat's clenched teeth and sinks beside him in the bed. Leslie invites herself inside his cocoon and wraps her arms around him. "We did it!" she half-shrieks, holding on tightly. "Thank you." And that comes out considerably calmer, and all Ben can do is hug her some more before the inevitable happens. They have to go to work, and Leslie will explain these awesome ideas to him and Chris, and they'll have to pretend this didn't occur.

"No need to thank me," he says quietly against her skin.

"Is it..." Leslie starts, her breathing almost quickening. "Is it weird to, y'know, just stay like this?... Only for a few more minutes, of course."

Ben shakes his head. "Not at all."

He presses their bodies closer together, and, for the first time, panic doesn't settle in when she kisses beneath his chin.
Andy and April's Fancy Party

Chapter Summary

Following the wedding, Leslie invites Ben over to look at the stars, and Ben panics.

“So, how did you like your first official evening living in Pawnee?”

They’re strolling alongside each other, and Ben’s shivering from both the freezing weather and because Leslie keeps brushing up against him. His cheeks flush, and he rubs the back of his neck with his gloved hand. “It was... great,” he says, almost too hesitantly. This... Whatever this is between him and Leslie drives him absolutely wild in the best ways possible, but it’s so hard.

Chris doesn’t know that he’s slowly falling madly, head over heels in love with Leslie Knope, and he can never figure it out. They would both get fired in disgrace, and Ben would be left with nothing; Leslie wouldn’t want anything to do with him afterward. He can’t... Sometimes, it’s almost too emotionally stressful for him to see her, touch her, be around her.

He struggles to breathe, but then she takes his hand, and everything’s alright again. “Something’s eating at you.”

Ben shrugs. “It’s, um, it’s nothing. Where... Where are we going?”

“To my house,” Leslie says nonchalantly as if nothing’s wrong with that.

Of course, there’s nothing actually wrong with that, but still. They can’t get caught. And he’s been spending more and more time with her and enjoying every single tiny, miniscule second of it. She came to his motel room two nights ago, where they shared a tub of pistachio ice cream while watching 20/20 beneath his blankets, and she fell asleep with her head on his shoulder, spoon still in hand. If there’s anything he’s learned about her, it’s that she’s wound up and hyper and extremely lovable, but she tends to conk out and sleep hard when he’s around her.

He likes to think that’s a good thing, like maybe his mellow, quieter nature soothes out her wild side. Like they’re really the perfect team.

After a long night of trying to convince April not to marry Andy, Leslie’s still slightly frazzled and a little worse for wear (not that anyone could ever tell), and Ben wants to scoop her off her feet and cuddle her until she falls fast asleep, relishing her touch and her warm breath on his neck.

“We should take our own cars,” she points out.

And, right, that again.

He nods. “Yeah. That’d be smart.”

He gets into his Saturn alone and drives the seven and a half minutes to her house with his heart pumping and his blood running and each fiber of his existence screaming for him to get out now. He should go... Just go... And pretend this never happened. Pretend that Leslie Knope isn’t the woman of his dreams. Pretend that he doesn’t fall more in love with her each passing minute.
It’d be easy, but, for the first time in his life, Ben doesn’t want easy.

He wants Leslie.

Ben clutches his steering wheel tightly as she races over to his car the instant she’s parked in her driveway. “I just came up with a fabulous plan!” Her curly blond hair peaks out from beneath her purple bobble hat, and a lump forms in Ben’s throat, and he wants her so badly.

And not even in a sexual way.

Well, of course, he definitely, absolutely wants her in that way.

She hurries him inside, and his breathing’s too ragged, and he’s lightheaded and stumbly and not exactly feeling like himself. He shuffles awkwardly in her foyer while she runs around her cluttered, oddly adorable house. The almost winter chill settles into his bones, and he bites his lower lip, but he smiles when he sees her with three thick blankets piled in her hands.

“Let’s go look at the stars!”

He nods and grins again and follows her out to the backyard. Because, yeah, he’s freezing and a little disoriented, but Leslie’s out here. Once they’re outside, she sits down on a wooden swing he never noticed the first time he was here, a navy blue quilt wrapped around her shoulders. She offers him the plaid one, and he mimics her before taking a seat. She spreads the last blanket over both of their laps and curls up on him, head on his shoulder.

Good lord. He’s at her house. Again.

In her backyard.

Beneath yet another blanket with her.

Staring into the darkened winter sky together.

Ben swallows harshly, and Leslie instinctively kisses his cheek.

“Do you want to tell me what’s bothering you?” she asks so quietly he barely hears her.

Crap. Crap crap crap.

Ben stiffens, and sweat soaks his forehead, and he wills his heart to stop beating so rapidly.

“Nothing,” is all he manages to squeak out, terrified by what could come out next.

He imagines her frowning. “You know you can tell me, right?”

Tell her what? Tell her that he’s in love with her? Tell her that he’s never felt this way about another person before? Tell her that he’s willing to leave everything behind if it meant having her in his life? And, trust him, he gets it; they’re good friends, and Leslie will always be here for him. But he doesn’t want that. See, Ben Wyatt wants someone he’s not supposed to have, and that never really adds up.

Ben’s a numbers guy, has been his entire life. He’s logical and decisive and has reasons and explanations for what he does the things he does. But, with Leslie, everything goes straight out the window. He’s so ridiculously in love with her and so immensely terrified by admitting that to himself. He’s been trying to hide it for a while now.
He wants to tell her; he really does. But it will compromise their friendship, and Chris will find out, and Leslie will get fired, and Ben will be shipped away to a new city. Maybe he should go. Maybe he actually should. Maybe he’ll call up his old boss tomorrow morning and tell him that he made a mistake. He should go to Bedford or Greencastle or Decatur. Anywhere to get away from his emotions and feelings and know that, eventually, he’ll be a drowned rat.

“Are you cold?” she asks eventually, after a while of him not responding. “Ben, you’re shaking.” And she rubs her hands up and down his arms, the repetitive motion not doing much in the way of calming him because he’s incredibly nauseous, and, good lord, does he hate this.

He’s in love with her.

He’s in love with Leslie Knope.

Oh God.

And he tries to even out his breathing and tell his body to quit quivering, but nothing happens until she’s ushering him inside. While staggering on freezing, numb feet, Ben seizes the opportunity to let go of her hold for a second, only missing the warmth and happiness the moment he stops touching her. And he knows he can’t let go; he just can’t.

Soon, they’re on her couch, and his head is pillowed in her lap, and he’s wrapped up in so many blankets. And, Jesus, he’s going to have to find a way to explain this to her, and should he say it? Should he tell her? What should he do? If anything, he figures sitting in silence may help.

Which, actually, is what they end up doing. Leslie runs her hands through his hair, and he alternates between panicking at and enjoying the comforting touch. He knows he should do or say something, but his tongue is glued to the roof of his mouth, and he finds his train of thought slowing down before coming to a grinding halt.

~

He’s still cold when he comes to.

“Good morning,” Leslie says softly.

But she, surprisingly, doesn’t ask any immediate questions about what happened last night.

Or, wait, is it still nighttime?

Nope, she said morning.

His stomach swims, and his head spins, and he’s in way way too deep. But, still, he smiles when Leslie kneels down beside him and brushes his hair off his forehead. His muscles ache, and he’s so horrifyingly confused.

“Please tell me you’re okay,” is all she says next.

She sits down on the floor and takes his hand from inside the blankets.

He nods, rather unconvincingly, he must add. “I’m alright. Promise.”

Except nothing about this is okay. Not even in the slightest.

But, right now, it doesn’t exactly matter because Leslie’s a bit too concerned for his liking, and he wants to rewind back to last night and just look at the stars with her. He wants to rewind back to one
of their brainstorming sessions or dinners or movie nights. Maybe he should rewind back to before he met her. But, seriously, that’d be the biggest fuck up of his entire life, even worse than Ice Town, because he really loves Leslie Knope.

And he wants to be with her.

But he can’t.

“I’m here for you, Ben,” she tells him quietly. “Always remember that.”

He gulps and nods and wants nothing more than to kiss her passionately and confess what he’s feeling.

She stands and smiles and pecks him softly on the cheek and heads into the kitchen.
Soulmates

Chapter Summary

Their relationship is complicated, and Leslie can't help but notice that Ben's becoming distant.

“Okay, we’ve got to stop meeting like this.”

His hair damp and flat against his forehead, this rumpled version of Ben Wyatt almost looks like he just saw a ghost. Casper's a cute ghost, so maybe he's thinking about that, but Leslie's a non-ghostular woman, and she probably, maybe shouldn't find this semi flattering, especially since he's gulping and clenching and unclenching the handles of his shopping cart with obviously shaky hands. Come to think of it, he's been a little off around her for a while now, especially since he officially moved to Pawnee. Sure, he may still live in a motel, but he's at City Hall everyday, and that's more than kind of nice.

Except she can’t figure out if she did something wrong. After all of their wonderful conversations, she feels like she’s gotten to know the real Ben, who is a nerdy, anxious, funny, sweet, caring man that she likes a lot. They're best buds... Or perhaps they're a bit more than that. It's early March, spring is upon them, but their relationship has been strange and icy for at least a month.

Not that this Ben’s a jerk or anything; he’s definitely several notches below Mean Ben.

“Oh, hey,” he says, giving her a crooked grin that drives her crazy, but it’s somewhat forced.

Still, though, she wants to make out with his face.

And he's acting like they didn't just have a fantastic talk at the wildflower mural on the second floor a few mere hours ago. They chatted for a long time, sharing potato chips, and Ben let her take a few sips of his Coke. She had left in a hurry to catch up with Ann so they could discuss her dating situation. But she isn't interested in anyone else because what she has with Ben seems to be working.

Or so she thought.

Now, she’s not sure where they stand.

Leslie gazes over the items in his cart, as if to assess a read on him. There's a carton of orange juice, loaf of whole wheat bread, deli meat, toilet paper, a copy of "A Dance with Dragons" (whatever the hell that is), and toothpaste. Yeesh. Compared to her seven candy bars, gallon of Sweetums famous chocolate milk, container of double fudge brownie ice cream, and assortment of NutriYum snacks, she almost feels sad for him.

He's a joy to be around and makes sarcastic, crude comments that are typically hilarious, especially when they're only uttered to her. And he knows exactly what to say to make her feel better in crappy situations. Lately, they've been off kilter, and, dammit, Ben didn't even want to go on a legitimate date with her earlier today. It's time to figure out what's going on. If she's honest, Ben makes her tingly all over in all the right places, and all she wants to do is be with him.

“There’s not a single piece of junk food in your cart, Wyatt,” she points out.
He shrugs, but then leans over to glance in hers. “Um, seven candy bars? Leslie, please tell me this isn’t your grocery shopping for the month.”

Screw him, jokingly of course. But, for realskies, she would tap that.

Gross, when did she start talking to herself like Donna talks out loud?

“Well, dearest Benjamin, this hath be what I’m consuming for tomorrow. And possibly until Tuesday.”

He chuckles quietly, and they sort of just end up coasting down the aisles together. Ben doesn’t do a whole lot of talking, which is okay because she’s good at making things up on the spot thanks to a few improv classes she took after grad school. She makes jokes about bananas and cucumbers, and he only laughs a few times before she notices the sad glimmer in his eyes and that he looks like he’s in more pain than anything.

But she doesn’t say anything else as they approach the check out. He lets her get the junk food in her cart and suspiciously doesn’t add apples or celery and carrots into the mix. He doesn’t criticize what’s going into her body, and he doesn’t tell her that it’s incredibly bad for her. Those things are what she expects, almost yearns to hear from Ben, but he stays silent and pays for his groceries.

“Ben,” she says after they’re outside.

He zips up his coat and grabs his plastic bags from the cart. “Leslie.”

“I...”

And she stops.

Because this really fricking hurts. And she wants to take him back to her place and jump his skinny bones, but she can’t. And, seriously, her feelings aren’t just sexual. She misses Ben like crazy, and she’s woken up in the middle of the night on more than one occasion wishing his strong arms were wrapped around her. It doesn’t matter that he snores kind of loudly or that he’s neat where she’s messy or that fate seems to be dragging them apart more than holding them together.

Goddammit, they’re not even a couple.

They’re not dating.

So why does she feel this way about him?

"What's up?" Ben asks suddenly. And, holy cow triplets, he gently touches her forearm, and she snaps back into reality. "You seem... preoccupied."

She shakes her head. “I’m great. Everything is fiddly dandy... as always.”

It’s now spitting snow outside, and Ben’s cheeks are bright red, and she’s shivering. “Do you wanna... come over?” he questions quietly. “We could watch a movie or something.”

She instantly nods. “I’d like that.”

~

Ben’s motel room, as usual, is seemingly below freezing, and Leslie bites her lip the second she notices that it’s probably warmer outside. The temperature soaks into her skin, and she doesn’t even want to take her coat off. But Ben, in his soft sweater and slightly tattered blue jeans with lazy,
messy hair, unmakes his bed and holds back the covers for her. He doesn't say a word as he settles in beside her, changing the TV to the Food Network, and her stomach growls.

“Should’ve brought your seven candy bars in here,” he mumbles cutely, quivering from beside her.

Leslie has yet to shed her bobble hat, and she almost pauses to hold her breath when Ben's wool sock clad foot accidentally brushes against her leg. The new comforter he recently bought makes the room seem warmer, but she can't help but notice that he's keeping his distance, and that's definitely not like him. She takes it upon herself to snuggle her face into his shoulder, but he squirms instead.

“Um, I'm not sure we should be... doing that.”

She raises her eyebrows. “It's no weirder than being under the covers together, Ben.”

He nods, sighing and scrubbing a hand down his stubbly cheeks. “I know. This is just kinda...” He swallows, “hard.”

Trust her, she knows the feeling. Ben means a lot to her, but Chris is very strict about his no dating policy, and it's not like either of them are extremely comfortable with breaking the rules. Nope, Leslie follows the rules completely and absolutely; she always has and always will. Except maybe, slightly, sort of when it comes to Ben. Because, before she knows it, his arm's wrapped around her, and he's closed the gap between them.

“I thought –“

He shrugs. “... I don’t wanna lose you, Leslie,” he whispers.

She takes his hand from beneath the covers. “You won’t.”

Magically, it’s as if that resolves everything because she tentatively places her head on his shoulder again, and he kisses her hair.

Leslie removes her hat, and they watch TV and hold hands.

Nothing’s wrong.

In Leslie Knope’s book, this is entirely, totally right.
“Hey, roomie!” Andy shouts, clasping Ben very hard on the back, adding to his recently growing mirage of black and blue bruises.

And, also, it’s no big deal, but he kind of makes Ben spill his scalding hot coffee on his shirt.

“So, I was thinking that maybe you could, y’know, pay rent, like a few months in advance because well, me and April sort of, um –“

Ben’s eyes widen. “You guys were in my room again, weren’t you?”

“Just for, like, a split second.”

Dammit.

“And what’d you break this time?”

Andy shrugs nonchalantly. “A few of those weird action figure thingies... But I swear it wasn’t our fault. The rats ate them.”

Ben scrubs a hand down his face. “We don’t have rats.”

His roommate laughs and nods. “Yep, nope, we don’t have rats.”

Oh, good lord.

This is what he gets for deciding to live in Pawnee?

Is it too late to take it back?

Ben stares at dusty floor as he walks down the hallway, ignoring Andy’s pleas for more money, padfolio in hand and on his way to a morning meeting. Blech, is that... gum on the tips of his shoes? He sighs loudly and sits down on the bench. He’s a few minutes early, but Chris is driving him up the wall with new assignments, and April’s been surprisingly very creepy today (hey, voodoo dolls scare him), and he just needs a few moments to himself.

He puts his head in his hands and nearly dozes off. Sure, he may have gotten a brand new bed with a
three inch thick foam topper, but Andy and April are extreme night owls who play video games, scream loudly at the TV, and blare music until the sun comes up. It’s only been three days since he moved in, and, while this place isn’t freezing and doesn’t have bed bugs, he’s wondering if it’s really wise to stay there. Seriously, he’s gotten less than five hours of sleep, and his nose is starting to run, and he’s a little more than positive that he’s chugging along on empty.

“Ben!”

Oh, please, no.

But he glances up and sees Leslie, and he immediately smiles. She plops down beside him on the bench. “Hi,” he says quietly. He wants nothing more than to reach for her hand and tuck that piece of adorably loose hair behind her ear, but, seriously, he swears he’s visibly seeing sounds. “How’s the day treating you?”

“Great!” she exclaims, and he jumps a bit. “The new after school program is up and running, and the Parks Department’s having a bake sale tomorrow! I’m staying up all night to make brookies! That’s cookies and brownies mixed together, Ben. Together!”

He nods and smushes his face in his palm again. “Don’t you stay up all night anyway?”

“True, but this is so much better! And we’ve...” She trails off, and Ben doesn’t bother looking to his side. “Whoa, you look rough. Are you okay?”

“Mhmmmm... Little tired.”

“When’s the last time you slept?”

He shrugs, but he knows the answer, and it was three hundred thousand decades ago.

Huh.

He’s not usually the type to exaggerate like that.

“Is it that bad? Living with April and Andy?”

Oh, good lord, yes.

“Um, no. It’s not terrible. Just trying to get used to their schedule still.”

She nods and pats him gently on the back before standing up, and he tries hard not to flinch because that’s where April slashed the shit out of him with a horrifyingly painful, possibly a bit too accurate plastic sword. “Your meeting’s starting.”

~

By five PM, Ben’s shaking slightly, and his left nostril is entirely clogged. Fuck. He really hates not sleeping because this is what happens to him. Maybe he should actually consider moving out? But he’s already paid rent up through July, and he knows there’s no way in Hell he’s getting that money back. It’s been spent on a new Xbox 360, more Frisbees to eat off of, a monstrous fish tank with, get this, no fish, and a year’s worth supply of Captain Crunch, on top of other useless expenses he’s sure no one in the history of everything has ever needed.

He should be thankful to be going home, but he almost wishes he were going back to the motel instead.
Ben bundles himself in his coat, throws on a black beanie since Pawnee’s decided to, once again, snow during the very first days of spring, and trudges to his car. It’s the first time in a long while that he’s getting off when he’s supposed to, but this living situation sucks so much that he’s going nuts. Leslie was still plucking away at the computer in her office, and he doubts she would want to hang out with him when she’s clearly heavily enticed with her work.

So, he drives home in shitty weather, alternating between cursing fluently and rubbing his achy neck. And, of course, it’s not a party until he opens the front door and is nearly fucking blinded in the process. “What?” is all he manages to get out after something round and flying and green smacks way too hard into his cheek. He holds a hand to the area and is only mildly shocked pull it away to find it blood. “What’s happening?”

However, he gets the message pretty quickly when he takes a good look at April and Andy throwing Frisbees in the house. “Oops. Sorry, dude,” Andy apologizes before throwing a yellow disc at his wife, who just barely catches it; otherwise, it most likely would’ve hit Ben again.

And he has no true words at this point, and there’s not a trace of anger left in his entire body, so he walks to his room, where he closes the door and immediately flops face first on to his bed. Of course, he forgets that his face is kind of bleeding, so crimson drips on the bedspread. Motherfucker. He places a tissue beneath the cut and chooses to ignore it because he’s not sure how much longer his brain will allow him to formulate thoughts.

He just needs to sleep.

~

“Ben.”

He grumbles awake, smacking his lips, and letting the soreness of his body hit him all at once like a freight train. He still can’t breathe out of one of his nostrils, and son of a bitch, why does his face hurt? He palpates beneath his right eye to find a Kleenex stuck over what appears to be a wound, and, shit, did he really just forget about the Frisbee incident?

Ben shifts and rolls on to his side and nearly craps out a brick when he spies Leslie hovering over him. “Leslie?” he questions. “What’re you doing here?”

Does she need him to hide another provocative, nude painting of her?

Because this answer is one hundred thousand percent yes, if so.

She ignores the inquiry, sitting down on the bed beside him. She softly removes the sticky tissue from his cheek and grimaces. He wants to tell her that it’s nothing, and there’s barely even a scratch, but his throat hurts, and laying here in silence seems a lot more appealing. Only, it isn’t quite silent because Andy and April must’ve broke yet another glass.

“I’m guessing this is what it’s always like?”

He nods. “Usually it’s louder.”

Somehow, there’s antibiotic ointment and then a Band-Aid applied to the afflicted area, and Leslie’s snuggled up around him, spooning him and carding her fingers through his hair. They’re in the middle of his bed, and he’s trembling from the cold, but she’s so warm and welcoming and cuddly and awesome, and he just wants to sleep beneath her skin.

And, of course, his mind decides to shut down, and his eyes decide to close as soon as Leslie gets
He’s buried beneath his plaid comforter, and there’s something heavy on his back. He’s almost too content to move, but he stretches and rolls into the familiar, soothing solidness beside him. A slight bubble of panic bursts in his mind when he realizes that Leslie’s still here, and she never left, and he can’t ever actually be with her, but she’s right next to him in his bed.

“Hey, sleeping beauty,” she whispers. And she brushes his bangs off his damp forehead. “Having roommates really isn’t easy for you, is it?”

Ben chuckles. “No. Guess not.”

“I told April and Andy to keep it down for a bit, so they went to a bar.”

Ew, gross. He can’t even imagine putting up with his sloshed roommates right now.

He snuggles his face into her neck, but it doesn’t last long because he’s still sort of snotty and super sleepy. “Thanks, Leslie,” he mumbles sincerely.

Ben’s so tired that he doesn’t bother with the anxiety or the wondering what’s going to happen next between them.

He’ll just enjoy Leslie being wrapped around him.

Maybe April and Andy aren’t such bad roommates.

Wait, no. He’s nuts.

They’re definitely terrible roommates.

But having Leslie here makes everything, even this, better.
Eagleton

Chapter Summary

Ben surprises Leslie after a bad day.

Stupid fucking Eagleton.

Leslie could just punch Lindsay in her fricking mouth and watch her choke to death on her own slimy tongue. Or she could be attacked by sharks! Or killer bees... Where could she find killer bees? Maybe Jack Lansfield from Northern Pawnee knows someone.

She sighs and relaxes as best as she can on her couch, binder in lap and a cup full or Extra Sugar Cola Delight on the coffee table. It's two in the morning, she can hardly see straight because she's so frigging pissed off, and she can't believe she used to be best friends with such a horrid witch woman. Outside, a cool spring breeze blows and jingles her lovely, festive decorations, but, inside her heart, she feels terrible and shriveled up and useless.

She may come up with ideas at an alarming rate and practically be a human work mule, but she's nothing like those stupid mother truckers from Eagleton. And she thought that she could be pals with Lindsay again, but time and distance and the fact that she's an actual crazy person stood in her way. She wanted to make amends and put her best foot forward.

Don't get her wrong; the dinner was pleasant at first, but Lindsay kept picking and digging at Pawnee, and Leslie lost it rather fast. And that's not her fault because Pawnee is amazing and wonderful, and no one, especially a rich snob from Eagleton, should insult the greatest city in America, possibly the world. She tried to ignore it and be the bigger person, but she ultimately shoved a piece of pie down Lindsay's idiotic shirt and squirted caramel sauce in her hair, peacefully and calmly telling her to cram it up her pretentious, shallow butt.

Only, it wasn't exactly peacefully or calmly.

But that's just a minor detail.

The point is that Eagleton drools and sucks and is the scum town of the earth.

She scribbles on a mostly blank sheet of paper, trying to coax her mind into slowing down. She clenches her jaw. It's nights like these that really make her wish she had an established sleeping schedule because she could be resting and formulating dream ideas and cursing that dumb place mentally, but she's still here in her living room.

Leslie jumps, heart racing when the doorbell rings.

Ooh, she hopes it's June! She usually delivers leftover chocolates this late at night.

Except that's normally on Tuesdays, and it's now very early Saturday.

And her jaw nearly drops to the floor, and her eyes widen when she finds Ben Wyatt staring back at her, grinning softly. Wait, what's he doing here? It's two AM. He should be dead asleep at April and Andy's...
Shoot. That's right.

Ben hasn't had much luck in the slumber department since moving in with them, but he's here, and she immediately lets him in, encircling him in a huge hug the second she can. She feels so so so so many things for Ben, and he makes her happy and tingly and just genuinely smiley when he's around.

"Well, this is a nice surprise!" she squeals.

Ben shrugs. "Um, I hope you don't mind, but-" And then he motions down to the plastic grocery bags in his left hand.

She peeks inside, noting the chocolate and ice cream... And is that whipped cream?! And she can't help but hug him even more, giving him a quick, soft kiss on his neck. "Nonsense! You're always welcome here, Ben. And we can play charades!"

But she gets a glimpse of the oversized hoodie and flannel pajama pants and those exhausted, deep brown eyes. And she knows he's more than just a bit worn out these days due to the lack of sleep, but him being here makes her want to forget about stupid Eagleton instead of dwell on it anymore. And, honestly, she should probably lay down too.

"I think you need more than two people to play charades," Ben points out. And then he adds, "You seemed really upset earlier. Do you wanna talk about it?"

And, for realskies, she could cry.

Because Ben's thoughtful and sweet and considerate, and he came over at two in the morning with goodies, and his cheeks are tinged pink, and he seems so unbelievably drowsy, and his messy hair is such a marvelous sight. But he's here, and he wants to make her feel better.

He toes off his shoes, and they head into her kitchen to unpack the treats. There's vanilla ice cream, sprinkles, a jar of maraschino cherries, gummy bears, candy necklaces, chocolate chips, and an assortment of candy bars. And, obviously she can't forget the two cans of whipped cream. She smiles so insanely brightly that she thinks she might blow a gasket.

"Thank you for this, Ben," she tells him seriously and much much much calmer than what she anticipated. Tears swell in the corners of her eyes.

"Hey," he says softly, wrapping her up in his strong, solid arms. "I'm sorry you had a rough day."

They hold each other for a while, and Leslie would've assumed Ben fell asleep if it weren't for the repetitive, slight motion of his thumb moving in circles on her back.

"Do you wanna talk about it?" he asks again quietly.

She shakes her head against his chest. "I... I just wanna forget about it."

"How about a sundae? Would a sundae help you feel better?"

Leslie pulls apart from him, but is sure to keep her hands on both his forearms. "Sundaes make everything better."

And so does Ben Wyatt.
Thankfully, it's Saturday because it's five thirty in the morning. They've been laughing and throwing food at each other and relaxing while watching movies and breaking out the Uno cards again.

But it's extremely late, or early depending on how she looks at it, and Ben's teetering on the edge of delirium, and Leslie has to admit that even she's a little tired herself. He's curled in a ball at the opposite end of the couch, hood up and covering half his face, cheek smushed into a throw pillow. He plays footsie with her every now and then.

Up until a few minutes ago, he was chatting about the logistics of Star Wars actually being real.

His breathing is deep, and Leslie switches her attention from Shark Tank to the man who managed to turn such a crappy experience into something so lovely and amazing and wonderful for her. There are melted bowls of ice cream on her coffee table, and her belly is full, and she's nice and toasty because of the quilt Ben draped over her earlier.

She can't remember the last time she was this happy.

"Ben," she whispers, nudging him lightly with her foot.

"Hmmm..."

"Let's go to bed."

The statement sends a jolt of electricity through her, and her heart beats rapidly. Oh God. She just invited Ben to lay down with her. In her bed. At her house. And it's five thirty AM, and he's almost asleep and so extremely cute. She nearly verbally changes her mind until he sits up slowly.

"Are you... um... sure about that?" The words come out slow and slurred.

She nods. "Of course. It's not weird, is it?"

He shakes his head. "Uh, maybe. No... No, I don't think so."

They hold hands during the stumble to her bedroom, and he grumbles when he stubs his toe on a replica of Ramsett Park. He's a bit more awake with wider eyes and a nervous expression plastered on his handsome face.

"It's okay, Ben. We're just sleeping. Nothing we haven't done before."

He nods, gulping. "Okay."

Even as she pulls the covers back after moving her sea of binders and stuffed animals, she can't help but think about how badly she wants to jump his bones. She bites her bottom lip and sighs. She wants so much more than platonic hand holding and kisses not on the lips and cuddling. Leslie needs Ben in her life, and she's not sure she can handle only being friends with him anymore.

Plus, seriously, they both know they're not "just friends."

She pats the mattress once she's sitting, and he plops down next to her. The sun's already starting to rise, and they're both going to bed ridiculous late/early. Ben cuddles his face into her collarbone; she kisses his hair. And he entwines their fingers together before Leslie rolls on her side.

"Night," Ben mumbles.

His breath is warm against her neck, and she shivers.
"Goodnight, Ben."
The Fight

Chapter Summary

Leslie finds out Ben tried to fix her and Ann after their fight.

Being this hungover sucks ass.
Like for real ass.
And it should definitely be illegal.
Why does alcohol even exist?

She swipes a hand over her slightly sweaty forehead. It's early April, and the day is so perfect and sunny. There isn't a single cloud in the sky, and she should want to have a picnic in her backyard. But the smoldering sun makes her squint and her head want to explode all over the place. The air is almost too nice; it stifles her aching lungs, and, jeez, she kind of feels barfy again.

Leslie wants to go home, lie down with a bottle of Sprite in her grasp. But that's hard to do when her phone rings, and she's already struggling enough to drive as it is.

"You need to marry him," is the first thing she hears. "Or doink him or something."

"Um..."

This is the first time she actually has ever been speechless in her life.

Is it from the hangover or from whatever the hell Ann's going on about?

"Ben," she says, and her heart sinks fifty thousand feet to her stomach. "He came over and told me that me and you are best friends and that we love each other. Leslie, I'm really sorry about last night."

She sighs in relief. "Me too! Ann, you beautiful sunfish, I am so sorry."

There's a weight lifted off her chest that's quite indescribable, but replaced with another feeling. Ben, also super extremely hungover Ben, went to Ann's house to try to help them make amends? And this is the same man who brought her ice cream sundaes in the middle of the night last week.

"He's really sweet," Ann tells her.

She nods into her phone and smiles. "I know."

~

Naturally, she finds herself at Andy and April's front door.

It's sort of windy and slightly chilly and overall awful because her head pounds viciously, and she's so ready to take a nap.

Or, surprisingly enough for Leslie Knope, sleep for a full five hours.
But she needs to thank Ben for setting things right between her and Ann first. He's too cute to just ignore. Plus, he helps her with so much more than just to nearly petty female friends quarrels. And, yeah, so what? He's sexy and handsome and has an amazing ass, and it shouldn't matter how badly she desires to bone him.

No one answers when she knocks and rings the doorbell, so Leslie, knowing it's just April and Andy's place, walks right in. Her head's immediately grateful because it's not as poundy, and it's much darker than what it is outside. It's so quiet and not at all what it's typically like in here.

Usually, it's a mess of Andy and April screaming and scrambling around, throwing Frisbees and breaking things. Now, it's silent and strange and foreign. But she's still thankful for the change for pace.

She enters the living room to find said married couple entwined together on the couch, April's head on Andy's chest as they mumble in their sleep. Andy's not wearing a shirt, and his face is smudged with... Wait, is that poop or chocolate?

Nope, she doesn't want to know.

And, if Snake Juice floored them, then why and how isn't she dead?

Leslie snickers a bit before going down the hall and quietly tiptoeing into Ben's room.

And, holy quadruplet cows.

Ben's flat on his stomach, face smashed into a fluffy pillow. Wearing just a plain white t-shirt and black slacks, one of his socked feet dangles over the edge of the mattress. He's snoring wickedly, and his hair is all over the place.

Leslie carefully moves to the other side of the bed, and her foot collides with a miniature trash can that's thankfully empty, minus a couple of tissues and some gum wrappers.

Wow. Ben must feel a lot rougher than her.

She sits down and rubs his back beneath his shirt, and he stirs, moaning and groaning, but never moving from his current position. He sniffs and blinks lazily up at her.

"My head is dying," he croaks out, voice low and exhausted.

She frowns, and her heart breaks a little. She shouldn't have came over here, especially when she knows no one feels the greatest today. She should be at her own home. And she probably just disturbed Ben from the only sleep he's ever gotten where it's actually quiet in this house.

"I'm sorry," she says instantly. "I'm gonna get out of here."

When she goes to get up, Ben grabs her hand with his cold, clammy one.

"Don't go," he tells her quietly.

But it's extremely obvious that he's still barely functioning and is in dire need of rest. She only wanted to say thank you, but he's shivering and looks like a sad puppy.

So, she does the only logical, rational thing and opens Ben's closet, grimacing when he flinches at the sudden noise, and grabs a folded up blanket that's at the top. She unfolds it and gently lays it over him; he lets out a nearly inaudible sigh of relief. He scoots over, and his face turns a pale shade of
green super quickly, but he shakes his head when Leslie gestures to the trash can.

Ben spoons up from behind her, cradling her softly and kissing her neck.

He's snoring within seconds.

Leslie follows soon after.

~

She feels bad.

Like genuinely bad.

Because, by the time ten PM rolls around, Ben's quivering in his sleep, and he's not under his comforter, and she wonders why the hell his hangover won't go away.

Not that she's in the best mood either, but still.

She cards her fingers through his hair, and the movement causes him to snort awake.

"Wha's goin' on?" he mumbles, and, God, Leslie just wants to jump him.

"When's the last time you ate?" she whispers, mindful of his aching head and hers too.

He shrugs. "Dunno. Two days ago?"

"Is that a question or an answer?"

"Not sure..."

And it's immediately strange to her because Ben is insanely smart and articulate and always knows the answers to all of her inquiries. Massively hungover Ben isn't much of a talker, but she hadn't been bouncing off the walls like usual today either.

"You really should eat," she says. "I'm gonna go make you something."

But the burritoed form of Ben stops her, and he sits up, instantly putting his head in his hands. "I'll go with you."

"Uh uh, Wyatt. Stay here. I promise I'll be lightning fast."

He pouts, but then nods and lies back down, curling in a ball on his side.

She kisses him on the cheek before she goes.

~

Less than half an hour later, Leslie has two plates piled with eggs, toast, and strips of bacon. She grabs two blue gatorades from the fridge and carefully balances it all. But, instead of entering Ben's bedroom to see him still passed out and snoring, he's changed into flannel pajama pants and a thick sweatshirt. His hair's damp, and, what the hell, she didn't even hear the shower.

"Feel any better?" she asks, handing him his plate and drink.

He shrugs. "More human, I guess."
Ben sits back down on his bed, pulling the blanket over his legs as he munches on the bacon. Leslie cozies up beside him, and he grabs her hand.

"Thank you," she says after a while.

"For what?" he asks.

"Ann told me about you going over there. Last night was stupid, and I love her to death. I just wanted to thank you for helping us."

He gives her a small grin. "You don't have to thank me for anything, Leslie."

She nearly says "screw it." She wants to grab his cheeks and French him hard.

But she doesn't.

Can't.

And this is so frustrating.

Eventually, their plates are empty, and Leslie's head is on Ben's chest as they watch late night cartoons on his tiny TV. His arm wrapped around her, she's pretty sure she's found her favorite spot in the world.

"Do you wanna stay?" Ben asks, his voice quiet. "It's really late."

"But what about April and Andy?"

She feels him shrug. "I'll set an alarm to be up before them."

Leslie shifts and places a gentle peck on his neck and then snuggles into it.

"I'll take that as a yes," he says with a small chuckle.

He kisses the top of her hair, and she melts.

She absolutely cannot go on like this.

And, honestly, seriously, for real: how could she not be in love with Ben Wyatt?
Road Trip

Chapter Summary

They can't afford to take so many risks all at once, but Leslie is worth everything he could possibly lose.

Chapter Notes

This is set post episode. And, also, I'm really not good at writing anything smutty.

He's naked in Leslie's bed.

And, good lord, her body feels so amazing and soft and moist and perfect beneath his touch, and she’s the woman of his dreams. He’s been waiting for the moment where he can press their bodies together and kiss her passionately for nearly a year now, and, while it’s been way too long, he knows now that there’s absolutely no chance in hell he’s going back.

This is happening.

She’s fast asleep, her head against his bare chest as he folds his hands behind his head, staring at the ceiling. He figures he should be conked out by now, lulled to sleep by her comforting touch and the warmth of her smooth skin. But it’s four in the morning, and there’s really no reason to drift off now. With Leslie curled up beside him, he feels way too wide awake for the time, but he can’t get over the fact that he’s here naked in her bed, and they made love for hours before.

It’s the first time in a long while that he’s not panicking about what could happen next, what the future holds. Fate has pulled them apart for long enough, and now it’s time to shove it aside and go for it. Go for this. Go for this intelligent, passionate, sexy woman who drives him crazy in the best ways imaginable. Go for the wonderful, amazingly beautiful Leslie Knope.

God, he’s waited so long for this.

And he’s not just referring to sex.

Yes, he’s waited forever for her body to writhe beneath his, for his tongue to explore between her thighs. But it’s so much more than purely sexual. If he’s being honest, Leslie captivated him from the moment they met. After all their talks and nights spent together during their friendship, he couldn’t help but wonder what it would be like to hold her. Like for real, actually hold her. He’s always wanted someone to cuddle and hold hands with, and sex is a part of that, but he has always wanted Leslie for Leslie.

Now, despite the hurdling, staggering obstacles in their way, he has her.

Ben's never been happier in his life.

"Are you okay?"
He jumps, and when did she wake up?

"Never better," he whispers, kissing the top of her head and pulling her closer. There will never be another gap between them again.

"Your heart's racing, babe."

And it triples when she calls him "babe."

"I'm perfect."

~

They shower together at six in the morning, and Ben’s positive that, at this point, he can’t go a second without touching her.

She’s slick and immensely pretty, and he wraps around her like he’s finally found a purpose, meaning in his life. He wants to be inside her for eternity, but they have to go to work, and, really, this is going to be kind of weird. He’s never had to pretend that they weren’t together because they honestly weren’t, even though they’ve shared platonic kisses and hugs that weren’t all that platonic in the first place.

But still.

The logistics and statistics of them being together won’t work in their favor, but he’ll be damned if he’ll let that ruin this. He was an A student in math throughout his childhood and into college and is still good at it to this day, but numbers don’t lie. But, while they may not lie, Ben won’t let anything stand in the way of his relationship with Leslie, the woman he belongs with.

~

They make out in Ann’s office, which she thankfully, mercifully lets them use because, if she didn’t, Ben would go insane.

Leslie straddles his lap and runs her fingers through his hair, and he dies a little on the inside. Because she’s so amazing and cute, and her hand fits perfectly in his. Her tongue swirls inside his mouth, and he’s still pretty sure he won’t make it out of this alive. She’s perfect, and, while this has to remain a secret, there’s no one else he’d rather sneak around with.

Even if, seriously, she’s not that great at being sneaky.

“Really, guys?” Ben fidgets and removes his face from Leslie’s to see Ann in the doorway of her office. “This is the fifth time today.”

“I can’t help that he has a cute face,” Leslie points out.

“Blech, you guys are gross. Five more minutes.”

“Thanks, magnificent coconut tree!”

And they pick up right where they left off.

~

The end of the day stinks the most. They can’t afford to take too many risks all at once, so Ben decides that he should go home this time. He’s spent the last two nights at Leslie’s house, and April
and Andy are starting to ask way too many personal, horrifying questions. He wants nothing more than to scream about their relationship from the rooftops, but he can’t and won’t be the reason things fall apart between them; their jobs are important too.

Well, he’s not really sure he believes that on his end, but Leslie’s job is super important to her.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” Ben whispers, kissing and nipping at her neck in Ann’s office.

“Call me later? Or we could Skype.”

And Leslie’s fingers trace patterns on his back as they hug, and, good lord, he wants to make love to her.

“Of course.”

They break apart, and Leslie leaves the room first so it doesn’t look suspicious, and he swears he feels his heart shatter just a tiny bit.

~

He hasn’t slept in going on three days, but Ben can’t waste this time. His entire life has been calculated, and he was never a risky kind of guy when he was younger. While his older brother was making out with random chicks at parties, Ben stayed in and watched Battlestar Galactica and ate popcorn until his jaw hurt. He only has one life, and he wants to spend that life with Leslie Knope. And when exactly did he fall this hard for her?

Ben curls in a ball on his side, burrowing deeper beneath his comforter and trying to force his brain to shut off.

But then his cell phone rings, and it’s 2:23 AM, and it’s Leslie.

“What’s wrong? Is everything okay?” he asks immediately.

“Yeah, everything’s fine. I... I just missed you.”

He nods into the phone. “I miss you... So much.”

So much more than what he thought he ever would.

“Do you think that, maybe, you could come over?”

Of course he agrees way quicker than even he anticipated, pulls on his shoes, and then he’s out the door.

~

She’s warm, and he’s shivering in the humidity of May. Ben tucks a stray piece of hair behind her ear, and she lays her head on his shoulder. They’re snuggled up on her couch, and he’s so extremely exhausted, but he can’t waste anymore time. He doesn’t know if this will ever blow up in their faces, but he doesn’t want that to happen, and he doesn’t want to lose Leslie.

He can’t let anything stand between their relationship.

Jobs are replaceable.

Leslie Knope isn’t, not even in the slightest.
“Go to sleep, Ben,” she whispers. “I know you’re tired.”

He gulps. “What... What if this is all – “

“Shh,” she shushes, wiggling closer until she’s practically on top of him.

“I... I can’t – I won’t let anything ruin this, Leslie.”

And he wraps her up tightly and kisses her lovingly, and they fall asleep entwined on the couch.
The Bubble

Chapter Summary

Leslie and Ben spend a much needed long weekend together.

"You know what I just realized?"

Leslie's lying on her stomach, book propped up on a pillow and ankles crossed in the air. She turns around, and Ben's fresh from the shower, his hair floppy with a blue fluffy towel wrapped around his waist. God, she just wants to bone her goofy, adorable boyfriend ridiculously long and hard, but they basically had marathon sex, and she's unbelievably sore in the best ways possible.

"What?" she asks, unable to hide her bright smile.

It's not her fault he's sexy and perfect and handsome and so boneable.

"I don't have any swimming trunks."

They're spending their long weekend at a fancy hotel and spa. Leslie's pretty sure she's never been more in love with someone in her life, and Ben surprised her with this wonderfully amazing little vacation after a week of massive, crazy amounts of stress. Between the both of them, they've filled out over 700 sheets of paperwork, and they're both in dire need of some relaxation.

Leslie closes her book and sits up. "From my standpoint, you don't need any."

He smiles. "Um, maybe from your standpoint, but I'm pretty sure no one else would want to see this." And points to his now bare, amazing ass before tugging on green boxers.

She shrugs. "Their loss."

And, instead of continuing to get ready, Ben shoves her back down on the mattress and kisses her until she's dizzy.

~

They stop by JC Penney in the mall, and she adores these grey and red plaid trunks on him, so he purchases them with no hesitation. Of course, they're at the mall, so she absolutely must go to Bert's Chocolates and then Jelly Belly, and, before she's even aware of it, they've bought more than their combined body weights in candy. And, also, she may or may not have eaten every free sample at said stores.

Of course, nothing in her life feels as complete as when she's holding hands with Ben, whose lazy Friday hair and khaki shorts paired with a strange t-shirt of a 90s band she's never heard of is a sight for sore eyes. His stubble is a bit longer now, having neglect shaving for another day. He's humming quietly, and Leslie pauses dead in her tracks in the middle of a Hallmark just to hug him and squeeze his delectable butt.

"What was that for?" he asks with a soft grin.
She smiles back at him. "I just really really like you."

~

Boyfriend Ben is, by far, one of her most favorite Ben's. He's definitely much better than Mean Ben, but Authoritative-But-Not-Necessarily-Mean Ben turns her on, and she always wants to do very naughty things to that Ben. But, seriously, Boyfriend Ben is amazing and so ridiculously cute.

And Boyfriend Ben is currently swimming beside her in the five star pool. He's wet from head to toe, and Leslie would jump his bones right here if it weren't for the other stupid, annoying patrons they're sharing with. Maybe they should sneak back down here once it closes and have water sex. She's never done anything like that before.

They've just finished a splash fight, Ben's eyes are dark and kind of bloodshot, and Leslie's hair is matted down everywhere. But now they're relaxing against the wall of the five feet section of the pool, and Leslie's on her tip toes, kissing his neck while he tries to stifle the growing erection she feels when she presses closer to him.

"Um, maybe..." he starts, but groans as she nips him more.

"Bed?" she whispers.

"Oh God yes."

~

They have waffles and sausage in bed the next morning, and Ben has purple bruises on his neck and around his hips from last night, and Leslie has more than just one hickey she's trying diligently to hide. But it's going to be a lost cause later on because they're getting full body massages, and surely the masseuse has seen her fair share of love bruises and hickeys.

"We should just screw it," she tells him.

He drops his fork and gulps. "What do you mean?"

"This," she says. "I'm tired of having to hide how I feel about you from everyone."

He nods, grabbing her hand and doing that thumb rubby thing that drives her wild. "Trust me, I am too. But... We'll lose our jobs, Leslie."

"So?"

"You don't mean that," he says.

She crosses her arms over her chest. "Yes I do. I most certainly do, dear sir."

"You can't go more than a few hours without checking something in your binders."

"I have a lot of things I'm working on... Oh, I see your point. But we'll have to tell someone eventually."

He scoots closer to her and kisses her gently. "Let's just enjoy this for now."

"But Ben, this is for realskies."

He nods. "I know. But I don't want to worry about that right now. All I want to worry about is how
And his hands begin to wander and explore, and, soon enough, they're naked and saying "screw it" in their own way.

~

They're both barefoot, and Ben's plaid shirt tickles her back as they sprawl out on the picnic blanket. He rubs her side and kisses her neck, and she can't even believe how much she enjoys the feeling of him pressed against her.

Leslie's married to her job. Being the Deputy Director of the Parks and Recreation Department for the great city of Pawnee, Indiana, is her life. She loves paperwork and meeting new people and creating projects from nothing. But she thinks she's found a new favorite thing in the universe, and that thing is a person named Ben Wyatt, who makes her feel beautiful and appreciated and taken care of every single day.

She rolls to where she's facing Ben and lightly touches his sunburned cheek. They've spent their Sunday morning in a paddle boat on the lake, and she's incredibly thankful he did most of the paddling because she cut her shin, somehow, within the first thirty seconds. And he had taken care of her then too, wrapping a towel around it and then appropriately bandaging it when they reached their destination.

He's drowsy and cuddly, and he kisses her forehead before pulling her closer. He tangles their legs together, and Leslie's absolutely positive that there's nowhere else in this galaxy she would rather be.

"Take a nap," she tells him quietly. They only have a few hours left before they need to go back to Pawnee, but the sun is warm, and the shady tree they're lying beneath is cool and calm, and she runs her fingers through his sort of damp hair. "I'll be right here when you wake up."

"I love you," he breathes out so softly she isn't even sure he knows he said it out loud.

But, still, she doesn't hesitate or miss a beat. "I love you too."

He starts to snore, and how can she not love him?

She's not a crazy person.

~

The drive home to Pawnee takes approximately five and a half hours, and, during said hours, Ben and Leslie pull over six times. Two of those times were to pee and gather snacks, and the other four were simply to make out (one occurrence even ended in boning in the backseat of Ben's Saturn). But they only did that because they can't see each other until tomorrow, and Ben has to drop her off at her house without coming inside.

It's a sucky ass plan, and Leslie hates spending time away from him. He's pink and a little more than just tired, but so incredibly sweet and considerate; he rubbed her back with lotion and muscle relaxant multiple times because she slept wrong a few nights ago. But they're supposed to be careful, and spending the entire weekend together isn't exactly precautious, even if their hotel and spa was hours away.

But when Ben pulls into her driveway, she knows she can't part with him. Her heart aches already, and she sighs loudly before he even puts the car in park.
"I don't want you to go," she tells him.

He nods sadly. "I don't wanna go either."

She turns to look at him in her seat. "Do you wanna come in?" she questions. "Just for a little bit."

Ben bites his lower lip, but eventually grins. "I'd like that."

~

Of course, "just for a little bit" morphs into Ben passing out on her bed at 10:45, wrapped around her and nuzzling into her neck.
I wish I had a fluffier one-shot for Independence Day, but we're heading into angsty, break up waters here.

Happy 4th of July!

It’s pouring down rain the night after the wonderful, gone too soon Li’l Sebastian’s funeral, and Leslie can’t be more grateful for the warmth Ben brings her. He’s snoring quietly on his side with his head pillowed in her lap, cuddled up loosely in a navy blue quilt. It’s just after eleven, and he lost the battle with consciousness almost half an hour ago. While she’s way more than simply sad, his sleeping form gives her a type of comfort that’s hard to come by.

She cards her fingers through his thick hair, and, come on, how in the world does he even have this much of it? It’s soft and smells like her mango shampoo, and he’s so delicate and fragile while in this state, but his fingers are still protectively curled around hers. Leslie frowns, but she continues with the repetitive motion because Ben grumbles cutely when she stops.

She got an offer to run for City Council. She got an offer to climb the political ladder. She got an offer to start her dream. And she’s mulling through her options because she can’t hide anything from her campaign managers. And storing away her relationship with Ben, hiding him from the world, hurts enough as it is, but having to break up with him hurts even more.

And he has no idea. He doesn’t know that their future together rides on her decision. But she’s Leslie Knope, and she’s been gunning for a higher position of authority since, well, forever. Pretty good is never good enough, and being the Deputy Director of Parks and Recreation, while wonderful and amazing, can only get her so far. She wants to move on to bigger opportunities.

But she wants nothing more than to take those leaps with Ben by her side. She knows she can’t. There’s no way to maintain her appearance as a potential City Council member harboring the love of her life, letting him creep behind the shadows of her growing career. She doesn’t have to worry immediately, but this plagues her thoughts and bubbles up and controls her every emotion.

“You okay?” Ben’s hoarse, exhausted voice fills the silence. She muted the TV once he fell asleep, and she’s just been sitting here in the quiet stillness ever since. He sits up, squirming closer before Leslie places her head on his shoulder. He’s all warm and toasty from his slumber, and he spreads the quilt over both of them. “You seem sad.”

She shrugs. "I'm okay."
"Leslie, I know you're not -"

"I'm okay, Ben. I promise. I'm just... sad about Li'l Sebastian."

And, yes, it's a lie, but only kind of.

Okay, maybe more than kind of.

Don't get her wrong; Leslie is upset over the death of the best mini horse in the universe, but losing Ben, even hypothetically, makes her heart shatter. In the short amount of time they’ve been dating, she’s grown so used to waking up beside him, holding his hand, secretly making out in Ann’s office. Now, they’ve cut any romantic ties at work, and that makes matters suck ass even more, and it’s only going to get worse from here on out.

Usually, she's so sure about everything, but she honestly isn't sure about this.

She's Leslie Knope, and she should always know what to do.

Tears swell up in the corners of her eyes, and Ben immediately wraps his right arm around her, closing the gap between them and kissing her cheek. He wipes the now fallen tears away with his thumb.

"Baby," he whispers. "What's wrong? This can't just be about Li'l Sebastian."

The normal version of herself would rage at him for saying that, like mimicking and mocking the fact that he's gone. But that's not what this is about, and a storm of regret brews inside her.

"He was a national treasure, Ben. And now he's gone."

And, soon, Ben'll be gone too.

And their relationship will be in shambles.

But shouldn't she be happy for the opportunity to run for City Council?

She shrugs to herself, and more tears come.

Nothing is really worth it if it means losing Ben.

~

She blinks awake the next morning.

It’s normally not too hard to find Ben; he’s typically flat on his stomach, hair splayed out everywhere with a limp, surprisingly heavy arm slung across her waist. She’s actually woken up in the middle of the night when he doesn’t stay, panicked over the sheer notion that that arm’s not there. And, when he drowsily glances at her with those bleary, half open eyes and kisses her forehead, she melts a little inside.

But he's not here now.

In an instant, she bolts out of bed. Her heart bangs relentlessly in her aching chest. Her mind spins in every direction. Her nerves, which are normally great, thank you very much, go haywire. Where would Ben be? He’s always in bed with her when she wakes up. He’s groggy and begs for more cuddling before they shower together, and she loves running her fingers through his hair while he’s still fighting off sleep.
He’s not in the bathroom, and she half sprints down the hall. She nearly explodes when she hears the TV in the living room playing the news quietly. And, there he is, already dressed and putting on his black socks on the couch. His hair’s wet, but combed neatly, and his tie’s crooked, and he seems wiped out already. Wait. What time is it? What did she miss?

"Good morning," he tells her.

And he circles her in a massive, warm hug as if this isn't strange.

"Um," she starts. Is it too weird for her to be this needy? "What's going on?"

"I have to be at the office early today. Chris is panicking about budget cuts."

And is it too weird for her to desperately want him to come back to bed with her for a few minutes?

She wants to complain that she didn’t even get to wake up beside him. She wants to complain that he never leaves her here like this. But Ben doesn’t know anything right now, and she’s not sure when she’s going to tell him. He’s so cute and innocent, and, seriously, she just wants to snuggle with him. He looks so soft and comfortable and inviting.

"I'll try to stop by your office later."

She nods and forces a small smile. "Okay."

He walks toward the front door, coffee in one hand and messenger bag slung over his shoulder. He toes on his shoes before giving her another hug. "Are you sure you're alright? You're not acting normal." He lightly touches her arm, eyes pleading for her to tell him what's wrong.

But she can't.

Well, not yet anyway.

Can't she just enjoy her time with Ben before it's over?

"I'm fine. It's just been a rough few days."

Finally. That's not a lie.

Ben kisses her gently on the lips. "I hope today is better."

She smiles sadly. "Me too."

"I love you," he tells her, giving her one more peck on the cheek.

And that's when she wraps tightly around him. It doesn't matter that his coffee spills a bit on her t-shirt, which is actually Ben's shirt anyway. All that matters is that he's here, and he's trying to comfort her, and, God, this absolutely cannot end between them.

"I love you too."

The second Ben leaves, Leslie shuts the door and cries.

~

Her day doesn't get better.
Ben’s stuck in meetings from six in the morning until eight at night, nothing goes right for the Parks Department, and she’s just spinning her wheels, trying to come up with a reasonable solution to her issue that doesn’t include penguins or Ann or running away or insensible amounts of chocolate. She sits on the couch and waits for him to come home... Home. Wait. Is this his home? Technically, he still lives with Andy and April, but he’s probably here more often than he should be, and he has clothes and movies and even food behind these walls.

And, when she hears the door unlock, she tries so hard to contain herself. She’s so ready to see and hug him after a painfully long day, and, for real, how is she going to manage being without him? But she needs this. She needs advances in her career and to follow her dreams. It’s really hard, though, when Ben enters her living room with beautiful flowers in one hand and a Styrofoam container from JJ’s in the other.

His hair's disheveled, and he's already lost the tie and unbuttoned and untucked his shirt. There are deep, dark smudges beneath his eyes, and she sweeps him off his feet, dragging him to the couch with her. He places the flowers and food on the coffee table, and she holds him tightly and cards her fingers through his hair. Her heart is just so so so happy and swelling with emotions, and Ben Wyatt is perfect.

Absolutely perfect.

"I’m sorry these past few days haven’t been that great for you." He rubs her back and kisses her neck.

She can’t get any words to come out of her mouth, so she kisses him, hard and somehow soft at the same time. She’s dizzy and elated and wants badly to take him to bed, but her emotions are beyond fried. Eventually, the kissing tapers off, and she snuggles her face into his neck in an attempt to hide herself for a little while, enjoying and relishing the sensation of being loved by this amazing, considerate man.

"I love you, Ben," she whispers, but she doesn't move an inch.

Ben takes her hand with his free one. "I love you, Leslie."

She really doesn't know how she's going to survive without him.
I'm Leslie Knope

Chapter Summary

The inevitable is approaching, and Ben just wants to hold on for a little bit longer.

He knows.

Leslie's been skating around his questions and acting odd and shouting things like, "This is a perfectly normal scenario in which I am participating in, Ben!" in the middle of City Hall. And, in light of the political season they're currently in, it's not really a surprise to him.

Becoming a member of City Council is Leslie's dream job. Or one of her dream jobs. She has a plethora of goals and passions, and he used to not think there was a single thing wrong with that. Until now. Until Leslie's ambitions caused his heart to shatter once he found out.

They have to break up.

And that's all he can think about, and he's positive it's the same for her. While they've been making out, holding hands, and having sex often, there's something different about her. She's still goofy and adorable and undeniably perfect, but she's almost a little too timid around him, like she's afraid her world will come crashing down around her if she says anything.

Really, though, it probably will.

He can't imagine a life without Leslie Knope. He's fallen way too hard for this amazing woman, but he can't stand in the way of her dreams. This is something she's wanted for way longer than she's wanted him. This is bigger than both of them, and it fucking sucks. Because Ben loves Leslie with every single tiny fiber of his being, and seeing her upset instead of excited hurts him even more.

Still, though, he hasn't said anything.

However, in his defense, it is kind of hard to with an extremely sore throat and a head that won't stop rattling in agony.

Sure, yeah, he's deflecting. He should tell Leslie that he knows; he honestly should.

But why ruin what they have now?

Shouldn't he enjoy it while he can?

Which is why he heads over to Leslie's place as soon as he gets off work. April and Andy still haven't caught on to the fact that he very rarely stays at his actual house anymore. He doesn't even want to think about the gross sex they've been having on his comforter or that the bathroom, probably once again, reeks of stale Cheetos and moldy underwear. And, good lord, he doesn't want to acknowledge that they've probably unalphabetized his DVD and comic book collections on purpose.

Leslie even gave him a key.
See, why get rid of this?

Denial. It is the first stage of grief, after all.

He kicks off his shoes, loosens his tie, and shivers in the air conditioning he should be grateful for. April and Andy's freaking sucks, and the units only pump out Legos and the occasional French fry. The TV in the living room is off, and the kitchen is empty, so Ben heads down to her bedroom. He's gotten so used to this place that he knows exactly where not to step on her cluttered floors.

Except for just now. Because he totally didn't step on a... Lego. Great. She has Legos too.

It's surprisingly more endearing and adorable coming from her, though.

He creeks open the door, and his heart stops beating for a second when he sees her on the bed. Her hair in a messy bun and already in her pajamas, which tonight consists of his Letters to Cleo shirt and sleeping shorts with stars on them, she's glowing, pen in hand and working diligently. Ben sits down on the mattress, careful not to jar any of her work, and his body should not feel like this very early into the evening.

"I have so many things to show-" But she stops mid sentence, and Ben gulps. "Whoa. Are you okay?"

He quickly nods. "Yeah. I'm fine." He smiles too, but even that hurts.

"Uh huh. Sure, Wyatt," she quips, grinning just a tiny bit. She reaches over and places her tiny, freezing cold demon hand on his forehead. He bites his lower lip and cuddles his face into her pillow before extending the rest of his body on to the bed. "You're really warm." But, this time, her tone is gentle and soothing, but he kind of only wants to relax with her instead of worrying about this.

There's a much larger issue at hand here.

One that he's not going to recognize as an issue quite yet.

She gets up, removing the stacks of papers and binders and markers on to her bedside table, which is about to collapse from its generally overflowing, overused nature. Ben doesn't have the energy to follow her around and, instead, closes his eyes and tries to dream of a perfect enough world that would allow him and Leslie to be together without anymore obstacles and hurdles.

He's not sure how long it's been; his head's fuzzy and currently dying, but this pillow smells like Leslie, and that's good enough for him. She rubs his shoulder and coaxes him into showering before bed. It's barely six o'clock, and he wants to lay with her and hold her hand and kiss her and tell her she means more to him than anything else in existence.

NyQuil poured down his raw throat and a marvelous comforter tugged over his achy body, Leslie lies down next to him. He tries not to breathe on her; this is stressful enough without her getting sick too. She runs her fingers through his hair, and he curls around her, pulling her to his chest. Okay, so much for keeping the germs to himself. But he can't help it that this happens right as the end of the world approaches.

"I really love you," he slurs.

The medicine bogs down his mind, but he's almost positive she whispers it right back.

~
He tries to imagine his world without Leslie Knope, but there's no easy solution. Numbers and statistics and facts ring in his head, telling him that there's no way in hell this will stick. He and Leslie will fall apart just as easily as the fit together, and she'll be left alone, and that's just not right. He can't imagine it.

And it's even harder to picture when she lies beside him in her bed, wrapped around him and comforting him in ways he didn't previously know were possible. He tries to hide his racing heart and quaking body and attributes said factors to being sick. He's not panicking or worrying or assuming the worst; he's just feverish and not feeling well and suddenly very very cold.

Which Leslie picks up because, in an instant, the comforter is pulled over his body once more. He kicked it off about twenty or five or forty-five minutes ago, whichever it was. She rubs his back through his long sleeved shirt, and he's still adamant about covering his coughs as efficiently as possible, even though he's spent the last several nights in a row over here in this exact spot.

It's so silent and quiet in this house that it's causing his vision to swim. Normally, Leslie's jumping or running or, at the very least, talking; she's a very energetic woman. And he loves that about her, but she needs to do something now because, suddenly, he's drenched in sweat, and his muscles quiver violently. He can't. He can't do this.

He can't lose her.


And she spoons around him even more, scooting as close as possible. But, here's the thing; this is the first time in Ben's entire life that he feels like he means something to someone out in the world. Sure, he gets it; he can be an asshole when it comes to his job. He's reliable, but too tactical and decisive and likes to take action into his own hands. Leslie makes him feel wanted, a concept he couldn't really grasp growing up since his divorced parents were always picking fights.

And it's whiny as hell, but this isn't fair.

He just wants to be with Leslie.

That's all.

And, really, it's not like he desires to be a millionaire or own a douchey yacht or own twenty cars.

"I think you need some more medicine."

She starts to unwrap herself from around him, and Ben instantly rolls on to his other side. He pushes his face into her chest and hugs her like there's no tomorrow (because there isn't). She runs her fingers through his hair and rubs his back and tries to help, but nothing will help this. She'll be amazing at whatever she sets her mind to, and that's way more than he can say for himself.

"Ben," she coaxes. "Where's this coming from?"

And, yeah, maybe a tear or two escapes, but he's still sick, so he's hoping he can get away with it.

"I..." He stops because his emotions are too much, and he can't untangle his own thoughts.

Leslie kisses his forehead. "Medicine and then we're taking a nap."

And, the second she leaves the bed, more tears come, but he doesn't let them fall.
The next day, he tells her that he's not interested in her anymore with a thick, nasally voice. "It's not you; it's me," he lies through his teeth. And he tells her that she's boring. No, it's not rude or hateful, but he told her he knew about everything and had figured it out a while ago, and they ended on good terms. He gave her a Knope 2012 pin and went with it, all while his heart shattered into billions of tiny, insignificant pieces.

And that's it.

They're done. Broken up. Whatever.
Ron and Tammys

Chapter Summary

What a difference a few days can make.

Chapter Notes

This is something I actually thought could've happened in the show.

Ben can’t stop trembling, and his heart and mind are beyond mushy. So mushy that each beat threatens to kill him, and every thought seems like it could honestly be his last. Because, sure, he and Leslie broke up without any actual complications, but sliding out of this relationship isn’t as easy as it seems.

He contemplates calling in. He hasn’t slept a wink, he’s still feverish, and the image of her face keeps popping up in his achy brain. And he’s so freaking used to sleeping beside her that this bed at his actual fucking house seems cold and foreign, and, God, he just misses her. It hasn’t even been a full twenty-four hours ago that he saw her last, and it’s already messing with his head.

But he gets up anyway.

“Dude!” Andy shouts, smacking his back hard (because that seems to be his thing, and Ben kind of forgot that) enough for him to spill coffee down his button up. “Oops. But, hey, um, we were thinking that maybe tonight we could use your... Hold on. What’s up with you?”

Ben stops unbuttoning his shirt for a brief second. “What do you mean?” His voice shot and shaky, he doesn’t even remotely sound like himself. And the coffee stain burns, but not as badly as his heart, which is a massive cliché in itself. He should be at Leslie’s, showering with her and eating breakfast and taking on the day headfirst together. Instead, he’s going to work alone without an actual purpose for his meaningless existence.

“You look, like, really sick or something. Was it the tacos? Seriously, dude, tell me you didn’t eat those.”

He shrugs. "I'm fine... And I have absolutely no idea what you're talking about."

Andy fist bumps April over that.

Then she whispers something about blood orphans and points to him.

He doesn't want to know what's so special about the tacos.

Or the blood orphans.

Ben heads back into his bedroom, grabs a different shirt, and doesn't bother with anything else.
Nothing else really matters anyway.

~

By the time the weekend rolls around, he’s stuffed up and has a hard time swallowing and doesn’t get a lot of sleep under his belt. It’s been four days. Four days of him seeing Leslie in meetings and walking past her in the halls at work. Four days of him not being able to kiss or hug or cuddle or, fuck, even touch any part of her period. Andy and April begged him to go to Snerling with them to their friends’ house, but he stays in, shielding himself away from the world.

Away from a world without Leslie Knope.

He doesn’t get out of bed for an entire twenty-seven hours. He curls in a ball on his side and blows his nose when he needs to and doesn’t change out of his pajamas. He doesn’t have the energy to turn on the TV or even play those numbing games on his phone that somehow manage to at least cheer him up.

Before he knows it, Saturday morphs into Sunday.

And, come on, he really has to pee and should at least shower. Maybe take some medicine.

He didn’t know he was this in love with her.

Yes, it’s beyond obvious that he was and still is in love with Leslie, but it’s hard to know how bad he has, something that’s measurable. He wants nothing more than to run into her arms and let the sneaking around continue. Beg her to be his again. But that can’t and won’t ever happen, and she’s... Fuck, she’s probably already moved on from him.

Ben showers quicker than he expects for the amount of discomfort he’s in and changes into long sleeves and plaid pajama pants. He takes NyQuil and brushes his teeth and remembers the ghost of Leslie’s lips against his forehead. Remembers the smell of her shampoo. Remembers the feeling of her body beneath his. Remembers every fucking thing about her because it’s messy and convenient and makes him feel better before it makes him feel worse.

He’s about ready to reclaim his position in bed when the doorbell rings. Seriously. What now?

Not that he’s had any visitors.

He just doesn't want to deal with people right now.

And, shit, he sees curly blond hair and a beautiful face and a gorgeous half smile through the peephole.

But she has a cardboard box in her hands.

"I... thought it would be a good time to return these. Y’know, just in case," is what she says when he opens the door. "You still look awful."

His already spotty breathing is now completely and entirely stuck in his throat. Leslie’s standing in front of him on the porch of his house, and, seriously, why does he feel like he shouldn’t even look at her? Like he isn’t allowed? She’s not his girlfriend anymore, and they’re not dating, but he doesn’t even want to be friends at this point because every fiber of his existence hurts.

But he shrugs. "I'm okay. Thanks for these." And then he takes the box. There’s some clothes and movies and CDs and most likely everything he ever left over there. He tries to pretend that she’s
Ben’s about ready to close the door because, well, what’s done is done. He can’t take back his relationship with Leslie, and he certainly can’t wipe away the feelings he has for her. She’s so gorgeous and beautiful and pretty and cute and adorable, but she’s much more than looks. It’s her passions, quirks, interests, willingness to do anything to help someone, laugh, smile that does it for Ben. And seeing her here like this is the absolute opposite of what he needs.

And he’s not exactly quite sure how it happens, but suddenly he really honestly can’t breathe. Because Leslie’s lips are on his, and their foreheads touch, and Ben cups beneath her chin and palms her breast, and she’s leaning on the now closed door to the house. And they’re kissing. They’re fucking kissing. His heart rate quadruples, and his head is definitely mush now, and he... This... It’s too much, but so amazing all at the same time.

And he’s not exactly sure how it happens, but suddenly Leslie’s top is missing, and his flannel pants are discarded on the carpet, and they’re in his bedroom, groping and moaning and crying for each other. Not actually crying, but the type that’s internal when two people are being forced apart.

“Are you okay?” Leslie whispers, her lips red and eyes watery.

He stops kissing her. “I am now.”

~

Leslie’s head is on his bare chest, and he’s stroking her hair, just as God intended.

Only God didn’t intend on this happening; he’s sure of that.

Because it’s four in the morning on Monday, and April and Andy aren’t back yet, and Leslie’s still here, and Ben’s still struggling, mulling over them having sex. They’re broken up, done for, whatever, and all she tried to do was return a box of his stupid fucking belongings, and they’re now tipped over in the living room, the spilled over contents in a sea of confusion and angst, and, for real, Ben can’t believe how much he loves this woman.

“You’ll sprain something if you keep thinking this hard.”

He jumps, scrubbing his hands down the sides of his face. “I thought you were asleep.”

“It’s kinda hard for me to sleep with you contemplating your life,” she says. “Plus, your breathing’s really loud right now.”

Ben sniffles loudly, trying to loosen some of the mucus. “Sorry.”

Leslie props her head up on her elbow, and Ben squints into the darkness of his bedroom. “Are you... Are you going to be alright?” she questions. And then she does that thing where she brushes his hair from his forehead that makes him shiver.

“It’s not just me, y’know? You’re... Don’t you hurt too?”

She nods. “Of course. But I want to be friends with you still, Ben.”

“Friends? Leslie, we... Friends don’t do this.” And he motions to the fact that they’re very naked.

There’s a long silence that’s just enough for Ben to dull his panic slightly. Because, whether they’re “supposed to” or not, Leslie’s in his bed, and they’re comforting each other, and that’s going to have
to be enough for now. He tugs her against him, and she reciprocates, throwing her arms around his back and holding on to him for dear life.

“Are we gonna be okay?” she asks softly a few minutes later. Her breath tickles his skin.

“I want us to be,” he says. “I can’t lose you, Leslie.”

And he’s pretty sure he’s never uttered a truer statement in his life. Leslie’s the person he wants to be with, but he can’t. Leslie’s the person who makes him want to be a better man for her, and she’s the one who always somehow manages to make him feel better. There aren’t many words in the English dictionary that could add up to how much he loves her, how badly he wants to be with her, how sorry he is that this has to end.

“You won’t, Ben. I swear.”

Ben Wyatt’s not a big believer, but he believes her.

~

“You definitely need to call in,” she tells him as removes the thermometer from beneath his arm.

And then she throws on her t-shirt over the polka dot bra he was thoroughly enjoying, and he pouts.

Leslie hands him his cell phone from his bedside table with Chris’s number already loaded up on the screen.

She cards her fingers through his hair before placing a damp, freezing cold washcloth on the back of his neck. She kisses his forehead and leaves, and Ben seriously almost vomits right there.

It’s so fucking screwed up. Ben pulls the comforter over his head and curls into as tight of a ball as he can physically manage. It’s so screwed up how last night happened, and they have to carry on as if nothing ever occurred between them, like he’s not so head over heels in love with her. Tears swell up in the corners of his eyes, mournful of what he’s losing.

And, this time, he lets them fall.
Chapter Summary

Leslie tries to help Ben see past the fact that they're broken up.

Each and every single time she glances up at Ben during their meeting, he stumbles over his words, as if he’s uncertain of what to say next. But she knows Ben pretty well, and he’s meticulous and thoughtful and doesn’t say anything without some form of meaning behind it. Because, well, he’s not too much of a talker in general and, as far as she’s seen, he’s only managed to actually open up in front of her, despite living in Pawnee for a year now.

He’s overly pale, and he’s clearly been doing that thing with his hair again, the one where he runs his hands through it numerous times. She pictures him biting his lower lip and sighing heavily, and then the image of Ben in just his boxers and a baggy t-shirt tickling her in her bed, pressing their lips together and entwining their fingers pops up. And she exhales more loudly than she expects in the middle of him talking, and he frowns, and she frowns back because she may or may not have made it seem like she was tired of him talking.

And she’s definitely not. His voice is almost more comforting than his touch. That voice has calmed her down, made her elated, surprised her with romantic gestures, talked about their future together. But now there is no future, and Leslie’s left with what happened two days ago and no answers, or questions for that matter, and she’s too confused for her own liking.

But Ben manages to get through the rest of the torture, and everyone leaves, off to lunch. But Leslie stays, and her hands tremble as she watches him slide papers into his padfolio. He’s shaking too, and sweat drips down the side of his face. And she mourns their broken relationship like there’s tomorrow because there’s not, and she just wants Ben back.

Leslie’s a big enough woman to admit that what they did that night was wrong. It was openly, emotionally toying with both their feelings, and it almost felt like a selfish act. Except she knows that Ben Wyatt’s anything but selfish and recalls all the times he’s stayed up with her during the past year to listen to her ideas and all the times he’s cooked her breakfast in bed and all the times he’s made her feel better by just being here and not even trying.

She’s about to say something, anything, to him to break the ice, but he leaves the room without so much as glancing at her again.

~

Each time she walks past Ben’s office, his head’s down, and his right hand is moving rapidly, scribbling tiny numbers on to spreadsheets and figuring out budget reports for the upcoming quarter. He never looks up, never bothers to acknowledge the fact that she’s walked by twelve times now, praying for him to invite her in so they can chat. But, who is she kidding, they aren’t teenagers in love; they’re adults, and Ben’s handling this the best way he can.

But, really, tuning out the world isn’t the best thing to do, and he needs to know that.

“Hey,” she says quietly, knocking on his office door. Her stomach swims near her toes because
Ben’s handsome and sexy, and she’s seen all of him and wants to continue seeing all of him, but they’re broken up, and now he barely talks to anyone. “Can I come in?”

She gulps when she sees the glassiness in his eyes. His hair’s now matted to his forehead, and he chews on his pen while he nods and gestures for her to take a seat. Part of her wonders if he’s still not feeling well, and it’s an entirely plausible thought, but she doubts it’s that.

If she’s being honest with herself, she wants to spend time with him. She wants to at least be friends if they can’t be lovers, and she wants to talk with him all night and watch movies and cuddle and... Wait. This. Maybe she shouldn’t. Maybe she should walk right out of here because, while she’s known to push the boundaries, she’s not exactly sure how this would work in a platonic way because, let’s be honest, they sucked at being platonic anyway.

“How’re you?” she asks, crossing her legs.

He nods and gives a brief, very forced grin. “Good. You?”

And, no. This isn’t how her and Ben are. They’ve never been the type to make small talk, especially not small talk that’s this pathetic and downright teeny tiny. She needs to get the ball rolling, somehow convince him that it’s okay to still talk to her. Maybe she should get Ann? Or maybe she should rent one of those giant chocolate balloons she saw on Pinterest? Maybe she should invite him over, and they could stay up and discuss what they’re both feeling.

“Ben,” she says with a light sigh. “You know you can still talk to me, right?”

He gulps. “Um... Uh, yeah. I know.”

“Good. So, are you okay? Because you’ve barely said a word to anyone today.”

He shrugs. “I’m alright.”

It’s hard. It really is. She broke down the walls and barriers with him months ago, and he’s not acting anything like the original Mean Ben she first met, but he’s closed off and clammed up. They didn’t always have to be talking to make their relationship work because it just felt right, but now they’re over with, and Ben’s shutting down faster than she ever thought possible.

Because, yes, she knew this was coming.

“Is this about the other night?”

And the image of Ben’s bare, beautiful butt creeps into her mind, and she blushes.

“What do you mean?”

“We had sex, Ben. We had sex, and we were already broken up, and I feel like that... hurt you.”

He obviously tries to grin, but fails miserably. “I’m not... hurt. I’m confused. I thought we couldn’t be together, and then you showed up, and... God, Leslie, our first reaction was to fuck each other. Do you know how messed up that is?”

“Well, it sounds really messed up when you say it like that,” she tells him because what he says comes off harsh and not very Ben like.

He scrubs his hands down the sides of his stubbly face. “We can’t... I can’t do this, Leslie. It’s... so hard seeing you here everyday.”
“It’s not exactly easy for me either, Ben.”

He exhales loudly, palming his face again. “I... I know. I’m sorry. But I still... Never mind.”

“What? You still what?”

“It’s not important,” he says quickly, immediately picking up his blue pen. “Not anymore.”

Tears swell up, and they threaten to spill over, but she leaves his office before they have the chance.

~

The next day, she finds Ben outside, staring mindlessly at his lunch, head propped up in one of his hands as he pokes at the sandwich.

“I wanted to apologize,” she says, taking a seat across from him.

He doesn’t look up.

“Ben, you can’t shut everyone out of your life. You’ve made friends with other people besides me. And what you’re going through is normal because, trust me, I feel the same way right now.”

He doesn’t even so much as flinch, and it’s like he’s a deflated balloon.

“I still want to be friends,” she tells him. And tears stream down her cheeks, which finally causes him to spring into action just like her Ben always would. He’s never been able to stand seeing her upset, and he always tries to make it better. He doesn’t grab her hand, doesn’t kiss her, doesn’t wrap her up in his strong, solid arms, doesn’t let her know it will be okay, but he does hand her a folded up napkin and tries his best to put on a happier face.

He nods. “I want to be your friend too. I honestly do. But it’s... It’s really hard, Leslie.”

“I know.”

“I... I can’t promise you that I’ll do everything right,” he tells her. “But I can promise you that I’ll still be your friend.”

She smiles. “I’d like that.”
Chapter Summary

Ben struggles with insomnia and a caffeine problem, and his roommates try to help.

Chapter Notes

This is the first chapter I have where Leslie and Ben don't interact at all. I think it's important to step away from that a bit, even if their relationship is constantly on both of their minds. But, don't worry; Leslie's back in the next chapter!

He's on his fifth cup of coffee.

And it's 3:11 AM.

Ben's sleep schedule is seriously fucked up, and coffee is the only honest to God solution he’s came up with for this recent bout of insomnia. Consume so much caffeine that eventually, maybe he'll fall into a fast, soothing sleep, one where he’s not haunted by what could have been. Or his heart will explode instead because he’s pretty sure this approach isn’t a very good one.

He adds probably way too much sugar and French vanilla creamer to this cup. The last was plain and bitter and black, and he swears he has coffee grounds stuck in his teeth, and he needs something sweeter, more sustainable and more likely to get him out of this funk. He sips on the now lukewarm liquid, blood pumping quickly through his broken, strung out, adrenaline jacked system.

As he drinks, he crosses his legs and watches reruns of Tosh.0 in hopes that a funnier show can relax his mind. Instead, he ends up engrossed in his own thoughts of Leslie and what she's doing right now and how to better handle this suck ass situation. Should he call her? He feels like he should call her. But they’re not even dating anymore, so how weird would that be?

He’s in the middle of a near panic attack turned life crisis when the living room light flickers on. He jumps, and thankfully his java is already over halfway gone, so nothing spills on his green flannel pajama pants. Andy stands in the doorway with extremely messy hair, and he's not wearing a shirt or pants, and Ben grimaces before shielding his unsuspecting eyes.

"Dude, it’s, like, three AM," is all Andy says, rubbing his eyes with the heels of his hands.

He nods, gulping. “Sorry,” he says. “I didn’t mean to wake you guys. I’ll just go back to my room.” And he goes to stand up, but Andy knocks him rather forcefully back into his spot on the couch, and, fuck, spilling coffee on himself might as well be his new seven times a day tradition here because that’s what it’s turned into.

“What’re you even doing up?” For once, Andy sounds concerned and isn’t joking and seems like he might actually be serious. “Ooh, I love Tosh.0!” And he plops down practically right on top of Ben, and he squirms frantically to get away from the oversized, nearly naked man-child.
He misses Leslie's place.

Not just because living with April and Andy is sometimes an actual nightmare. Once, April painted herself completely black and slid around on his bedroom floor for part of the night just to freak him out. She claimed it was a Halloween surprise, but it was mid August, and, seriously, everyday is Halloween around here anyway.

But all he imagines is Leslie staying up extremely late, scribbling notes in her sea of binders and creating thousands of new scrapbooks. They both, especially her, usually slept more soundly when they were together. Not to mention that he misses her so much that he’d run into her open arms in a heartbeat and wouldn’t even second guess himself right this very second.

Andy cackles and slaps Ben’s knee, and he slouches further down into the couch, placing his cup on the coffee table and mentally willing his brain to shut down. But that’s a strange request considering he’s drank so much coffee (and energy drinks and soda) lately. Come to think of it, how has he not had a heart attack yet? An aneurism? Anything?

“Seriously, though,” Andy starts, catching him off guard. “Why’re you always awake?”

He shrugs. “I’m not always awake.”

“Dude. Me and April can hear you in here all night long.”

He glances down at his lap. “I’m sorry for keeping you guys up.”

“I don’t care about that, man. But whatever’s eating at you must... really be eating at you.”

“I guess you can say that.”

“Ooh, can I guess what it’s about?”

He shakes his head. “Andy, I’m not really –“

Andy bounces his leg up and down. “You’re a CIA agent, and the woman you love...”

He tunes him out shortly after that.

~

Ben runs his fingers over the Batman costume before hanging it in his closet.

He’s not entirely sure why he bought it, but now he feels incredibly stupid, naïve for tagging along with Donna and Tom. And he feels significantly worse about crying in front of them over his breakup with Leslie. Ben’s never been the type of guy to express himself, certainly not in such an emotional manner. His parents were professionals at the art of bottling everything up, and he definitely hit an exploding point tonight with his friends.

Because, yeah, it’s 5:02 on this awesome Thursday morning, and he has to be “up” in an hour and a half to get ready for work. Not that it matters anymore. He can’t sleep, and flashbacks of his and Leslie’s relationship run through his mind like a stupid fucking broken record player, and, fuck, he’s nauseous and sinks to the floor beside his bed.

He pulls his knees to his chest and rests his head in the middle. Shit. Isn’t he supposed to be a man? Henry’s fucking married, and he doubts his older brother ever cried over a woman before in his life. But, he gets it. Everyone’s different and yada yada yada. He’s more prone to sensitivity and
apparently insomnia and also apparently falling too hard for Leslie Knope.

Okay. That’s it.

He has to do something about this. He has to see Leslie.

And he swears he already has his shoes on and coat tugged over his upper body, and his hand is on the doorknob to his bedroom, but he can’t. He can’t do this either. Leslie needs space from him, and Ben needs space from her. It’s not good to be codependent on each other, to want to constantly and continuously be next to one another for any given situation.

Oh, yeah. That’s right.

Leslie’s not even at her house tonight.

He’s seriously fucked up.

So, instead, Ben toes off his shoes, removes the coat, and heads into the kitchen.

It’s 5:13 AM, and he pours his seventh cup of coffee for the night or morning or whatever this really is.

~

“I’m pretty sure that’s not healthy, dude,” Andy says, gesturing to the bottle of Code Red Mountain Dew in his grasp.

He shrugs and then takes a swig. He doesn’t even bother turning around. “Why wouldn’t it be?”

“You’re gonna need, like, a stomach transplant... or something.”

He’s sitting at his desk in his room, and, no, he’s not going to bother with the boundaries lecture tonight. His vision is beyond blurry, his head is too spinny, and he wants to pass out, but he can’t. Luckily, tomorrow’s Saturday, so, if he somehow manages to fall asleep tonight, it’ll be okay to doze until Monday morning for all he cares.

Ben’s on night number nine with very little to no sleep, and he’s starting to see sounds.

“I’ll be alright,” he mumbles, glancing back down at his papers.

Andy sighs. “Do you want some actual food? Me and April ordered a pizza. It should be here in thirty minutes or less, or else it’s free.”

“N’thanks.”

“Okay, that’s definitely not good enough. Babe, come in here.”

And, what the actual fuck, Andy holds him down in his chair, and he’s, gross, so super gross, sweating all over Ben, so much so that some drips on to his face. And April removes his tie sloppily and unbuttons his white shirt, and he tries to push them away. Seriously, what are they going to do to him? Is he dying? No. Are they forcing him into a three way?

His teeth chatter violently, and he’s still struggling to shove Andy off of him.

But then Andy lets go, and April unmakes his bed.
“Go to sleep,” is all April says, but it’s angry and irritated sounding.

“Um...”

“Quit being weird, Ben.”

“Weird? I’m being weird? You guys, this is – “

And, suddenly, he’s being picked up by Andy and is thrown down hard on his bed. Andy accidentally miscalculates, though, and sends the back of Ben’s head crashing into the frame. He instantly recoils, and he swears he blacks out for a second, and pain ripples throughout his skull as he clings on to his hair for dear life. Great. He can add a concussion to the list of things that suck about his life right now.

“Oh, damn. Sorry, Ben,” Andy says.

But April somehow, miraculously (as if it had been planned), has a Ziploc baggy of ice in her hands, and she very briefly holds it to the afflicted area before Ben takes over himself.

“There,” she says, and she tugs his comforter over him. “Sleep. Now.”

He doesn’t bother asking anymore questions.

April whispers something about demons coming to drink his blood before turning out the light.

Ben rolls over and shuts his eyes.

~

“Uh uh, dude. No more coffee,” Andy says as he swats Ben’s hand. “And no more soda. Or energy drinks.”

“Or cow piss,” April adds.

“Ew, gross. Do you really drink cow pee, Ben?”

He rolls his eyes and takes a seat at the island counter with them. He’s fairly certain he’s short-circuiting, but he slept for a full five hours before waking up from a nightmare, so that’s something. It’s almost noon, he’s fresh from the shower, and he changed right back into his pajamas. He props up his head in his hand and struggles to keep his eyes open while he half listens to the married couple banter about creating an indoor waterslide in the bathroom.

But then there’s a rough hand shaking his shoulder. “Hmm?”

And then, somehow, he’s on the couch, curled beneath a surprisingly clean smelling blanket, and he has no energy to fight this time. It’s almost something he could see Leslie doing for him, forcing him to give up the sugar rushes and actually attempt to sleep, but it’s not Leslie. It’s his crazy, annoying, but apparently caring roommates looking out for him.

He mumbles when Andy sits down next to him, but all he does is pat his socked foot.

April mentions something more about death and chaos and destruction.

But, for once in a long while, Ben doesn’t try to fight it.
"It'll only take an hour or so," he pleads.

And, for real, it's way too early to be begging the two that had a raging Halloween party last night. He fucking broke Andy's nose, and he's so adrenaline jacked that he's practically running on empty. He's still in his pajamas and hasn't even showered yet and is in awe of how he, Ben Wyatt, forgot about an eye appointment he set up only a month ago. He's not usually the type to overlook events, especially since he saves these dates in his phone and writes them down on the three other physical calendars he owns.

Now, it's the day before the exam, and he has no one to take him. He sighs and massages his temples. It wouldn't be a big deal if it weren't for the whole eye dilation part, but he shouldn't really drive home by himself. And he's having a hard time convincing Andy or April to do it because apparently doctors are gross and scary and annoying, and, fuck him, he just really wants to cancel the whole thing.

But he can't. He's been getting headaches and seeing double, and those two factors combined together equals a freaked out Ben. The whole reason he scheduled the appointment in the first place is because he became hyper aware that he had difficulties seeing road signs, and he's never been that great at staying out of his own head.

"Can I have, like, seven thousand, or so, bucks for studio time for my band?" Andy asks.

Funny. Last night at the ER he only asked for $5600. He's upping it just because he has to actually do something for Ben. Even though Ben does their laundry, washes their dishes, cleans their areas of the house, buys the groceries, and pretty much anything else one can think of that's domestic.

But then Ben glances at Andy's swollen, red cheeks and puffy face and the nose that's still bandaged.

And, then, he remembers the long, jagged scar on his shin from Andy and April's sword fighting adventure a few months ago and immediately shakes his head. "No."

"Then find your own way to your butt doctor, Ben," April says. "Andy Dwyer doesn't work for
free."

And, yeah, Andy does cackle at "butt doctor," and, yeah, it does almost shatter his eardrums.

~

He asks Tom and Donna and Jerry and even Ron. Tom told him that there's no way in hell he'd be caught dead at one of those places that sells glasses. Donna immediately refused, claiming his skinny little white boy ass would probably hurl in her Benz (which couldn't be true because eye dilations don't cause nausea, and he's never been one to get carsick). Jerry says he would, but has to pick up Gail and the girls from their annual road trip to, get this, Snerling, which is less than an hour away from here. And Ron instantly kicked him out of his office without any further words.

Ben's about ready to ask Chris when Leslie enters his office. His breath gets caught in his throat, and his hands shake.

"What's this I've been hearing about you needing a ride?"

He shrugs. And damn is his mouth dry now. "I have an eye appointment tomorrow."

Ben doesn't say anything else. He wants Leslie to leave. Not because she's not welcome or that he's angry at her or anything, but he's trying to get over her. He's trying to move on, even though he has zero actual, true desire to do so. Seeing her makes everything so much harder.

"I can take you," she offers.

And he may or may not grimace. He's not even sure if it's internal or if it's something she can visualize herself. "Um... Well, I..."

"Ben," Leslie says. "It's not a big deal. I'm just taking you to the doctor. You don't even have to look at me if that's the problem."

He instantly shakes his head. Wishes he could take her hand or run his fingers through her hair or kiss her cheek. "No no no. That's not it at all. I just..."

"Friends can take other friends to their doctors appointments."


"So what time should I pick you up?"

And he has to pause here. Because this is strange. He and Leslie broke up. He always used to ask this very same question to her when they were dating. And Leslie would say a time, but she'd be at least an hour late every single time. Ben never minded, though, because he got to come in her house and drink tea and watch her get ready in her own element. And, no, he doesn't mean that creepily, either. It was nice to feel like a part of something, of someone.

He gulps, shrugging his shoulders slightly. "Um. Maybe around nine?"

She smiles brightly. "Okay. I'll see you tomorrow."

And why exactly does she sound this excited to take him to the eye doctor?

~

Leslie shows up at 9:17, which is fine because his appointment's at 10:00. He swallows harshly as he
buckles the seatbelt, clearing his throat. He taps out random rhythms on his jeans and tries to preoccupy his mind with thoughts other than kissing her. Because that's all he really wants, needs to do right now.

"No wonder you needed this appointment," Leslie says, causing him to jolt.

"What do you mean?" he asks, unable to hide the shakiness in his voice.

She gestures over at him. "You have these huge bags under your eyes."

He shrugs. "Yeah. I haven't been sleeping the best lately."

And he neglects to mention that it's purely because she's never beside him when he tries. Ben's never been the most sound sleeper in the universe, but he always entirely chilled out around Leslie. He could sleep for twelve hours contently if he were wrapped around her. But, since they broke up, he's been dragging ass and unable to rest his eyes for more than a couple hours at a time.

"So, um," he starts. "How's your campaign going?"

It's hard to talk about this because it's what caused their whole thing together to fall through the cracks, but... God, he used to be Leslie's boyfriend. He comforted her and loved her and told her everything was going to be okay. And he's been a pretty shitty just friend on all fronts because he's been narrowly avoiding her for a while now.

She smiles and then proceeds to tell him all about the new strides and changes she's trying to incorporate as a part of her election strategy. She tells him about open a children's zoo and officially breaking ground on lot 48 and naming the park after the lovely Ann Meredith Perkins. She laughs and giggles, and Ben nearly grabs her hand and shares along in the joy.

But then she pulls into a parking space, and it's over. Well, to him anyway. Leslie keeps on talking, and he's completely fine with that. Because seeing her elated, happy, and carefree is all he ever wants from her, and he's excited he can share in even just another moment of that with her.

"Are you coming?" he questions once he's out of the car. The late fall wind nips at his cheeks and back.

"Am... Should I?" she asks.

And, seriously? Leslie Knope seems unsure.

That's not a common characteristic of her personality.

"Of course. Come on," he tells her with a smile.

~

Okay, so what if he nearly has a panic attack when the assistant asks if his wife would like stay with him during the appointment?

And so what if Leslie immediately responds with a “yes,” and Ben doesn’t try to stop her?

Because living in a fantasy seems to be his thing now.

She holds hands with him the entire time, and then she makes sure his sunglasses are on securely before they head outside once it’s over. She guides him to his seat and buckles him in. He wants to say that he’s not completely useless; he can still see colors, shapes, light. Everything’s just pretty
"I knew it," she says. And so what if their fingers are still entwined?

He squints over in her direction as he feels the car go from parked into reverse. "Knew what?"

"That you needed glasses," she says with a laugh. "You're practically glued to your computer at work. And your handwriting is so small."

He chuckles. "I hate to break it to you, but the glasses are for seeing far away, not up close."

“Oh, even better,” Leslie says. “You’ll be Professor Ben from now on.”

“Professor Ben?” he repeats back with a laugh.

And shit.

Holy shit.

Holy actual shit

They did not just refer to a role play scenario, did they?

But she doesn’t miss a beat and continues poking fun of his vision impairment while Ben focuses hard on not puking. The swirling, awful blurriness doesn’t really help his case, and, God, Leslie rubs her thumb over his knuckles, and the air in this car is way too fucking stifling. He cracks the window, and the sun blinds him even more.

"Ben?"

"Hrm?" is all he manages to get out because, suddenly, all of the air's being squeezed out of his lungs.

It's been a few weeks. Why does she still have this affect on him?

And he's distanced himself from her and everything, which was extremely taxing.

"Are you okay? Are you in pain? Should we go back to the doctor?"

But Ben wrangles himself in as fast as possible. "N-No. I'm okay. I'm good."

He needs to avoid drowning in the ocean.

Because this, whatever this is, is not okay.

Just being in the car with Leslie, pretending for a measly second that this isn’t a lie, that he could actually be with her, is too much for him. He was okay for a while. Maybe not okay, but he was trying to be. He’s been sleeping a little more often and not drinking as much coffee and attempting to hang out with Andy and April and not hide as much of himself away.

She parks her car in the driveway, but his line of vision is basically blurs mixed with even more blurs at the moment. His eyes pulsate and feel so incredibly wonky, like they’re about to pop out of his skull, and she takes his hand once more. He wants to pull away. Needs to pull away. But he doesn’t. Can’t. Because Leslie Knope is a drug to him, and he can’t get enough of her.

Leslie guides him inside, the world him tilting and going in and out of focus. But her skin is warm,
silky smooth, and that’s all he needs.

“Ben!” he hears Andy shout. “Dude, come play Xbox with me. Oh, hey, Leslie!”

“Are you blind now?” April asks.

“Oh damn. I didn’t even notice. So you can’t play Xbox?”

But all he feels now are Leslie’s fingers on his arm, and, good lord, he just wants to lay her down in his bed and ravish her, tell her how much he loves her. Instead, though, he’s guided to his room, and Leslie doesn’t let go the whole way there.

“Are you gonna be okay?” she asks. “Can you see anything?”

He nods. “I’ll be alright, and I can see. It’s just blurry.”

“So you’ll be alright if I go?”

Oh.

Ben bites his lower lip. “Uh, yeah. Sure. I’m... You’re good to go. Thank you for this again, Leslie.”

She smiles and lets go of his hand. The lack of touch instantly causes a circuit in his brain to pop.

“I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Yeah. See you tomorrow.”

Ben collapses face first on to his bed, pulls a pillow over his head, and tries to count backwards from one hundred.

Each time he tries, Leslie’s beautiful face enters his mind.

And, seriously, there’s no actual way this could get any worse.
Leslie tries to come to an understanding as to where her and Ben stand.

They barely talk anymore.

Sure, they'll smile casually when they pass each other in the hall, and they obviously still have some semblance of working together. Ben's the Assistant City Manager, so he's a critical, crucial part of the day to day department operations. Here lately, though, he hasn't been spending quite as much time with Parks and Rec as he used to.

Leslie figures it's because of her and their now ended relationship. She wants to spend every possible second with him still, even after all of this, but he doesn't seem to be reciprocating the idea. He's closed off and is in that whole "don't speak unless spoken to" phase with her. She should be annoyed. Maybe. She doesn't exactly know how to feel.

But being mad at Ben doesn't seem right.

She misses him being around all the time, whether at City Hall or in their personal lives. She used to hold his hand or hardcore make out with him in Ann's office. They used to have sex in her bed and take showers together. She remembers vividly all that they had, all that they lost. She's normally so articulate and knows exactly what she wants, how she feels, but she's at a loss with Ben.

After tonight, though, her heart can't take much more. Because Ben doesn't want to be friends anymore. He thought be could do it, but it's too hard. It's extremely hard for her too, dammit, but she's trying. Or maybe, at this point, she shouldn't be trying anymore.

Maybe she should give up.

Give up on this relationship, friendship thing with Ben.

It's clear that that's what he wants.

But the thought of him shacking up with Shauna Malwae-Tweep makes her stomach churn and her head spin. Because she knows Shauna kind of well, and she's terrible with titles for articles and just, overall, a terrible match for Ben. She doubts Shauna likes sci-fi or marathoning the History Channel or baking brownies at two AM.

Leslie sits at her house, alone, and wonders, seriously, what Ben's doing tonight.

And if he's doing Shauna, then her heart will break even more than it already has.

~

"Leslie, it's... 4:30 on Saturday," Ann slurs sleepily into the phone.

But Leslie's up and raring to go and already dressed for the day. She hasn't even laid down for bed yet, not that it would matter anyway because, let's face it, she's a mess when it comes to actually
relaxing. See, that's why she needs Ben in her life. Cranky, groggy Ben would literally cuddle her into oblivion, allowing her to use him as her personal pillow whenever she pleased as long as she made an attempt at functioning like a normal human being.

"I know, Ann, but I'm distraught."

"Ugh. It's too early for big words."

Her eyebrows furrow. "Aaannn... I miss him," she whines.

"Hmph."

"That's it? That's all the wizardly advice you can give me? I'm having an emotional breakdown here."

"Leslie, you're my best friend, and I love you," Ann tells her. "But you've gotta let him go."

"Say what now?"

Ann sighs exasperatedly. "Ben. You need to let him move on. Badgering him and making him hang out with you is only going to make this worse."

"But he said he wanted to be friends and then he just went back on it."

"He's probably really hurting."

Oh.

Not that she hadn't already figured as much. She knows Ben's been having difficulties adjusting to this, especially after their sort of one night stand three days post break up, and it confused both of them, rifled through their feelings and made things messier, more complicated. And, after taking him to the eye doctor a couple weeks ago, he's only said a few words to her at a time, as if he's unable to even look at her long enough to speak.

But she had left in a hurry.

A real hurry, actually.

Because being around Ben like that was a bit much, even for her. Of course, she doesn't feel that way anymore (or at least she doesn't think so). She wanted to kiss him hard, bone him hard, and then cuddle him hard. It's crazy and difficult to pick apart the pieces that she would like to stay in place from their relationship, and Ben's right. She shouldn't have the privilege of doing that when what Ben needed was some time and space apart.

By the time she snaps out of her trance, all she hears on the other line is Ann's sleepy hum.

~

He's still mostly asleep when he answers the door; that much is obvious.

But he must've soothed down his hair on the walk here because it's only slightly wild. Each morning when they were together, she would card her fingers through it, kissing his temple and cheek, and he would grumble about how that only makes him sleepier. Ben crosses his arms to block out the fall air seeping into the house.

And, after she says her piece about this whole fiasco between them, she apologizes and asks for
Shauna to come out too.

But then Ben tells her she's not here.

And, she's not going to lie, hearing him say that makes her feel so much better.

"Leslie!" Andy shouts, coming up from behind Ben and clasping him hard on the back. He shirtless and sweaty, and his cheeks are pink. "You gotta check out our new fish tank!"

"He means the second tank they bought with my rent money that actually has fish in it this time," Ben clarifies.

And then Andy grabs her forearm and ushers her inside. It's warm, smells like coffee and oddly chlorine and chocolate, and there's clutter spots here and there. But it's definitely a drastic improvement from what this place used to look like before Ben moved in.

"I'm gonna go shower," Ben says quickly.

Leslie instantly turns around, but she doesn't make eye contact. Of course he wouldn't want her in his house anymore. He hasn't paid any surprising visits to her place since they've broken up, but she's been over here three or four times now. And it's really not fair to him. He leaves, and Leslie frowns, wondering if he'll even come back out to say goodbye.

~

She's sitting on the couch thirty minutes later.

Andy ordered a pizza and begged her to stay to play Xbox. The original plan was to construct a water slide out of cardboard, but she heard Ben quickly veto it from the bathroom, which she couldn't help but chuckle at that. So far, she's only watched him play some kind of football game, and Andy keeps screaming at the TV while April reads magazines in the recliner.

But then Ben exits the bathroom. He's wearing jeans and a grey long sleeved shirt that's seen way better days; there are tiny holes littering the collar. Has he had that shirt since the Stone Age? Knowing him, it's seriously probably from when he was a teenager. And his hair doesn't have any product in it, but it's still somehow endearingly messy and adorable, and, holy cow, she just wants to jump his bones. Bone him hard and soft and slow and everything in between.

He's already in the living room when he spies Leslie on the couch, and he immediately places his hands in his pockets and drops his head. Crap. He probably wanted a lazy Saturday at home, but she had to ruin that for him too. But, still, he sits beside her, making sure to distance himself even with the obvious lack of space; their knees don't even touch at all, and Ben's crammed himself in the corner.

She's about offer to leave when April speaks from the chair.

"Ben, the internet's not working again," April tells him.

He sighs and scrubs a hand down his face. "I've showed you guys how to do this a thousand times. Just turn it off and then turn it back on again."

"Dude, I was so winning!" Andy whines.

"Beeeennnn," they both say in unison.
"Fine," he mumbles as he stands up. His shirt's a little bunched up, so Leslie sees the green plaid boxers and can't deny that she enjoys the view when he kneels down. And, seriously, when did he become so small? She's never noticed, even naked, how bony he is until now. Huh. Weird.

April moans. "It's still not working."

"Well, give it a minute."

"Yes!" Andy shouts. "Reggie Wayne for the touchdown!"

And his game is back up and running again.

But then Andy jumps and victoriously throws his controller on the carpet.

"Okay, was that necessary?" Ben asks.

"Everything's necessary, buddy."

Ben's eyebrows furrow. "What does that even mean?"

Leslie sighs into her hand and hides a smile.

How on earth did she ever let this man go?

~

They enjoy their pizza.

It's mostly just April and Andy squabbling back and forth at each other through mouthfuls of pepperoni. Ben stays pretty quiet, only quipping up something sarcastic two or three times. He doesn't relax and is still over in his area of the couch, and he places his paper plate on the coffee table after only taking a few bites of his food. He props up his head in his hand and mindlessly watches TV.

"Is that all you're gonna eat?" Leslie finds herself asking out loud.

He shrugs. "Not really hungry."

"More for me!" Andy shouts, excitedly grabbing another slice.

"I'm gonna go ahead and go. Ann and I are going shopping soon," she announces, standing up. She starts to head to the door, hoping that maybe, just maybe, Ben would follow her. Maybe walk her to her car. Maybe hold her hand and say that he misses her. But none of that happens, and he continues staring at the TV withoutmuttering so much as a goodbye.

"See ya later, Leslie!" Andy exclaims. "Dude, pass me the Oreos."

"You ate all of those last night," Ben reminds him.

"Dammit! Can you go get us more Oreos?" is the last thing she hears before she closes the door.

Maybe she really should just give up.
The Treaty

Chapter Summary

Ben's pretty much done with Pawnee.

Chapter Notes

Guys, this is the last break up chapter! And it's probably the most angsty one because Ben's more than fed up here. I'm so happy these two nerds get back together in the next chapter!

Thank you so much for reading! :) 

Also, you guys can follow me on Tumblr! My username is supervanillabear31.

He's still in love with her.

And, good lord, it's the only thing he can focus on. Before Leslie, he would entertain himself by marathoning the Star Wars trilogy, learning new ways to prepare calzones, or browsing fan forums to see what the latest gossip is. Now, if he wants to distract his distraught mind from her, he has to force his brain to tire out and fall asleep. But, let's be honest, he hasn't been sleeping well in the slightest.

So, basically, he's screwed.

Because, every time he even sees her, thinks about her, hears her voice, he dies a little on the inside. His organs shrivel up and stop behaving like normal, functioning organs, and he's pretty sure he's only a few steps away from complete and utter self destruction. Because he's so ridiculously in love with Leslie Knope that it's too hard to move on.

It's difficult to walk the opposite direction of someone who means so much to him. He misses everything about her, from her adorable smile to her sexy body to staying up until it's time to go to work the next morning because they couldn't take their eyes off of whatever documentary they're watching. He misses how her palm seems to fit perfectly in his and misses the tiny freckles on the bridge of her nose. They're almost invisible, unless he stands super close to her.

So, as he sits in this high school chemistry lab with the love of his life, he's unsure how to think.

But he agrees to the five minutes of fun conversation thing everyday while they're at work. That much he can muster. He's buried most of his actual, vocal feelings so down that he doubts it really matters anymore. What's one more killer blow to his psyche? As childish as it sounds, not a single person in the universe can hurt him more than he already is right now. He's just that absolutely positive Leslie is the woman he's supposed to spend the rest of his life with.

When they stand up to walk out of the room, their hands accidentally brush against each other.

Ben's heart flutters, and he contemplates kissing her.
Good lord, how exactly is he supposed to be just friends with her?

~

He struggles to pull himself out of bed every morning.

Even if he wasn't sleeping, his mind screams at him to lay there; it'll be easier that way. And he sighs and grumbles and wants nothing more than to feel like an actual person again. Because this fucking sucks, and his thoughts are so preoccupied by a person who he can't be with. Can't hold hands with or kiss long and hard on the lips.

He's thought about returning to Indianapolis and getting the hell out of Pawnee. Pawnee is where Leslie lives, and she can have it. She can have the scars on the ankles from raccoons and end of the world gatherings at the parks and the whole Goddamn city if need be. She can take it all because he doesn't want it anymore. He needs to get back to his old job and go on the road and have beer bottles chucked at his skull.

But he can't. Not yet at least.

He trembles as he exits his blanket cocoon. Their heater is busted on account of Andy shoving Play-Doh in the grates, and the electrician, which he had to hire and pay for, won't be here until this upcoming Monday. He fell asleep wearing thick sweatpants and thermal socks and wrapped himself in his warmest flannel shirt to keep in his body heat. None of it worked, and now he's going to work chilled and not really on his game.

Well, if he had game that is.

He brushes his teeth and showers beneath scalding hot water and puts his contacts in and combs his hair. It's a mundane routine he finds himself established in, dependent upon. He has something to do other than think about Leslie, but it's so temporary that it's sickening. But, when he's at works, he can feel her busy nature buzzing, absorbing him whole, like it's fucking suffocating him, and that's honestly why he prefers being at home a bit more at this point.

Ben makes his coffee and shuttles himself off to work.

It takes thirteen and a half minutes to get there, and he counts by nines the entire way.

~

"So I think we should have that fun conversation right about now," Leslie says, entering his office with a giant, bright smile on her face that causes Ben's own cheeks to hurt.

But he's knee deep in paperwork, and the lights above kill his eyes and head, and his right hand cramps with each passing word. He can feel his hair soaking and matting to his forehead, and his white undershirt is entirely drenched, even though it's November and starting to slush outside. He's shaky and flushed, and, good lord, so hungry from skipping lunch that he can barely see straight.

"Um," he starts classically. Not even that has changed. "I... I kinda can't right now." And he gestures to the mounds and scatters of papers.

Leslie sighs and takes a seat in the chair across from his desk. "I can't keep this up by myself, Ben."

He bites his lower lip. "What do you mean?"

"This. I thought you wanted to be friends? Because you're not acting like it. You never spend time
with the Parks Department anymore, and you ignore me like the plague. And I don't have the plague. I'm a very clean woman."

Ben drops his blue pen. "All I said was that I can't have the fun conversation right now."

"Yeah, but you've been avoiding me since last week. Still."

"Well, what do you want me to do, Leslie? Kiss all over you? Hold your hand? Tell you I love you? We broke up, and now we both have to live with that. So, yeah, I am avoiding you, but it's just because it's hard. I'm still... Y’know what? It doesn't matter what I am anymore."

Leslie raises her eyebrows. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means I'm done. I'm not okay. I'm tired of pretending that I am. I'm not your best friend, and I'm not some toy you can drag around on a leash until you decide what you want from me."

"Ben, seriously, all I want is for us-"

He shakes his head, standing up from behind his desk. "Save it. I'll make this easy for both of us."

And he walks out the door, leaving Leslie sitting there in awe.

~

He's lying in bed, curled beneath his comforter and two extra blankets. It's almost four in the morning, he hasn't slept at all in going on two days, and he's too riled up for coffee or soda or energy drinks.

Ben just wants this to be over.

Win or lose. Sink or swim. Do or don't.

It doesn't matter anymore.

If he can't have Leslie, fine.

He loves her so so much, but he's going crazy here, and he wants it all to stop. He needs to press the pause button, to gather up the strength and energy to carry on with his life. Maybe move back to Indianapolis.

Scratch that. Definitely move back to Indianapolis.

But he's exhausted and needs Leslie to understand that he's hurt. Trust him, he knows he's being a selfish prick, but Leslie's in denial. He once was too. He was too afraid to look at the itty bitty details and piece together the puzzle, solve the equation. Well, the equation's solution is that they don't work together, and they never will. Because, while the best months of his life were with Leslie Knope, he can't be strung along anymore.

It's time to cut the cord.
Soon, their lives will change forever, but Leslie's going to enjoy the ride.

Ben's more than beyond passed out, wrapped tightly around her and snoring loudly in her ear. It's not obnoxious or irritating; no, it's welcoming and comforting. To be honest, she wasn't sure if she'd ever hear it again. And she wasn't sure if she'd ever feel him breathing on her neck or tucking a stray piece of hair behind her ear or holding her in every way imaginable, not just physically.

He's naked and adorable and sighs contently every now and then. And, when he shivers, Leslie pulls the grey comforter up over his shoulder, kissing his bare chest before snuggling in closer. He's so warm and cute, and she wants nothing more than to stay here in his arms for the rest of her life.

Being apart from him hasn't been easy. It's been a lot of texting Ann in the middle of the night when she can't sleep because Ben's not there, cuddling her and telling her to slow down and that everything will be okay. It's been a lot of overeating any chocolate in sight and a lot of binge working into the late hours of the night. She hasn't been getting a bunch of rest, but that's pretty typical for her.

And it's even more obvious than Ben's just above barely functioning. Sex with him is always amazing and wonderful and the best thing ever, but tonight he was slow and lazy, and there was no rush, no hasty peeling their clothes off and jumping into bed. No, Ben was sweet and made sure she was completely and entirely taken care of. He was trembling, and she had a hard time catching her breath, and they were a mess.

Together.

There seriously are no words to describe how happy she is to have Ben back in her life. Boyfriend Ben, Best Friend Ben, any Ben is good with her because he's finally here and willing to talk to her and able to sweep her off her feet just like usual. Like nothing has changed. Like they didn't break up and go through hell.

So, Ben continues snoring, and Leslie finds a way to move closer, listening to his heartbeat.

~

It's Saturday, and Ben's lounging around her house after cooking up a big breakfast of waffles, eggs, toast, sausage, bacon, extra extra extra whipped cream, chocolate milk for her, and orange juice for him, even though he barely eats. He's wearing the same oversized blue t-shirt and black sweatpants he wore the very first time he ever spent the night at her place and is barefoot because all of his clothes are back at his house.

Except the shirt Leslie throws on after their shower together.

It's green and blue striped and long sleeved and incredibly comfortable. It's baggy on her, but it fits him so well. She sits down on his lap and begins kissing him immediately, her cheeks heating up when he nips at her neck and smiles into her skin. She runs her fingers through his damp hair, and
she knows that there's nowhere else she would rather be in the universe than with Ben Wyatt.

"You're wearing my shirt," Ben says quietly after a bit, and they're both sitting on the couch. Leslie's head is on his shoulder, and they're cozied up together beneath a large purple afghan.

She nods. "It's very comfortable."

"You look very sexy in it," he tells her, entwining their fingers.

~

They alternate between watching movies and making out. Neither of them are in a hurry to be anywhere; they're perfectly happy being wrapped up in each other. Ben spoons her from behind on the sofa, nuzzling into her neck and kissing her every now and then before Leslie can't stand it anymore, can't wait any longer, and rolls to where she's facing him. Their kisses are leisurely and downtempo, and Ben hums softly every now and then.

"I love you," she whispers after a while. And it gives her chills and goosebumps pop up on her skin, and she couldn't even foreshadow how perfect this moment has grown to become.

He smiles and pecks her forehead sweetly. "I love you too. More than anything."

"Do you think," she starts, "that everything will be okay between us?"

Ben's eyebrows furrow, and a confused expression looms. But then his face softens. "We're fine, Leslie. I promise. And everything will be alright."

Because they'll tell Chris everything on Monday, and her heart races when she even attempts to think about that. Because one of them or both of them will lose their jobs. Because, while their relationship will finally be out in the open, it won't be accepted. Because punishment follows and eerily cascades the light that could be.

"We'll get-"

But Ben shushes her by placing a delicate finger over her lips. "I swear that I won't let anything happen to you."

She grins through hesitation, through her mind reeling past the possibilities. "I trust you."

And she really honestly doesn't trust anyone else more than Ben.

~

On Sunday, Ben leaves just long enough to bring clothes over to her place, stopping at the grocery store on the way. He picks up double fudge brownie ice cream since she's been craving it, despite the fact that it's November, and two and a half inches of snow fell last night, and replaces the gallon of milk she ran out of.

She engulfs him in her arms the second he walks through the door, snowflakes nestled on his black coat and cheeks tinged pink. He removes his beanie, and she kisses his chin while standing on her tip toes. He was only gone for less than an hour, but her heart thumps in wild anticipation as he touches her softly and brings their lips together.

Leslie didn't know she could miss a person this much.

Ben removes his coat, and, instead of being adorned in the huge pajamas he borrowed from the
depths of her dresser, he's wearing jeans and a blue and red flannel. She chuckles when she spies the familiar "Disc-y Business" shirt beneath it. He toes off his shoes, and they hold hands, even while he puts the milk and ice cream away.

It's a tiny, simple action that causes Leslie to want to bury herself inside of him, to live beneath his skin and love him until the end of the world. Because they've already survived the catastrophic termination of their relationship, and they need to move on and look ahead, forward, to something even bigger and better.

~

Soon, they're tangled together in a mess of sheets.

And Leslie swears that she'll never be this far apart from Ben again. Without Ben, her heart is hollow and empty, and her brain only yearns for his touch, his embrace, his sense of humor, and his keen ability to comfort her in every way imaginable.

He lazily kisses her hair and holds her closer, and she palms his chest. They play footsie, and it takes her this long to realize that he's only wearing one sock (yes, this time was a sloppy rush, because they've wasted so much time), and she giggles when he tickles her bare hip briefly. He's perfect. Absolutely, undeniably, one hundred thousand percent perfect.

"What're you thinking about?" he asks so quietly she barely hears him. He sounds drowsy, groggy and mostly asleep.

She smiles. "Just how amazing you are."

And Ann would call her gross and say that they're disgusting, but who cares?

She's laying her cards out on the table. No more hiding. No more wishing it could have been. Because it is. Because Ben's right here, cuddling against her, and she can feel every single part of him.

"You, Leslie Knope, are far more amazing than me."

Tears swell in her eyes, and she kisses him, soft and slow.

~

By the time Monday morning rolls around, Leslie's nerves are slightly more than massively, horrifically, infinity and beyond frazzled. Ben gave her one of his patented back rubs at 4:30 this morning when she was far too riled up to sleep. He found her in her makeshift office, etching out designs for Lot 48 and silently panicking.

He always takes such good care of her. Even now, he holds her hand and rubs his thumb across her skin while he munches on some cereal. He does his best to smile and laugh and love on her, despite the fact that Leslie can see through the cracks, the facade he builds when things get rough. Because today's the day that they tell everyone, including their boss, about their relationship.

And she doesn't feel anywhere near ready to unleash the truth to Chris.

But, honestly, all it takes is one look at Ben to know that everything they'll go through, everything they’ll face, will be so much more than worth it in the long run.

Everything is better with Ben by her side anyway.
Chapter Summary

After a stressful day, Leslie and Ben hang up Christmas decorations.

"Y'know most people wait til after Thanksgiving to hang this stuff, right?" Ben asks, gesturing to the tinsel in his hands.

"I normally do it on November first, but I was kinda too..." she trails off, and Ben immediately engulfs her in his arms, rubbing small circles on her back.

He kisses her hair. "I know. Me too. Well, not the decorations."

And, here they are, standing in the middle of Leslie's crazily cluttered living room, sorting through disorganized grey tubs that are unruly enough to make Ben's head spin. It's 1:03 AM, snowing peacefully outside, and he's in his pajamas while Leslie's still in jeans and wrapped in his discarded white button up from earlier. But, honestly, there's not a single place in the universe he would rather be than with her.

Even if his right elbow is actually swollen from the tumble he took down her staircase earlier.

But she yelled at him for damaging her tree toppers after making sure he was okay.

Yes, toppers. Meaning that there's more than one.

There's also more than one Christmas tree.

But who cares? He doesn't. Because he loves this goof of a sexy, wonderful woman. And she's way way way more than he can ever ask for of a person; she's perfect and immensely beautiful and intelligent, and he smiles every time he even glances in her direction. Because now they're together, and it's okay, even though he's currently unemployed.

It's a tiny, small, insignificant price to pay to be with her.

"Help me reach the top of Herman?" she questions with a Rudolph tree topper in hand.

His eyebrows furrow. "Herman?"

"Oh!" Leslie exclaims excitedly. "He's this tree right here!"

Herman's the fifth tree in their line up, the one Ben will have to drag back up those demon spawn stairs once they're finished. But Ben complies with a soft grin and gently takes the reindeer instead, placing it on top of Herman. Leslie embraces him and pecks his chest while kisses her hair.

"He's beautiful," he says, chuckling. "Just like you."

~

"I'm not sure we should be doing this right now," he states, biting his lower lip.
Because it's still snowing, and he's pretty sure his cheeks are frozen.

"Nonsense, my dearest Benjamin. This hath be the safest event of da season."

He shakes his head. "I think you mixed up your eras there. And I also think it's not exactly safe."

They're staring up at her roof. Ben internally gulps as slush pools around them. Her six boxes of lights are sheltered on the porch. He gave his coat to Leslie in an effort to keep her as warm as possible, and he's shivering violently, teeth chattering and nose running. He's out here in one of Henry's old hoodies that practically swallows him whole and flannel sleeping pants, but at least he was smart enough to throw on thermals beneath his poorly put together ensemble.

She nods. "You're right. It can wait," she says sadly. "I just wanted the house to be done by morning so the neighbors could roll over in envy and name me the best decorator in Pawnee. Or the United States. Which ever."

But she doesn't tell him that in one of those ways that would slyly compel him to do it anyway. Leslie understands that it could and should wait, and he loves that about her. Good lord, he loves everything about her.

So, he grabs the first set of lights. Ben places the ladder in its position before carefully, tentatively, slowly ascending the slippery steps. His heart thumps rapidly, so much so that he hears his blood rushing in his veins. But Leslie means the world and more to him; the least he could do is put up her Christmas lights in the middle of a snowstorm.

"Ben," she calls once he's up there. "This... I don't like this. Please come down. I didn't mean you had to do it now. God, did I pressure you? I feel like I totally just pressured you."

He shakes his head and tries to respond, but his lips aren't working, and his tongue is glued to the roof of his mouth. His gloved hands tremble and shake, and his knees wobble. And, seriously, when did he become afraid of heights? Because the ground is so fucking far away, and Leslie's even tinier than usual.

It goes over okay because Ben gets the hang of this whole light situation once he's actually on the roof instead of the ladder. Thankfully he's wearing snow boots, so the incline is the only real issue because the shoes seem to be doing the trick for the moment.

But then, as he strings along the multicolored lights on the front of the house, he slips. Hard. He bites the inside of his cheek so forcefully he tastes blood, and he immediately slides off the roof and on to the snowy ground below. The cold, windy air swooshes around him, and he quivers beneath the flurries.

Motherfucker.

"Ben! Oh my God! Are you okay? Please tell me you're okay."

Leslie's frantic hands wipe away the flakes around him and instantly reaches to help him up, but Ben's beyond frozen, and his right leg tenses at the movement. Shit. Fuck. This seriously can't be happening.

"I'm okay," he says through clenched teeth, even though he's at least seventy-nine percent sure it's a lie.

"Should I call an ambulance? Do you need a doctor?"
"N-No," he groans. "I'll be alright."

"Let's get you inside."

Ben face palms himself as Leslie does her best to haul him in her house. So much for the neighbors rolling over in envy.

~

Leslie helps him shower to get warm before he changes into a baggy grey sweatshirt and red and green pajama pants. She settles him on the couch with plenty of ice, even though he's certain winter is now his least favorite season, and he never wants to see snow again.

Talk about a blow to the ego.

All he wanted to do was take care of Leslie, but now his right leg is an assortment of dark bruises, particularly this huge one that seems to envelop his entire outer thigh. He cuddles his face into her neck while she delicately entwines their fingers together, mindful of his now even more swollen elbow.

"I'm sorry," he whispers, long after How the Grinch Stole Christmas ends. It's 4:49 in the morning, they're both completely wiped out, and his heart can't take much more. "I just wanted you to be happy."

She kisses his forehead. "I'm always happy when I'm with you, Ben. And I'm really sorry you're hurt."

He shrugs. "It's nothing I can't handle. I'll be good as new by Monday."

Ben chooses to ignore the fact that parts of his leg are so tender and freaking angry that he could barely get his pants on.

"I love you," she says quietly.

He snuggles closer, smiling. "I love you."

~

"Red or green?" Leslie asks.

"Uh, green."

"I knew you'd pick that one," she says, handing him his full to the brim mug of hot chocolate.

Carefully, he kisses her cute, pink lips. He's choosing not to panic at the moment, even though he knows he should be boiling in his own anxiety right now. What if no one wants to hire him? What if he never finds a job? What if he goes broke and loses all his hair and Leslie leaves him? Those would be the typical Ben Wyatt crises for the occasion.

But all he truly cares about is that Leslie's here with him. She sets new bags of ice on his leg before crawling into her bed beneath the festive comforter. A Christmas Story plays as they sip on their drinks, and she instantly scoots closer and closer to him until there's not a drop of space between them. Ben sets both of their cups on the bedside table before sinking down lower into the mattress with her.

Their kisses are slow and soft, and Leslie tastes like chocolate, and, seriously, he doesn't have a
worry in the world.
Because who doesn't love a sleepy, lethargic Ben?

After a long day of organizational task forcing around Pawnee, Leslie arrives back at her house to find her boyfriend in a very deep sleep.

It's not necessarily surprising to her since Ben went to five interviews for potential jobs today, but she still doesn't expect him to be this tired at only six in the evening. She gently lies beside him on the bed, tugging him until his head is on her chest. She kisses his messy hair and rubs his back and inhales the scent of peppermint and cloves.

He's snoring quietly and bundled up cozily in the comforter, cheek nuzzled into Leslie's left breast. She smiles and snuggles into her fluffy pillows, enjoying the blissfulness that accompanies relaxing with an overly exhausted Ben. Because, while he gave up his job a week ago for her, he still hasn't been sleeping well, especially after he injured himself hanging the Christmas lights.

And now he's unemployed for the first time since he was a teenage mayor, and it's really not a big deal to her at all. Ben sacrificed the best job he's ever had just for her, just so she could keep her job at the Parks Department, just so she could go on with running her campaign. He's the kindest person she's ever met in her life (sorry, beautiful turtle-fish Ann), and she honestly never wants to let him go because he's so sweet and loving.

He deserves time to find a job he likes, rather than going with whatever opportunity comes his way first. Ben deserves his own island called Benland, where there are rides dedicated to his quirky sense of humor and how well he treats her. And there should totally be an exhibit in honor of his wonderful butt, the one Leslie can't help but find so sexy.

Ben cuddles closer in his sleep, instinctively wrapping an arm around her while she strokes his hair. It's so soft even with the product in it, and he was completely clean shaven this morning; it was strange to see her boyfriend with no facial hair, even just the small amount he usually has, for the first time since she's met him.

"L'slie?" he mumbles tiredly, and she wants to kiss him and bone him hard when he talks all deep and slow. "Time's it?"

"Almost 6:15," she whispers. "Go back to sleep for a bit."

He nods and squishes his face back into her chest.

The snoring resumes almost immediately.

~

Around eight, Leslie orders Chinese food while Ben continues his marathon slumber. She re-enters the bedroom silently, turning on her lamp and rummaging through her dresser drawer to locate warm, comfy pajamas. Instantly, Ben stirs, shifting from one side to the other, smacking his lips and yawning.
"You've been in your work clothes this entire time?" Leslie whispers, chuckling slightly as she makes out the wrinkly collar of a familiar blue button up. She pulls the comforter down even more and shakes her head at the tie and black slacks and navy socks. He was so entwined in the blankets earlier that she hadn't even noticed.

Ben moans, but he does crack open his eyes slightly. "Well, that's impossible because I didn't go to work today. These are just regular clothes."

She rolls her eyes while still smiling. "Shower?" she asks. "I ordered us food, but we've got thirty minutes."

He nods and sits up, running a hand through his hair. There's an imprint from a section of crumpled sheet on his pink cheek, and he looks uncomfortable and so sleepy, and is it weird that she wants to jump him right this second? Because damn. Because Ben is insanely attractive with his nerdy t-shirts and commentary on movies and collection of comic books protectively stowed away in her closet.

She can't help but frown when he puts weight on his still tender leg, grimacing at the unpleasant pain probably stabbing through the multiple bruises. He grabs a long sleeved Star Wars shirt that she once confirmed was from 1997, flannel pajama pants, and boxers before following her into the bathroom, limping more than just a bit.

They peel off their clothes, and Leslie makes a mental note to ice Ben's leg once they're off their feet for the night. The abrasions are angrier than ever, and the massive one on his outer thigh is a mess of dark purple and red. She grins, though, when he turns the water to the perfect temperature, and she immediately curls into him. He holds her, and they stand under the steady stream together, enjoying the peace.

Ben kisses her neck slowly, and tiny shivers explode throughout her body. Soon, their lips touch, and their tongues meet, and there's not a single thing that she loves more than Ben Wyatt. He's handsome and gentle and knows exactly how to rile her up and cool her down.

~

Their takeout arrives, and she instantly digs into her crab rangoon, while Ben goes for the pork fried rice slowly, even managing to miss his mouth and send some falling on to the couch. He cuddles his head on to her shoulder and drops his fork into the container. The purple smudges beneath his eyes do nothing to help him here, and she honestly has no idea how he's this sleepy, but he is, and it's cutely sad.

"Honey," she says, rubbing his arm. "You really should eat something."

He doesn't move, doesn't even flinch.

She guesses this sudden crashing is probably due to the immense lack of sleep he was suffering from during their break up. Andy told her, stumbling through his words and making up his own syllables here and there, that he all but stopped eating and didn't really get the rest he needed. Since getting back together, she's found him wide awake on the couch, drinking coffee and watching late night TV more than just once.

Instead of continuing to poke and pry, she munches quickly on her food before lying him down on the sofa. She throws hers away and puts Ben's in the refrigerator before returning, settling down behind him and pulling a quilt around them both.

Ben sighs in his sleep, and Leslie finds herself falling in love all over again.
He gave up so much for her, the least she can do is help him back into bed. Because he's tripping over his own two feet multiple times and unconsciously limping. She kisses his cheek and holds his hand and assures him that it's just a few more steps before covering him back up. He tries to curl in his patented ball on his side, but Leslie quickly stops him.

She grabs the jumbo ice pack from the freezer in the kitchen, wrapping it in a towel before returning to the bedroom, placing it on the length of Ben's upper leg. She even puts a long pillow beneath it in order to elevate the area, bring some comfort. He squirms and grumbles, but begins adorably snoring not too long after that.

Leslie lies down next to him, kissing his cheek softly and cuddling into his chest.

～

"No, Ann... Don't run with scissors..."

There's a warm something on her shoulder, and she pops open her eyes, jumping and her heart pumping. Because the clock says it's 9:28, and she never ever ever sleeps this late, especially not when she goes to bed the night before ridiculously early.

But Ben, already showered and dressed, places a tray on her lap with waffles and extra extra whipped cream and a glass of chocolate milk, and she dies on the inside. He kisses her forehead, and she smiles widely when she notes the bags beneath his eyes are almost entirely gone now.

"Thanks for taking care of me," he says quietly as he lies down next to her.

Ben couldn't be anymore amazing or wonderful or absolutely perfect.

And the waffles are delicious.

He's her sexy breakfast chef extraordinaire of a boyfriend, and she can't be happier.
The Comeback Kid

Chapter Summary

Champion almost cock-blocks Ben. There's also some good old fashioned hurt/comfort.

He's going over Leslie's campaign notes when Andy loudly barges in his room.

"Dude, you gotta come see what Champion just did!"

"Oh, please, come into my room," he says sarcastically, turning back around in his rolling chair.

"He took a crap that looks exactly like Texas! Also, side note, me and April called dibs on not cleaning it, so that just leaves you."


Andy flops on his bed and proceeds to sprawl out on his mattress, ruffling his comforter and sticking his favorite pillow beneath his sweaty chin. He's wearing a Colts jersey and thankfully boxers this time, and he smells suspiciously like maple syrup with a splash of lukewarm cola. "C'mon. That's not fair, man. Me and April are both tired because, unlike someone I know, we have jobs."

"Um, no. You can't pull that card with me again because I happen to have just gotten a job."

Andy laughs. "April said you would do that."

His eyebrows furrow. "Do what?"

"Go stand on street corners in your underwear and high heels. I gotta tell you though, dude; that's a rough gig. Take it from yours truly."

Ben immediately grimaces. "I'm not becoming a prostitute, Andy. I'm running Leslie's campaign."

"That's not a real job," his roommate says, clearly impatient. "Come look at Champion's poop. I promise you won't be disappointed."

And he instantly turns back around once more. "Yeah, because checking out a three legged dog's crap would be the highlight of my existence."

"That's the spirit!" Andy exclaims, grabbing Ben's arm and shuffling him out to the living room.

~

Following cleaning Champion's mess, Ben showers because dogs are kind of gross, and the smell of his Texas shaped and probably sized crap stung his nostrils and eyes.

He wants to go over strategies a bit more before lying down, but he can already feel his mind slowing, and his train of thought feels rather gooey and strained if he thinks too hard. Ben still doesn't quite understand why or how considering all he's done lately is sleep, make Oscar-but-not-Oscar-worthy claymations, and discover new ways to cook calzones, but the brain is a funny, complicated thing.
So he's already nestled in bed, buried beneath his plaid comforter and watching Game of Thrones in the darkness. He listens briefly to Andy and April discuss the pros and cons of adopting a baby kangaroo and letting him roam the house before turning his attention back to the TV. He's really deep into it when there's a knock. And it's not at the door.

What the hell?

He carefully gets up, painfully weary of his still hurting leg (and he doesn't even know why or how; all he did was fall off a roof into some snow), and heads over to his window. He opens the blinds, and Leslie, his beautiful girlfriend, stands outside in the flurries of early December. Immediately, he cracks it open and helps her inside.

"You're freezing, babe," he whispers, instantly reaching for his comforter and wrapping her in it, coaxing her to sit down practically on top of him on his bed.

Leslie's quiet for a few minutes, shivering lightly and cuddling her freezing face into his neck. He eventually helps her lie directly on his mattress, spooning up behind her and cradling her body against his.

He swears she's asleep, and he's heading in that direction too when she rolls on to her side to face him. "Hi," she says quietly. She plays with the strings of his hoodie and palms his chest and, overall, acts calm and collected. Anyone who really knows Leslie understands that those are not two of her most common characteristics. "I missed you."

Ben grins. "I missed you too."

It doesn't matter in the slightest that they saw each other a few hours ago. Leslie was over here and announced that Ann had quit as her campaign manager and wanted Ben to have the job instead. But they had both left shortly after for Leslie to attend another event downtown. It allowed him just enough time to come up with a plan of action before recently settling down.

"I'm so nervous," she says. It's so timid and small that he almost misses it.

He bundles her even more when the quivering returns. He kisses her hair and forehead and pretty much anything he can reach from his position. "About what, baby?"

She sighs. "I won't win. Who am I kidding? Why should I even try? There's no way I can outshine Bobby Newport."

There are so many things wrong with that statement that it makes Ben's heart ache and head reel. Because if he doesn't correct her, it'll drive him crazy. Leslie deserves to know just how amazing of a woman she honestly is.

"Leslie," he starts softly. "You're the best person I know. You're smart and passionate and full of the best ideas on the planet." She beams proudly at that before shying away once again, hiding her face in his chest. "You'll stomp Bobby Newport into the ground. That guy has nothing on you. You're going to make Pawnee even better and greater than it already is."

Tears swell in her eyes and spill over her cheeks, but Ben wipes them away with his thumb.

"I really love you," she whispers.

"I really love you, Leslie."

She curls into him, and Ben envelops her in his arms.
"Benjamin," Leslie says, hugging him the second he exits the bathroom; he's still bleary eyed and way more than half asleep. "How on earth is this the first time I've seen you in those?"

He glances down at his attire, but he doesn't spot anything troubling. "Um, my pajamas?"

She shakes her head and then points to her face, right around where her pretty blue orbs are located.

He touches the area. "Oh. These." He gestures to the black frames resting uncomfortably on his ears and nose. Because he very very rarely wears his actual glasses since he much prefers contacts, but he fell asleep with them in last night, and he doesn't really want to contract eye worms.

And Leslie kisses his lips. Hard. Hard enough to hurt and hard enough to make him groan.

"Professor," she growls, tugging at his hoodie.

"Oh God," he mumbles.

They fall on to the couch, Ben flat on his back while Leslie takes the lead on this one. His heart flutters, and all of his blood rushes to his head, and, good lord, he should wear his glasses more often.

But Leslie stops kissing, and she accidentally swipes her fingers across one of the lenses. "Why does your couch smell like that?"

He nearly face palms. "Champion," he mutters.

"The three legged dog?"

He nods. "The one and only."

But Leslie just shrugs and starts doing magical things with her tongue again.
In honor of Adam Scott's nasally voice in this episode, I had to write another sick fic.

Thank you all for reading! :)

You can follow me on Tumblr: @supervanillabear31

He's working diligently on calculating her latest poll numbers by hand, hunched over her kitchen table. She has no idea how he does it, but he claims there's a pretty straightforward equation to follow; it just takes more time. Typically, she wouldn't know how much support she gained or lost until tomorrow morning, but Ben's a super genius. A super genius who's amazing at math and has an exceptionally tight, compact body and an incredibly wonderful ass and who is also currently very very snotty.

Leslie winces as she watches him press a wad of tissue beneath his chapped nose. It's beat red and puffy around the edges, and she's already seen him rub Vaseline on his nostrils to alleviate the rawness more than once. His eyes all droopy and bloodshot, he continues scribbling numbers on a sheet of notebook paper with an etching of a zombie duck drawn by April in a spur of boredom.

And she can't help but frown as she heads over to him, rubbing his overheated back through the black suit jacket he's still wearing. He doesn't acknowledge her, is too wrapped up and preoccupied with the work to realize that he's running on next to no energy, especially after staying up all night for the last five days in a row, which is probably why he's so miserable now.

Because when Ben goes down, he goes down hard. Sleeps for what seems like decades at a time and ends up puking his guts out or becoming infected with a head cold from hell. Even she, Leslie Knope, the creator of barely sleeping and getting every drop of work imaginable done, knows exactly when she's had enough and needs to rest. Ben, however, doesn't understand there's a fine line. Or he's just really good at ignoring it.

Which is where she steps in. She can't think of all the times he's helped her, stepped in for her when she was feeling too run down. She always appreciates a good challenge, but sometimes it's better to let someone else call the shots at times. He's held her hand and coached her through speeches and made her sit down to relax when she hadn't had a break in a while. He's devised plans and sat by her through thick and thin, long before running for City Council was an actual possibility.

"Ben," she whispers. She's still standing behind him, lightly massaging the quivering muscles near his shoulders. "I think that's enough for the night."

Her only response is four harsh sneezes in a row and slight grumble of irritation. Not at her, but at how this evening seems to be going. Because it's almost Christmas, and he's stressed out and sick
and not exactly able to enjoy himself. She carefully removes the pencil from his clammy grasp, and
he buries the side of his face into her stomach instantly. She cards her fingers through his damp hair,
leaning down to kiss his forehead.

She helps him into warm pajamas before curling up beside him beneath the plaid comforter. He
shivers, and she wiggles closer, not even flinching when he sneezes into her hair.

~

There's a sudden lack of person huddled nearly on top of her. She becomes aware of the absence all
at once, and she sits up, turning on the bedside lamp. It's 2:39 AM, and her sniffly boyfriend is
missing, and she scrambles out from under the covers at warp speed.

Her heart thuds loudly in her chest, so much so that she can hear it echoing off the walls. She
stumbles over the Legos she subconsciously knows are there and nearly trips over her increasingly
growing number of stuffed animals huddled near the living room.

She finds Ben illuminated by the TV. He's flat on his back on the couch, bundled beneath one of her
mother's old quilts she was using earlier, seemingly wide awake. He's trembling, and there's a slight,
but growing, trail of snot starting to slide into his parted mouth. She quickly cleans it before palming
his forehead. He coughs violently, harshly, and it sounds so wet. Her poor baby.

"What're you doing out here?" she questions.

He shrugs, his eyes pooling with tears she's sure he doesn't even notice. "Couldn't sleep. Didn't
wanna keep you up." And his voice is so stuffy and nasally.

Leslie bites her bottom lip and heads into the closest bathroom. She wets two washcloths, measures
out a dose of NyQuil, and grabs a new box of Kleenex before heading back into the living room.
Ben swallows the medicine without any complaints, and she sets a cloth on his forehead and upper
chest.

She places two pillows under his head once she's sitting beneath him. He closes his eyes moments
later, but is interrupted by the urge to blow his nose.

~

Neither of them sleep.

By morning, Leslie calls off each and every campaign related event they had to do today. Sure, it'll
cause her to go down in the polls, and she's not exactly thrilled about that, but it'll be worth it if it
means Ben gets back on his feet. Today's a nasty December day anyway, so it's the perfect
opportunity to snuggle up and watch movies.

Her boyfriend doesn't say much about her decision. She's hoping that the familiar opening to
Cheaper by the Dozen, a film he's not particularly fond of (while she is), will lull him into a
comfortable sleep. But, even in his medicine induced haze, his eyes are open, and he's elevated by
multiple pillows so he can breathe.

Leslie maneuvers herself to where she's pressed up on his side, running her fingers through his hair
while he busies himself blowing his nose for the umpteenth time in an hour. Once he's finished, he
immediately sighs, rubbing one of his eyes.

"You doing okay?" she asks.
He squirms. "Can't get comfortable."

Leslie places her head on his chest, listening to his heartbeat and trying her best not to worry about the heat rolling off of him in waves. She grabs his hand, entwining their fingers together as she presses a penguin socked foot against his calf.

"Mmm... Better..." he whispers.

She kisses his forehead. "Go to sleep, love."
Even Leslie Knope has a breaking point.

It's not often Leslie lets things get to her.

But, on the rare occasions it occurs, Ben's ready.

He finds her curled up in bed, still wearing her bowling shirt, jeans, and Converse. He hears the crumpling, ruffling of tissues and the broken sniffles. Ben frowns, making his way to her side of the bed and leaning over to kiss for forehead before removing her shoes. He chuckles internally at the festive bowling pin socks and proceeds to lie down in order to nestle beside her.

Leslie instantly rolls over and hides her face in his chest. He gently pecks anywhere he can reach, wrapping her up in his arms and letting her expel all those negative emotions right here, right now. Because Leslie is beautiful and super smart and amazing, and she's going to take the world by storm. Ben has no doubts about her abilities, but, every now and then, she gets inside her own head and mentally destroys what she's worked so hard for.

He rubs her back and bites his lower lip as tears soak through his button up. It doesn't matter that mascara slathers his shirt; what matters is making sure Leslie's okay, that she knows he's here. What happened today shook both of them up, made them think about, very briefly, whether or not this was even worth it anymore. Because Leslie's nearly at her wits end with the stubbornness of people in Pawnee.

She just wants to make everything better, and sometimes he feels like he's the only one who truly understands that, besides her. While everyone from the Parks Department has been helping diligently, they still occasionally make snide remarks about how they're wasting their time (specifically Tom). He sees the sadness in her eyes through the damning determination, but she's only human.

Even Leslie Knope breaks.

And Ben swears that, for the rest of his life, he'll be there for her.

Leslie hiccups and curls in tighter. Ben gently runs his fingers through her curly hair. He entangles their legs together and rubs her hip and tries his hardest to comfort her with soft touches because it normally works. She'll calm down and laugh about that stupid fucking asshole calling her a bitch in front of a lot of people.

"Babe," he whispers once her trembling becomes incredibly fast and and bouncy and shaky. "Les, please calm down."

She shakes her head into his chest, palming it with a quivering hand. "Let's just move away, Ben. Far far away."

"You don't mean that, love," he tells her, still carding his fingers through her hair.
Leslie nods. "I definitely do. Pawnee is great and amazing and the best place around and all, but I'm so sick of it right now. I'm sick of trying to make things better for everyone and no one giving two poops about it."

"People care," Ben says. "Trust me, it may not seem like they do, and they may never thank you, but the changes you're trying to implement will make a difference."

"I think I made the wrong career choice."

He chuckles at that because even she knows that's crazy talk. Leslie maneuvers herself to where her head is on his chest while he's flat on his back. She delicately fingers over his bruised knuckles before kissing his cheek and nuzzling her face into his neck. "You're perfect," he whispers. "Everything about you is just perfect."

~

They must've fallen asleep because Ben wakes up when it's dark out, his mouth dry and head foggy. Leslie's cheek nestled on his shoulder, she's making content sighing noises. And, also, just to point it out, her left hand is hidden beneath his khakis and boxers, lightly caressing the area. And Ben really really likes it. He immediately perks up and, even though she's resting, and her eyes are still a little puffy, he kisses her hard enough to arouse her.

And she instantly reciprocates, swirling her tongue around in his mouth. She begins to rip at the buttons of his shirt, and Ben palms her breasts. His pulse thuds in his ears, and, good lord, he loves her so fucking much. He wants to be inside her and comfort her and tell her he'll never ever go. Because where else would he travel to? Leslie's the most amazing person he's ever met.

He shucks off her bowling jersey, and she unzips his pants.

And they never miss a beat.

~

They eventually shower, washing away the day's grime and misfortunes coupled with the successes between them that seem to overshadow every bad instance. Because they're together, and he's been inside her and knows her quirks and desires and is apparently the sexiest breakfast chef in the universe. And Leslie's touch is so sweet and powerful and drives him unbelievably crazy.

He whips up a batch of waffles, foregoing any side dishes. Leslie pours two glasses of red wine, and her smirks at her when she gropes him gently through his pajama pants. She pats his butt while he nips at her neck, and his heart feels lighter any time she's in his presence. He doesn't know how he got so lucky, but he can't imagine anything different. Because every good, bad, horrible, amazing, awful, exciting, wonderful thing that's happened to him in his life has led him to her.

They eat their food, and Leslie insists on stealing from his plate, despite the fact that they're munching on the same exact thing. He drapes a blanket over them both once he lies down behind her on the couch, rubbing her hipbone as he blows raspberries on her neck. She giggles, and they play footsie with each other until they're both entirely still.

Because it's 1:02 AM, they have a campaign to run, there's a cinnamon candle burning on the coffee table, and Leslie's peacefully slumbering in his arms, and there's nowhere else Ben would rather be.

He allows his mind to shut down, to just enjoy the feeling of holding Leslie Knope close.
"Leslie," he coaxes when he finds her almost in tears at her desk the next afternoon. "What's going on?"

He sits down beside her, and she immediately envelops him in a ginormous hug. And, dammit, he thought for sure that they had figured this out last night, that everything would be okay. At least for now.

"I love you so much, Ben Wyatt," she says quietly against his skin.

He rubs her back. "I love you too, Les. Are you okay? Do I need to go punch someone again?"

She shakes her head, and her adorable giggle briefly fills the silence. "You're the sweetest man in the galaxy." And she removes herself from him long enough to glide the note he left her a few hours ago during one of her meetings; he even drew a kiss monster just for her. He told her how much he couldn't picture a different future than one with her by his side, how she's going to rock the hell out of this campaign, how he'll stand with her no matter what.

How he's never loved someone as much as he loves her.

"You deserve this and more, baby," he says.

She cards her fingers through his hair, and tears dribble down his neck. "I'm so happy I have you in my life." Her voice comes out broken, but soft and laced with happiness.

And they kiss, slow and gentle.

"Bleh. You guys are gross," Ben hears Tom say as he enters the office.

They just shrug and continue on.
Ben lies quietly on the messy bed, smoothing a hand through his unruly hair. Leslie clumsily crawls over him, and he takes his chance to playfully slap her bare ass before she enters the bathroom. His heart panging in anticipation, his nerves scream at him to find a new hobby other than to wait. Wait to see the reaction, to know whether or not his idea was decent at all in the first place.

Because Leslie's so great at gifts and holidays and surprises, and Ben never feels like anything he's given her has been enough. Realistically, nothing could ever come close to her just being here with him, enjoying their life together and experiencing the marvels of being in a relationship with each other.

"Ben!" Leslie shouts excitedly. She flies back into the bedroom, naked with beautiful breasts bouncing. He chuckles when she jumps on the mattress, immediately wrapping her arms around his waist. "Is this for real? Like for realskies?"

In her hands, she holds two first class plane tickets to the Rapid City Regional Airport, where Ben has already secured a cost effective rental car. He grins and nods, and she hugs him like there's no tomorrow, pecking his neck and cheeks and lips. "Do you like it?" he whispers, rubbing her back and holding her close.

"Do I like it?" she questions incredulously. "I love it! I already have so many things planned to do!"

He laughs when she throws on his grey button up from the floor and begins rummaging through her closet. She thumbs through the scrapbook organizer he bought her last month as an early birthday present and plucks out the Mount Rushmore binder, which is number three of forty-two in her "Red, White, and Blue" series. Ben had thumbed through it multiple times before purchasing the tickets, giddy at the chance of taking her on a trip dedicated to her love of history and the presidents and America.

And, even though he's read it countless times, Leslie gives him a brief page-by-page synopsis of the events she wants to attend and the sights she wants to see, which quickly turns into a three hour summary.
But Ben wouldn't have it any other way.

~

The next day, Leslie spends her time telling Ann and anyone at City Hall who will listen about how amazing of a boyfriend he is. He only knows this because he stops by to take her to lunch, and Donna tells him to shut his crazy woman up, or else she'll do it for him.

He smiles as Leslie uses his laptop to look at weather reports for the trip while they cozy up in a booth at JJs. She's nearly too thrilled to enjoy her waffles, but Ben makes sure she takes at least a few bites before dropping her off and heading back to her place to pack.

It's a bit of a risk leaving for a long weekend while Leslie's running a campaign for City Council, but this is important. She's been stressed and spinning her wheels and even getting to the point where she's pleading for him to stay in bed with her just a bit longer before she faces the day. And, trust him, that's about as unusual as it comes because Leslie is always raring to go in the morning no matter the occasion, while Ben prefers to relax and cuddle his amazing, sexy girlfriend.

By the time she arrives home, Ben's packed and ready, minus the laundry he needs to fold for them both that's currently tumbling in the dryer. He squares away each and every tiny, minuscule detail that no one, besides him, would ever think about just in case something goes wrong, for both their journey and the campaign.

"I am so ready for tomorrow!" Leslie exclaims, settling down next to him on the couch. Ben ordered a medium pizza for them to split almost half an hour ago to ensure it was here around the time Leslie got home. He also kind of wanted to avoid dirtying dishes before their departure since their flight leaves at seven AM.

She lays her head on his shoulder, grabbing his right hand and holding it gently. While waiting for their food, Leslie tells him about the history of the plot of land Mount Rushmore sits on, chatting nonstop while Ben nips at her neck. She's beautiful and happy, and he's never felt more complete in his entire life.

The doorbell rings, and he hops up, quick to return with the box, a bottle of wine, and two glasses.

"To the presidents," Leslie announces, clanking their glasses together with a chuckle.

"To you, baby," he says, pulling her in for a kiss.

~

He doesn't sleep that night, but it's not like he expected to.

Leslie is wound up in a massive sugar rush, even though it's barely five in the morning. They watch the news while getting ready, dressing in comfy clothes for the flight. She downs three cups of coffee before they leave the house, and he makes sure to bundle both of them up since it's snowing lightly, calmly outside.

By the time they arrive at the airport, Ben's bladder is about to burst, and Leslie's still eagerly reciting facts. He can't help but laugh and smile every time she tells whoever is nearby that her wonderful boyfriend is taking her on the vacation of a lifetime. To South Dakota. To see Mount Rushmore. Because, what doesn't seem like a big deal to anyone else, it's always the biggest of deals to Leslie Knope.

They board the plane without any unexpected hurdles, and Leslie snuggles into him from her drafty
spot in the middle seat. He bought all three seats so she could have enough room to stretch and do crafts and whatever she wanted. A flight attendant brings them a blanket, and they cuddle beneath it, and he tangles their fingers together while Leslie places soft pecks on his neck and cheek.

~

It's snowing harshly when they arrive at their hotel six hours behind schedule. They had to reroute to Minneapolis, which made Ben feel ten kinds of odd because his mom, dad, and sister were all within close distance, but his only desire was to be with Leslie.

He collapses face first on to the comfy bed; his girlfriend follows suit. He planned on taking her to see Crazy Horse today, but those plans were quickly shot down because it's 5:49 PM in the middle of February, and the weather won't permit for a drive right now.

"I'm sorry, Les," he says quietly.

"For what?" she asks. "You can't control the snow. And, besides, we're in this amazing hotel room, and there's a hot tub. And tomorrow we're going to Mount Rushmore!"

She nibbles at him gently, and Ben tugs her to where she's beneath him.

~

Leslie kisses him awake from his jet laggy, groggy sleep at 8:30 PM, and he tries not to frown at the obvious lack of energy on his part. Because flying is known to drag him down, and not sleeping the night before isn't helping. She climbs into bed with him, giving him the room service menu because it's their chance to indulge.

He orders lobster tails, wine, and a chocolate soufflé, and they watch the snow fall peacefully from the room. They're in pajamas while they dine on their relatively fancy meal, and Ben's got a blanket that smells like Leslie and her home and Pawnee wrapped around his shoulders after Leslie immediately stole his dark grey hoodie.

She digs into the delicate dessert, chewing thoughtfully. "What do you think the presidents feel up there?"

He stops sipping his wine. "Um, what do you mean?"

"Like when it snows, do you think they feel cold?"

"Well, they're rock, so I'm gonna guess no."

She rolls her eyes, but her expression softens moments later. She reaches across the table and grabs his hand, rubbing over it with her thumb. "Thank you for this, Ben. Seriously, it's amazing."

He grins. "You're welcome. I'm really sorry so much of it is ruined already."

"It's nowhere near ruined, Mr. Wyatt."

And she gets up, climbs in his lap, and starts doing unimaginable things with her tongue, and Ben can't help but tremble in her presence.

~

Leslie makes him wear a patriotic flannel the next day.
He sneaks in his Li'l Sebastian t-shirt under that and over his thermals, just to make her happy. And, seriously, that stupid mini horse has caused him enough grief, but he can't miss a chance to see Leslie smile.

Luckily for him, she's been grinning brightly all morning. She woke up at three thirty after a power nap where she curled up beside him, head on his chest, and slept soundly for two whole hours. They watched documentaries until the sun rose, buried in blankets and drinking coffee. Ben makes his a double because he knows he going to need it, and, unlike his Energizer Bunny of an adorable girlfriend, he actually needs proper rest.

"I'm literally shaking with excitement!" she squeaks, holding his hand as they shuffle out to the rental car in a few inches of freshly fallen snow.

"You sure it's not from the cold?" he teases, opening the door for her and getting her inside as quickly as possible. Once he sits down, he smooches her reddened cheek and puts the vehicle in reverse.

~

There are very few people at Mount Rushmore when they arrive.

Of course, it takes two and a half hours as opposed to thirty minutes to get there; Leslie really really really had to pee, and then they found a cute little gift shop where they purchased presents for everyone they know. She even bought new scrapbooking supplies, to which Ben chuckled at as he helped her decide on stencils and decorative papers.

Now, they're here, and Leslie's digging her fingers into his arm while jumping up and down gleefully, a massive pep in her step. Ben shrugs off his coat because she's seriously shivering and places it around her shoulders. Snow falls around them at a soft, steady pace, and they walk into the main area, gloved fingers entwined. She stands on her tip toes occasionally as they walk to kiss his cheek.

Ben's quivering and slowly losing feeling in his face and toes and everywhere else, but Leslie's enthusiasm warms him like nothing else ever could. Because this fiery, passionate, goofball of a sexy woman is the only person he could ever possibly imagine spending the rest of his life with.

They reach the overlook ledge and stare quietly in awe, taking it all in. They're pressed snuggly against each other, Ben's arms snaked around her waist while he cuddles his face into her hair. The four presidents embedded into the monument, embedded into America's history forever, loom proudly over the area, and it's almost an odd, overwhelming sensation to be here right now with her. With Leslie. With the woman he so badly wants to call his forever.

"It's amazing," she whispers.

But all Ben can focus on is her.

"It really is."

~

They walk the President's Trail. It's almost a mile hike around a section of Mount Rushmore that she gravitates to. Leslie stops and takes a thousand pictures and kisses him thoughtfully. And it's still snowing, and Ben's beyond freezing, but he feels like he's glaring straight into the sun whenever he glances at her. Because she's perfect and wonderful and so incredible.
"I can't believe we're actually here," she says. They're staring almost right up George Washington's nose, and she's reading from the pamphlet that was given to her when they entered. There are tiny snowflakes nestled in her exposed blond curls outside of the red, white, and blue bobble hat, and her cheeks are tinged red.

"M-Me either," he stammers.

"Babe, do you want your coat back? I think I'll be okay without it."

He shakes his head, but he can't really feel the motion. "No. Y-You ke-keep it."

"Benjamin."

He eyes her. "Leslimin."

But she withdraws and pats his butt. "Let's keep going."

~

He swears she buys out yet another gift shop. Like they should give up and move on because Leslie Knope's been there and rummaged through their entire stock and purchased every tiny, possibly useless item. Because she's in love with Mount Rushmore and has a million photos to prove it and cannot stop beaming to save her life.

Ben leans over the last lookout point, staring into the snowy distance while Leslie uses the restroom. He sniffles and shoves his hands in his pockets. He doesn't exactly know how he got to this moment. Ben's the type of guy who didn't really expect to end up anywhere in his life, especially after Partridge. After ruining his family name in their hometown. After furiously disappointed his father and angering everyone he came into contact with following his career choice.

Then he met Leslie.

And nothing will ever be the same, and now he wants to be with her everyday for the rest of his life.

The winter wind slices through his clothes and eats at his skin, but soon she's wrapped around him like a small, perfect little blanket.

"You have no idea how much this means to me."

He turns around to face her. "You are so amazing."

"No, Ben. Please stop. You... You're so much more than you give yourself credit for." She doesn't stop when he blushes, and, this time, it's not from the cold. "You take care of me and make me feel like I'm perfect. I've never met anyone as kind, gentle, and loving as you. You're sexy, and I really really like you, and I wish you could see what a wonderful man you honestly are."

He smiles and leans down to bury his face in her neck. His heart beats slowly, calmly, and his brain is, for once, at rest. He loves Leslie so so much. He loves her and wants to marry her and wants them to explore the world together. He never wants another day to go by where they aren't Leslie and Ben.

"I love you," he whispers.

And, yes, tears do swell in his eyes, but he hides them by nuzzling into her even more.

"I love you more."
He insists on driving, even though he's almost too frozen to do so. Leslie uses his coat as a blanket, and they watch Mount Rushmore vanish in the distance. She reaches for his hand and leans her head on his shoulder as they move snail speed through the snow.

And his breathing hitches just a bit because he wanted this trip to be absolutely perfect, but the stupid snow won't stop falling. Of course, though, it's what he should expect for planning this to take place right after Valentine's Day.

"We should head back to the hotel," Leslie says, her voice filled with worry. "This is getting bad."

And she's not lying. He's having a hard time seeing past the heavy slush, and the car is just barely moving anymore.

He shakes his head. "No. We have a lot to do today."

She rubs his arm. "Ben, this trip is amazing. It's the most amazing thing anyone has ever done for me."

He wants to glance at her, but he can't move his eyes from the road. He clutches the steering wheel until his knuckles are ghost white. "I... This should've been perfect. I should've planned better."

"Honey, this is so great. I have all these gifts for everyone, and I freaking saw Mount Rushmore with the love of my life today. I am so happy just to be here with you. Let's go back to the hotel because this is crazy dangerous."

"Are you sure?"

She nods. "Although, daredevil is a good look on you."

~

He's utterly spent when they arrive back in the room a whopping four hours later. He sniffs as he turns on a warm shower for the two of them, stripping down until he's naked. The hot water envelops him, but it's Leslie that makes him feel whole again. Because he's so sleepy and cold, and he wants to take a fifty hour nap and cuddle with his love.

"You're falling asleep standing up," she says with a slight chuckle, rubbing his bare back. "Let's get you to bed."

His head fuzzy and a little dizzy, he changes into pajamas before Leslie covers them both up and shares her magnificent body heat with him.

"L'slie?" he asks, teetering right on the edge of pure exhaustion.

"Shh," she says softly, kissing his chest. "Go to sleep."

And he does.

~

The next day of their trip takes place in bed.

Because Ben royally screwed up with his planning and scheduled a mini vacation in the middle of a relentless, unforgiving snowstorm.
Which he apologizes for billions of times.

And then Leslie playfully smacks his arm and tells him to quit worrying so much.

They alternate between watching History Channel documentaries, sipping on hot chocolate, napping with each other, and decidedly not napping with each other. It's a slow, lazy day in a different place with their normal activities, but Ben's pretty sure he's never been happier.

Of course, it's virtually impossible to not be happy around Leslie.

"Whatcha thinking about?" she questions.

They're naked beneath a quilt and the hotel comforter, and she's in her favorite spot in the world: nestled in his arms.

"Just how perfect this is."
Chapter Summary

Spending an evening with Leslie's ex and a bar full of cops doesn't exactly do Ben any favors.

Leslie glances over at Ben, who’s sitting stiffly in the passenger seat. His fingers tremble as he buckles his seatbelt; afterward, he immediately puts his head into his right hand as he leans back against something sturdier than him. He’s chewing on his bottom lip and collectively avoiding any and all eye contact with her.

Because her ex-boyfriend is a cop who’s still in love with her.

Who handcuffed him to a urinal and was trying to persuade Ben to let him date her again.

“Babe?” she questions softly, rubbing his arm. But he is rigid beneath her touch. The sleeves of his button up are rolled to his elbows, suit jacket strangely missing, even though it’s rainy and miserably cold on this February night. “Are you okay?”

She doubts the answer could possibly be yes. Because Dave tortured him, and he's had to hold his pee for approximately five hours while Leslie continued to chat with police officers. He still hasn’t even gone yet, and the moonlight only accents how weary he seems.

He doesn’t say anything, doesn’t even flinch. He starts to gnaw on his thumbnail, staring out the window into the dark, frigid blackness. She puts the car in drive and heads back to her place, frowning and unnerved by the silence. Ben’s wound to the core and tightly restrains himself in most cases, but he loses his usual quirkiness around cops and becomes a ball of tight energy. He speaks too fast and says massively wrong, inappropriate things, and seems to cause more problems than resolve them.

“Dave,” Ben says so hushed she barely hears him. “He’s... He’s still in love with you.”

“Honey,” she starts sweetly. “I don’t feel that way about him. I never really did. I love you. Only you.”

And it’s not like there’s even a second thought in her mind. Ben took her to freaking Mount Rushmore just a week and a half ago, he cooks her meals, rubs her back, runs her campaign like a suave, ultra attractive beast of a gazelle, and is always on her side. But it’s so much more than what he physically does for her. He’s there, willing to help and making her feel like she’s constantly on top of the world.

Dave was never able to do that for her.

No one ever has, besides Ben.

Her sexy, handsome, adorable, smoking hot boyfriend who’s presently in the middle of a mental breakdown.

“He chained me to a toilet, Leslie. And... And he had a gun. H-He could’ve shot me. Boom. Done.
Over with.” And he mimics a taking bullet to the chest very briefly.

She grabs his cold hand. "I don't think he would've shot you, babe."

Ben shakes his head furiously and then finally makes eye contact with her. And, even though she’s trying to focus on the road, his browns orbs are dilated, and he’s breathing shakily. “You don’t know that. You don’t... But he’s really in love with you. And he had...”

It’s five plus hours of pent up nerves expelling from her wonderful boyfriend. He’s not exactly thinking rationally and has spent way too much time around people he’s deathly afraid of tonight. He’s sweaty and frazzled, and she just wants to cuddle the crap out of him.

“Shh... Shh...” she shushes, rubbing her thumb over his skin. “Take a deep breath. You’re safe now.”

“What if he had hurt you, Leslie? He could’ve... And I don’t know what I would do without you,” he whispers brokenly.

Leslie instantly pulls the car to the shoulder, turning on her flashers before engulfing Ben in a monstrous hug. He smushes his face in the crook of her neck, and she traces soothing circles on his back. He’s still shivering, so she turns the heat a little higher while maintaining her tight grip on him.

“Ben, nothing is going to happen to me.”

But he doesn’t move from her grasp. And, she’s not going to lie, part of her, even at this moment, feels so insanely lucky to have Ben in her life. Because he’s worried about her, concerned about her, and wants her to be okay. He puts her before himself, and he’s considerate and insanely handsome, and she wants desperately to take him to bed.

“I love you,” he tells her in an exhausted, muffled voice.

She kisses his forehead when they pull apart. “I love you and like you.”

And he breathes out a sigh before sinking back into his seat. She takes his hand after she gets back on the street, and he pecks each of her fingers individually. She loves him so so so much, and there’s no one in the world, galaxy, universe better than Ben Wyatt.

~

Leslie finds him curled in a ball on top of the covers, back to her and effectively covering his entire face with a pillow. His hair damp and clad in plaid pajama pants and a navy blue long sleeved shirt, he’s clutching on to a wad of comforter. She immediately spoons up from behind him, enveloping his still quivering body into her arms. A bare foot brushes against her shins, and she shivers at the touch.

She cards her fingers through his currently unruly locks. “You doing okay?”

It’s just after midnight, and, while they got the endorsement and should be freaking happy, it’s too obvious that Ben’s over-thinking everything. “’m fine,” he mumbles. “Let’s just go to bed.”

“Do you wanna talk more about this?” she asks. “Or we could watch Shark Tank and make fun of the entrepreneurs ideas?”

He shrugs. “I kinda just wanna sleep.”
And it’s unusual because he’s blocking her out, shielding a part of himself away from her. It’s very un-Ben-like; he’s usually open and honest and cute and sarcastic. His guard is very high up there right now, so Leslie squeezes him harder, kissing him on his neck until he tries to scoot away from her. “Benjamin,” she says. “What’s going on?”

“Nothing, Leslie. And don’t call me Benjamin.”

She nudges him. “Would you prefer Benji?”

“Quit it.”

He moves to the other side of the mattress, her side, crossing his arms over his chest and closing his eyes.

“Could you please tell me what’s bothering you?” she asks softer this time. She doesn’t move from her position.

“I just don’t ever want to lose you again,” is all he says, but it’s strong and solid and factual, like he would rip apart at the seams if he said it any other way.

“You aren’t going to lose me, Ben. I’m right here.”

“Yeah,” he says. “But what if one day you aren’t? What if you lose your campaign because of me and decide that I’m no longer worth the trouble? What if you end up not succeeding with your dreams because I fucked everything up? What happens when you don’t love me anymore?”

He gets off the bed, standing on visibly wobbly knees and heading into the bathroom. He’s just about to shut the door when Leslie grabs his hand. She rubs her thumb over his pale, clammy cheek and watches his Adam’s apple bob up and down. He’s quaky, and his hair’s a disaster zone, and all Leslie wants is for him to feel safe. Because tonight definitely shook up some ghosts in Ben’s closet, and she needs to work her magic, get him feeling better.

“I could never not love you. Never. I don’t know why you would ever think that I could just walk away from you. You’re the best person I’ve ever met, and I’m sorry I can’t make you feel as special as you make me feel.”

He shakes his head. “I-It’s not like that.”

“I know. I know,” she says. “You’re not a screw up, Ben. I get that Ice Town sucked ass in the end for you, but that’s the past. And, seriously, you’re worth so much. So much more than what you’ll ever realize. I think you think that you’ve hurt me, or even the campaign, in some way, but you’ve only made it a lot stronger.”

Ben still won’t touch her; he’s leaning against the counter in the bathroom while she’s up against the wall. He sighs, rubbing his forehead. “I just... I’m tired of always being the screw up. And tonight made me feel like a fucking idiot. I barely held it together with Dave and with those cops, and I’m a terrible boyfriend because I can’t give you what you want.”

And, nope, that’s not going to fly. Leslie takes a few steps forward and kisses him, long and hard until there are butterflies in her stomach. “You’ve already given me everything that I want. All I want is you, Ben.”

“And to win a spot in City Council and make an ascent to becoming the President of the United States,” he says with a slight shrug.
“None of that would be possible without you, though. I want to take these steps with you.”

It’s hesitant and still not quite like her Ben, but he finally wraps her up in his arms, kissing her hair and holding her close. “Are you sure?” he whispers.

She smiles brightly against his chest. “I’ve never been more sure about anything in my entire life.”
Ben tries to help Leslie relax.

"Uh uh, Knope. Let's go."

And Leslie, obviously knowing what's going on, glances up from her binder with a surprised expression smeared across her adorable face. "Whatever do you mean, dear sir?"

He wants to chuckle, but he chooses not to. Sleep deprivation and overworking is dangerous, and he doesn't want Leslie to stress herself out anymore than she already is. Because she's stretched too thin, and she forgot to invite Jerry to his own surprise party that she planned. "Cute," he quips, closing flap of her favorite piece of stationary. "Time for bed."

"I'm not tired. In fact, I just started an idea list for your birthday," she says with a smile.

He lies down beside her in bed, tucking a stray hair behind her ear. There are dark purple smudges beneath her still beautiful eyes, and she just looks so tired. "My birthday's in November," he reminds her. "It's only March first."

She shrugs. "That's not important. What is important, however, is the big three-seven." She curls around him even more, tucking her face into his chest, palming at his shirt. Leslie's still somehow in her striped sweater and jeans, while Ben changed into pajamas a few hours ago because he managed to spill coffee on his pants and cardigan after Andy scared the living shit out of him while carrying in leftovers from the party. He was only, for whatever reason, pretending to be a cat, but it spooked him regardless.

"Leslie, honey, you have to be tired," he says quietly, rubbing her back.

She shakes her head. "I'm good. Great even. I kinda wanna do some jumping jacks. Let's do some jumping jacks."

But, when she goes to roll off the mattress, Ben stops her, holding on tighter. "You're stressed," he points out. "You're tense and exhausted, and you've been working so hard, babe. Let me take care of you." He kisses patterns on her neck and up to her lips, pecking softly.

"You just want to sex me, Mr. Wyatt."

"No," he says. "Okay, well maybe yes, but I'm not going to. Tonight is Leslie Knope's Night of Relaxation starring you and a bubble bath and then a pillow."

She frowns. "But you're my favorite pillow, even though you're super boney." She considers briefly for a moment, tapping her chin with her pointer finger. "But a bath does sound nice."

He nods and smiles. "That's the spirit."~
Less than half an hour later, the bath is ready to go. Ben watches her smile at the dimmed lights, the candle burning, the two red fluffy towels. She's already naked and beautiful, and he would be lying if he said he didn't want to do unbelievably naughty things with her, but this night is about getting her to relax and actually sleep, not rile her up.

Because Leslie's appetite for sex is amazing, but it's the wrong approach for what he's trying to accomplish here.

"Come in with me," she says a few seconds after she settles down in the warm, bubble bathy water.

He doesn't object. Ben removes his clothes and climbs in behind her so she can rest the back of her body against his front. She's so smooth and soft beneath his touch, and he kisses her neck up and down. Leslie grabs his hand and entangles their fingers.

"So I can't finish the rest of your birthday list tonight?" she asks curiously.

Good lord, the woman doesn't know when to stop.

He shakes his head. "Nope. You shouldn't even be thinking about that right now, babe."

She sighs. "I don't like this. I don't like not being able to work. You know this, Ben. Why are you trying to torture me?"

Since when is a nice, soothing bath torture?

Oh, right; she's Leslie Knope.

"I swear I'm not trying to torture you," he assures her. "I just want you to take it a bit slower is all."

"I can do slow."

"And when exactly would the slowness start?"

"Um... Next week-ish? I dunno exactly; I'd have to look at my calendar."

Ben collects some bubbles and creates a mini beard for his lovely girlfriend. "No checking calendars. No laptops or binders. We're taking a bath and then going to bed."

"Fine," she huffs. "Remember this later, Wyatt... But could you make my bubble beard bigger?"

~

"I'm not quite sure this is fair," Leslie points out.

There are two little blue pills in Ben's hand, and she's glaring at him like he's lost his damn mind.

"They're just sleeping pills, Les. One for you, and one for me."

"I don't take those."

"Oh, believe me, I know you don't. But I do when I feel my mind going bonkers when I try to sleep."

"But I'm super chill all the time!" she retorts. "I most definitely do not need those, sir."

Ben exhales and lies down on the bed with her, pulling the sheet and comforter up over her
shoulders. She's amazingly cute in his REM t-shirt and a pair of loose fitting pajama pants with cartoon cows on them. But, even though she is amazingly cute, Leslie is a woman in desperate need of rest.

It's only going to get worse if she ignores it and keeps pushing on.

He runs his fingers through her hair. "Please?" he whispers. "For me. I don't want you to get sick or fall asleep while driving home one night or get yourself hurt."

Leslie rolls on to her side and cuddles her face into the crook of his neck. "I will go to bed," she says in a muffled voice. "But I won't take that pill."

He chuckles and sets the gel caplets on his bedside table. "Okay. That's okay." He clicks off the lamp and holds her close. Her heart's beating quickly at first, but then she instantly relaxes when he begins to rub her back. She places tiny kisses on his shirt. "Goodnight. I love you, Les."

She grumbles slightly. "Goodnight, Benjamin. I love you too."

He may be in a bit of trouble, but it'll be worth it if she sleeps soundly.

~

"Ben!"

He flinches and jumps and tries not to empty his bladder right then and there. He rubs his eyes and can't get them more than half open before they flutter shut again.

"This is so wonderful! I have so many new ways to improve Pawnee!" she screeches giddily, intruding into his warm section of the bed. "Wake up! This is important!"

"Noooo..." he whines. "What time's it?"

She bounces more on the mattress. "Two thirty. But that was the best four and a half hours of sleep I've ever gotten! We should go to Ramsett Park. Or to JJ's. Mmm, Ben, let's go get waffles."

He shakes his head and snuggles his cheek into the pillow, his head aching and body not at all ready to wake up just yet. "L'slie," he slurs. "Go back to sleep."

"Nope. Definitely not. No can do, chief."

"Oh my God," he moans, a sudden realization smacking him the face. "What'd you take?"

"Three Five Hour Energies! Let's go!"

Ben knows he'll lose this battle no matter what. An incredibly hyperactive Leslie is a recipe for disaster, and, if he doesn't go with her and follow her every step, she could die.

Yeah.

There's, like, a sixty-five percent she'll die.

He groans and scrubs both hands down the sides of his face. Leslie eagerly grabs his hand and ushers him out of bed, and Ben grabs his glasses before following her out into the living room, where there are already piles and stacks of binders everywhere.

So much for Leslie Knope's Night of Relaxation.
Leslie gets sick after all of her overworking, and Ben nurses her back to health.

"Okay," Ben starts, settling the lime green plastic tray over Leslie’s lap. “We’ve got peppermint hot chocolate, a bowl of my famous chicken noodle soup, tissues, cough drops, and the movie’s already in the DVD player; everything we need for a day in bed."

He lies down carefully on the mattress, taking Leslie’s hand and kissing it softly. It’s mostly just a way to gauge her temperature, and, as he suspected, she’s still overly warm to the touch. Ben pulls the comforter over her chest as she shakily picks up the spoon from the piping hot bowl. She slurps the liquid and breathes out a sigh of relief he can’t help but smile at.

“Why aren’t you in your PJs?” Leslie questions, her voice exhausted sounding to his ears. Because his wonderful girlfriend pushed herself hard this last week between the events and speeches and creatively coming up with a plan to stay in the game, even though Bobby Newport hired Jen Barkley, a very rude, surprisingly awful woman, to run his campaign. And, now, it’s the weekend, and Ben’s letting Ann cover things for the next two days while he tries to help Leslie get better.

"Right,” he says. “Absolutely."

He gets back up, stripping off his sweater, button up, and slacks and changing into a hoodie and sweatpants. He had errands, of the April and Andy related nature, to run early this morning, and he figured, especially after last night, Leslie could use some time off. She had spent the evening coughing and blowing her nose, hunched over binder number 1589 and abrasively denying that she didn’t feel well. Even though it was painfully obvious because she didn’t even want JJ’s.

And that, right there, among many other clues, is how he knew something was very wrong with his girlfriend.

He climbs under the covers and clicks play on Toy Story, her movie of choice. She sniffs as she eats the soup, her eyes drooping open and shut every few seconds, but still diligent and meaning to not drop her guard and keep on trucking Leslie Knope style. As if he hadn’t found her barfing in the fake ficus only an hour ago, claiming she had business she had to attend to at the very moment and was entirely too busy to focus on Ben.

But that’s because she’s housing a fiery little fever of 102.

"Can’t you just bring one binder in here?” she whines, taking her eyes off the TV to stare at him.

He shakes his head and glances sideways at her. “You’re sick, Les. Which, by the way, is exactly what I warned you of when you refused to take it easy in the first place. You’re going to stay in bed and watch movies with me and get better.”

“Only binders make me feel better,” she points out.

Ben chuckles. “I don’t make you feel better?”
She shrugs. “I guess you do,” she says nasally. “But I’m not happy about this.”

"I know you aren’t, sweetie. All you have to do is relax. Leave everything else to me."

~

He must’ve fallen asleep because he jolts awake to find Leslie out of bed.

Son of a bitch.

He figures he’ll find her working away on her laptop in the makeshift office combined with the exploding crafts box littering the desk, ignoring his pleas to go back to her room. Instead, before he even makes it down the hall, he’s stopped by the sound of retching filling the bathroom. He gulps and bites his bottom lip before entering, and he frowns when he finds Leslie on her knees in front of the toilet. Ben quickly kneels down and holds her hair, rubbing her overly warm back and whispering soothingly in her ear.

She eventually stops heaving, and he wipes her off with a cold washcloth as she leans against him. He kisses her curly locks. “I’m sorry you feel so bad,” he tells her quietly. She’s drenched from head to toe in sweat, and she just looks very tired, like the weight of the world rests on her shoulders, and she’s the only one there to fight it off.

Ben helps her shower, dressing her in one of his U2 shirts and sleeping shorts because, now, she’s more than burning up; she’s on fire. And he has her brush her teeth and take more medicine, and she’s soon back in bed, cuddled up around him like a miniature furnace. It’s the most worn out he’s ever seen her, and she doesn’t even try to fight him anymore. All she does is lie there peacefully in his arms before she eventually starts snoring.

~

Later in the evening, she’s still curled beside him. She kicked the comforter off in the middle of her slumber and refused to use it because she was perspiring enough to fill an entire gallon of water. He alternates between tugging her to his chest and spooning her, carding his fingers through her hair while she lies there, defenseless and unable to do much. It’s extremely strange for him to see the wild, passionate Leslie Knope succumb and let him take care of her.

She hasn’t even asked about work, hasn’t uttered a word about the campaign.

“Les,” he whispers. “I need to get up. You need more medicine.”

“Nooo,” she whines in a broken, thick voice. “Please just stay here with me.”

He kisses whatever part of her is closest. “I’ll be right back. It’ll just take a second.”

"Ben.” And his heart breaks into a million tiny pieces as she whimpers. He immediately wraps her up in his arms and holds her close as shivers wrack through her body. He does his best to get some of the blankets at least on her legs by kicking at them, but he fails, and, good lord, he’s never ever seen Leslie like this. “I don’t want you to go.”

And the fever is burning through her body, and Ben almost starts trembling himself.

"Shh. Shh,” he soothes. “I’m not going anywhere. I promise.”

~
Somehow, he gets her to eat just a few spoonfuls of soup for a late breakfast. She slept from seven o’clock yesterday evening until eleven today, and he thinks that’s exactly what she needed. Her temperature is almost back at a normal degree, only hovering at 100.2 now, but she’s lethargic and has practically zero energy.

They shower together and instantly change back into pajamas, knowing full well they’re not doing much today. Sure enough, before they even start The Lion King, Leslie huddles up around him, breathing through muddled congestion and clinging to his long sleeved shirt. He covers them both up and pecks her forehead, and she draws patterns on his chest.

"Do we have any candy?" Leslie asks thirty minutes in. “Of the sugary necklace variety?”

Ben’s eyebrows furrow, but, at the same time, it’s the most Leslie-like thing she’s said since yesterday afternoon. “You want candy necklaces?”

"Only if we have them, of course,” she tells him with a small, cute nod.

He goes to push himself up, and she rolls over just a bit. “I bet we have some.”

Ben finds them in her “hidden” candy drawer in the kitchen, the one where she stores away candy bars and sprinkles and frosting to munch on while he cooks dinner most nights and pretends not to hear him when he playfully lectures her. Once he hands her one, she perks up, and they lie against the pillowed headboard and finish their film. She chats and giggles, but she never even hints at filling out forms or new idea lists or updating the Li’l Sebastian memorial.

~

“Wake up, sleepyhead,” is the first thing he hears when he comes to.

And, good lord, why does he feel like he swallowed sandpaper?

Wait. No. What? No. This is so not how it’s supposed to happen.

“L’slie?” he slurs, but his voice sounds so foreign, so far away. “‘s happenin’?”

His vision is entirely too blurry, and his body screams when he tries to squirm until he’s on his back. “Medicine time,” she tells him. And then there’s nasty liquid lining his throat, and he just really really wants to go back to sleep. Because, whatever this is, it needs to go away right now. It’s not normal, and he shivers, and then there’s a hand rubbing his back.

But wait. Leslie. Is Leslie okay? She was, like, really sick for all those days, and he’s... Why is he so tired?

"You ‘kay?” he mumbles before a cough ruptures through his esophagus.

"Yes,” he hears. “I’m perfect. Thanks to you.”

He nods, snuggling his face into something warm. Solid. Soothing. “Good. ‘m glad you’re ’lright.”

“Get some rest, Ben. I’ll be right here to take care of you.”
Chapter Summary

Leslie is extremely lucky to have Ben in her life.

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for reading! :)
Follow me on Tumblr: @supervanillabear31.

“Leslie! Great!” Andy says, zooming up from the recliner to greet her at the front door. “Do you know anything about getting gummy bears out of clothes?” He gestures down to his green basketball shorts and Mouse Rat t-shirt, which are both slathered in wads of melted candy, some of which aren’t even gummy bears. She almost takes a step back on this one, but she holds her ground. “Never mind. I’ll ask Ben. He’s the best when it comes to this stuff.”

It’s probably just because Ben’s the only one in the house that does laundry. Once, he slept over at Leslie’s house for two weeks straight, not even bothering to come back here. He told her that Andy and April both ran out of clean clothes and resorted to walking around completely naked at home (minus Andy’s one lucky sock) and re-wearing the same underwear everyday at work.

“No. Wait,” she says because, honestly, she’s not even sure if Ben’s dressed just yet. “I’ll go ask him.”

Andy nods eagerly. “Do I smell Chinese?”

She glances down at the plastic bag in her hands. “No. This is... Um, broccoli.” She shudders at the very thought of consuming something so green.

“Blech. Gross.”

Amen, brother. Amen.

Thankfully, Andy lets her go to Ben’s room without any further questions. And, as she guessed, her amazingly sweet, utterly handsome, sexy elf of a boyfriend is sprawled out on his stomach on the mattress, snoring quietly with disastrous bedhead. She peaks beneath the soft blanket she laid over him before she left to pick up dinner and smiles. His khakis and boxers are still around his ankles, dress shirt partially unbuttoned and tie missing. He has a hickey on his neck and faint bruises scattering his hips.

And, yeah, Ben really did get lucky.

But, then again, she did too.

He’s her genius, suave campaign manager and the love of her life, and they make a marvelous team
together. Yes, she totally got monstrously hammered and made a fool out of herself and almost
drowned her dream, and he’s a giant stress ball on the brink of exploding, but they, by the grace of
Li’l Sebastian, are still floating high above the others, besides Bobby Newport, in this election.

She places the food on his desk and snuggles up beside him, rubbing his back. It’s officially spring
outside, but Ben’s shivering, and it most likely has something to do with his current lack of pants.
Leslie giggles and nudges him playfully until he grumbles, turning his head to face toward her. There
are still dark smudges beneath his eyes from one too many nights of not sleeping due to anxiety and
such, but he’s adorable and handsome, and she boned the crap out of him not even two hours ago.

“Tired,” is all he mumbles. He doesn’t move, and she brushes his wild hair off his forehead. Her
poor Benji is beyond exhausted, and she wants to cuddle him into oblivion, so she wraps her arms
around him and pulls him to where his face rests comfortably on her chest.

The food can wait until he’s a bit more coherent and is able to form complete sentences.

~

A couple more hours later, it’s past eight PM, and Ben’s chowing down on the food. They’re fresh
from the shower, and he’s bundled in warm pajamas while she stuck to one of his thousands of nerdy
t-shirts and a pair of his boxers; tonight’s shirt has Wookiee’s face on it and reads “Designated
Wingman.” It’s littered with tiny holes and is more than just baggy on Ben, so it practically swallows
her.

“Could your shirts be any weirder?” she asks.

He shrugs, mouth full of sesame chicken. “That depends. How often do you plan on wearing them?”

She smiles and grabs his left hand with her right. His shirts, while mostly ridiculous when he’s not
working, are endearing and make her feel protected, safe. Even if Ben’s not physically next to her,
which isn’t very often anymore (and she loves that), putting on his battered white REM t-shirt or
adorning herself with the Twin Peaks top with a map of the town on it helps her relax. It’s like his
kisses or his hugs or his voice or his reassurances that everything will be okay.

Leslie’s just really really into her pants and underwear around the ankles, sexy breakfast chef of a
boyfriend who collects geeky clothes and comic books.

~

She doesn’t know how she got so lucky, but she’s incredibly thankful she is. Because Ben’s fixing
her washing machine after she tried to clean her massive stuffed animal collection, including her
prized plush Li’l Sebastian, which apparently didn’t do her already decrepit appliance any favors.
He’s greasy (well, that was more or less from changing the oil in her car; who knew she was
supposed to cycle it through every three months?) and sweaty, and his hands and clothes are
smudged black, and, crap on a cracker, he’s extremely doinkable.

“Oh, I think I got it,” he says, huffing and standing up to pop his back before turning on the
device.

It works like before, probably even better now because Ben’s sexy and handy.

She immediately begins kissing the crap out of him; he’s small and wiry and perfect and exactly what
she needs.

Somehow, whad’ya know, his pants are left around his ankles again, but it’s more than okay because
hers soon join.

~

Ben with a paintbrush in his hand has to be one of the sexiest Ben’s, she decides.

Like Picasso.

King Picasso.

Ooh, or van Gogh. He seems edgy.

He’s going over a few knicks in her wall from moving in her brand new couch (Ben and Chris did all the work, and she’s not ashamed to admit it). Or rather their brand new couch. Because he pretty much lives here, and she couldn’t be happier about her sexy roommate. And, seriously, the way his jeans are just barely hugging his hips can’t possibly be any hotter.

“Okay, Wyatt. You’ve gotta stop doing that.”

He turns around, his cheeks flushed pink. “Doing what?”

And, dammit, the paintbrush.

There’s no warning as her lips crash into his, and maybe she gets paint on her clothes, but who cares?

~

He’s baking cookies with her at one in the morning.

Ben Wyatt, the man of her dreams, loves her enough to indulge in her craziness and wake up from a good night’s sleep to come downstairs cook with her. He’s all rumpled in his “A Vulcan in the streets and a Klingon in the sheets” shirt (she has no idea what either of those are, so she’s not sure it’s entirely accurate, but Ben’s amazing at sex, so...) and stupid plaid pajama pants. He’s barefoot and wearing those freaking glasses that drive her wild.

She bites her lower lip. He’s hand mixing the batter, and she dips her finger into the bowl, taking a glob for herself.

“There won’t be anything left to make cookies with if you keep eating the dough,” he points out.

But there’s flour in his hair, and there’s a smudge of chocolate on his cheek, and she can’t help herself.

“Just kiss me,” she growls.

And he does.
Chapter Summary

Chris invites Ben out for a run (or sort of forces him to go on a run... whichever).

He thankfully avoids April Fool's Day like The Plague, choosing to stay at Leslie's house purposefully March 29th through April 2nd (not that he didn't want to be with her anyway; this was just a tactical mission, otherwise he would've checked into a hotel). He locks the door to his room, bolts the two accessible windows, and removes each and every single belonging of his from their reach.

It doesn't work.

He comes home to find his room trashed at every single angle because neither of them have any regard to property or privacy. His door was kicked in by Andy in a fit of wrestling induced rage coached out of by April, and they spray painted just about everything he owns teal, purple, and bright pink. His bed is mysteriously flipped over, and his posters are in crumpled heaps on the carpet.

Ben doesn't even bother lecturing them because it's not like it would sink in anyway. His face red and fists clenched, he's the dark prince avoider of confrontation, and he's certainly not going to give in. He just picks up his possessions and sorts through the piles of garbage to scavenge for survivors. Most of his clothes, mercifully, are safe, but some of his mint condition action figures didn't fare as well.

He's honestly hoping he won't be living here much longer anyway.

His dreams are set on moving in with Leslie and eventually marrying her.

It's just after two in the afternoon. He bites his lower lip through the blue surgical mask he's using strategically to not inhale paint. He removed both closet doors off their hinges and is currently touching them up while Leslie's at City Hall. It doesn't exactly help that wind howls, nipping at the exposed parts of his body and launching paint into the shrubs and occasionally on him.

"Ben Wyatt!"

He immediately stops spraying, heart briefly racing before he glances up to see Chris wearing sweats and a thermal shirt. What the hell? Shouldn't he be at work?

"Oh. Hey, Chris," he says.

His friend heads up the driveway, but then he quickly stops, his eyes wide. "Are you sick? Please tell me you're not sick. I lit'rally despise germs. I think I may have some vitamins in my fanny pack."

Fanny pack?

Because apparently those are still a thing.

"What? No, man. I'm kinda, y'know, painting," he says, motioning to the can in his hands and letting the mask hang around his neck.
He beams brightly. "Great! This is excellent news! Hey, let's go for a run!"

Run?

Ben Wyatt doesn't run. Not really anyway.

He almost laughs in his face. The last time he actually ran was when he was being chased in Carmel by these dumbass pricks for slicing up the remains of their government budget. Luckily, he's quick on his feet when his life's at stake, and he even only needed seven stitches for that incident. And, before that, all he can remember about exercising is running laps during baseball practice in middle and high school.

"Um," Ben says. "Well, I'm kinda busy right now..."

"Nonsense! I'll help you finish up, and then we'll go together."

He worked side by side with Chris for the better part of a decade. He knows how he thinks and what irritates him and how to get him to shut the hell up, but he doesn't have a clue what to do right now. Despite it being officially spring, there's an unsettling chill in his bones, and he's exhausted after spending the last four (yes, four) nights up with Leslie creating more campaign posters (as if there aren't enough as it is). He kind of just wants to shower and take a nap and cuddle with his girlfriend once she gets off work.

"Um, okay."

~

Nope. Nope nope nope.

This was a bad idea. A very very bad idea.

Because Ben can see his breath while he jogs beside Chris, and he's trembling, and he's not entirely sure if it's from the cold. Sweat drips into his eyes, and, fuck, what if he gets pneumonia? And his eyes have past the point of irritation. Shit. He should've just done this blind.

Or, seriously, definitely shouldn't have done it at all.

He stops two miles in, hands on his knees and panting rapidly. Chris gives him a bottle of water, but he can't even drink it. Ben just crumples to the concrete, pulse and head throbbing and trying his hardest not to puke. His green long sleeved shirt thoroughly drenched, his sweats, which are oversized because he wears them as pajamas, cling to his legs. He's like a beached, bloated whale, and he can't... He can't.

"We still have eight miles left, partner. Let's go!"

Fuck.

Ten miles? He thought this would only take like twenty minutes. An hour tops.

Fuck no.

He lets out a shaky breath. "Chris, I can't..."

"That's the talk of a quitter, buddy. You've gotta push yourself if you wanna succeed."

He doesn't want to succeed at this.
Who the fuck cares if he runs ten miles or not?

But Chris hauls him to his feet anyway. He nearly topples over, and his knees absolutely do not feel like knees anymore. His legs tremble and quiver, and he wipes his runny nose furiously on his sleeve. Fine. Fuck.

He'll run.

Sort of, at least.

~

He throws up.

Three times.

Chris, good ole, overly optimistic Chris, keeps pushing him, claiming the release of toxins from his body is a good thing. But Ben's nauseous and the overwhelming urge to kick Chris in the balls keeps flooding his mind. And, when he reaches his house, he barely makes it back inside, while his friend keeps on marathoning it up.

Ten miles.

He ran ten miles.

Well, actually 10.4, but, hey, who's counting?

And, now, he's going to die.

Yep, death is approaching.

He ignores April and Andy's incessant screaming and heads to his room. He's covered from head to toe in sweat, and, fuck, he feels so nasty. His hair's matted to his forehead, and his pulse is actually hurting him right now, the notion of simply being alive painful. His nose pours, and he's in desperate need of taking his contacts out, a shower, and then sleep.

"Where've you been?"

He nearly shits a brick when he opens the door to find Leslie lounging around on his bed. There's a huge bowl of popcorn and an extra extra extra large cup of cola on the desk. Her sea of binders on the comforter almost makes him want to puke again.

"What happened? Are you okay?"

She instantly stands up, rushing over to him and taking one of his hands. Ben can't move, much less think or talk. She kisses his clammy cheek and begins rummaging around in his still beyond destroyed dresser. He swallows thickly and rubs his forehead, willing his body not to fall apart once again.

Shit. Fuck. Fuckity fuck fuck.

He tries to count to am million by sevens, but the vomit rolls up his esophagus anyway.

"L'slie," he manages to grate out.

Four times.
He threw up four times.

~

By the time he's showered and wearing a monstrous long sleeved shirt he's sure is Andy's and boxers, he has zero energy left. He hasn't eaten since breakfast, but he no longer cares because his bed is way more enticing, inviting than he ever dreamed possible, and Leslie's rubbing Icy Hot all over his legs and back. And, after she's done, she covers him up, turns on his fan, and lies down beside him.

"So he made you do it? Isn't there some kinda law against that?"

He doesn't move his face from the pillow. "Against making me run?"

"You ran ten miles, Ben. Ten whole miles. I would've died."

He chuckles. "I'm pretty sure I already have. This is just Ghost Ben."

She smiles and leans in to kiss his cheek. "Well, Ghost Ben is super sexy," she says. "But Ghost Ben also needs to go to sleep."

Ben nods, so immensely grateful for his beautiful Leslie. Such a pretty Leslie. God, he's so tired... "I love you."

And then there's a quick peck on his nose, followed by her grabbing his left hand. "I love you too, sweetie."

~

"Ow," he moans, slouching down in a chair at the kitchen island. His legs barely cooperated long enough for him to grab another shower before changing into the loosest clothes possible. They're sore and shaky and overall pretty fucking useless.

Damn Chris.

"You doing okay?" Leslie asks, placing two pancakes down in front of him. Despite not eating for a full twenty-four hours, he's in a bit too much discomfort for chewing and swallowing and just existing at the moment.

"No," he moans. "I... I'm tired."

And, yeah, he totally slept from six last night until eight-thirty this morning. But it was nice because Leslie was there the entire time. She has a campaign to focus on, but she's here. She's his Super Woman.

"I know, love. Breakfast and then we'll go back to bed."

He shakes his head, which sends a surge of pain rupturing through his body. "It's the weekend," he says. "I don't want you to be bored."

She lightly, gently rubs his back as he manages to pick up his fork and cut a piece of the food. "I'm never bored when I'm with you."

And her grin is so cute, and as giggles as she steals scraps away from him, dipping the pancake in maple syrup by hand. He wants her. He wants to take her to bed and ravish her and live beneath her skin.
Of course, he would actually need to be able to move to have sex with her.

Fuck.

Now he really really hates Chris.
"I'm so happy!" Leslie announces, jumping over him on the bed, accidentally kicking him in the leg in the process. "I kicked ass in that debate!"

He smiles into the pillow. "You did great, babe," he tells her, placing his hand on her thigh. He would say more if he isn't entirely too certain that his brain is short circuiting. Like his train of thought is slowing down and becoming a mess of sloppy mush.

"Let's go bowling! I'll set up a celebration event, and we'll get an ice cream cake that says -" He stops her there. "Les, it's midnight."

It's actually 12:56, which makes this so much worse. Because he's dying and just lying here physically hurts; he wants to stay up for the rest of eternity with Leslie, but he's not like her. He needs sleep. She's an ultra cute, sexy robot dog chicken thing (wow, compliment of the year right here), and she can go eternities, eons without resting, but he can't. He definitely really can't.

"Those are prime bowling hours, Ben!" she argues. "I call dibs on lane eleven. That's the lucky one where fries shoot out of the gutter."

What?

"That's... revolting," he comments, smushing his cheek into the softness even more. Shit. He's still wearing a suit, and, dammit, he should shower and brush his teeth and take out his contacts. But Leslie's here, and that's always a distraction, and she's adorable when she's hyper and refusing to even get under the covers.

She sighs. "We could build a treehouse instead!"

He instantly shakes his head; the notion of moving his body too much causing him to shiver. "Let's just lay here." And he effectively pulls her to him, wrapping her up in his arms and nuzzling into her hair. Of course, though, Leslie is Leslie, and she wriggles away instantly, as if he's a giant bug or something.

Wait.

Is he a giant bug?

What if all of this is a dream?

Seriously, though, how the fuck did Gayle decide to marry Jerry of all people?

So many questions.

"Beeennn," she whines. "I'm bored."
Good lord.

He huffs, but finds a way to grin at her because he knows what it's like to not have her in his life all those years and while they were broken up, and he never wants to experience that again.

"What do you want to do, my dear? Besides bowling or building a tree fort?"

"House, honey," she says.

His eyebrows furrow. "Huh?"

"You said tree fort instead of treehouse!"

All he does is blink. And his vision's a little fuzzy, and his head feels like it's stuffed with marshmallows. And, oh, Leslie's breasts would be the greatest marshmallows in the entire galaxy. His lovely marshmallow girlfriend grabs his hand and begins to haul him to his feet, but he's quivering suddenly, and he wants to go to bed so badly. So so badly.

"How about we bake some brownies?"

And then he's being dragged to the kitchen.

~

Three dozen brownies later, his head's cradled in his folded arms at the kitchen table, and he feels strange, off, odd. Because he loves this goofball of a woman. Because he wants to spend time with her. Because the campaign has been rough on her, and she needs his support.

Leslie scoops out some vanilla ice cream on top of the gooeyness of the chocolate, but he's not hungry. Not even remotely. It's 3:88 in the morning, after all.

Wait. 3:88?

Is that a real time?

What year is this?

No, wait, better yet: What dimension is this?

"Ready for our movie?"

He doesn't know how she does this. Ben's currently running on ten hours of sleep in five days, and he actually thinks that, at this point, he's gotten less than Leslie. Because, whether she'll ever admit it or not, she falls asleep on him all the time during movies or while they're working or just simply talking. She'll nap for a couple hours and be bright eyed and bushy tailed and back to her usual, perfect marshmallowy self.

Ben's never been the type to function well on little sleep, but he guesses he's learning. When he was a teenager and in college, he would still have to sleep a solid, full eight hours a night to be able to pay attention during class (although, he normally got ten or so because it made sense and helped him feel better when his life was a complete and utter wreck after Ice Town).

She presses play on Mrs. Doubtfire, and, even though it's a classic he really enjoys, there's no desire inside of him to pay attention. She's munching happily on her dessert while he lets his melt in his lap, eyes closing and breathing deepening as his heart rate dramatically slows down.
But then Leslie cackles, and he snorts, jumps.

He needs sleep.

Really really really needs sleep.

But she's giggly and soft and warm, and she's pressed against him like he's her blanket, even though she has one draped over her bare legs. He doesn't want to miss anything else, doesn't want to disappoint her with his need for rest and relaxation.

So, Ben puts his head in his hand and tries to watch, focus on the movie and his beautiful Leslie.

~

"Ben, you said we were going to watch a movie!"

"Hmmm?" is what he manages to get out. It's extremely intelligent and just reeks of wisdom.

"Us watching a movie doesn't mean you sleeping through it, babe," she informs him.

And, God, what's happening?

Because Leslie's voice shatters his eardrums, and his eyes pound behind his skull. He blinks and blinks and blinks, trying to get rid of the overwhelming sleepy sensation creeping up his spine. But it's no use, and he's going to... Well, he doesn't know, but, whatever it is, he hopes it comes soon.

"I'm sorry," he slurs, scratching his cheek.

"How about we watch Harry Potter next?"

No. No no no.

He can't.

Ben shakes his head. "L'slie, I love you," he tells her. "But I'm so tired. I need to sleep."

"But I'm not sleepy yet," she pouts.

He grabs her hand, and everything is entirely too blurry. "I know, sweetie. But I can't... I'm not like you. I need sleep, preferably every night."

"Everything is so boring when you're not awake."

Which is a shocker because Leslie finds just about anything and everything fascinating. She loves to work and bake and scrapbook and to learn new, interesting facts.

He frowns. "I'm really sorry... Believe me, I wish I could stay up all night with you."

Ben feels shifting from beside him, and then Leslie's on her feet, taking his hand and leading him into the bedroom. Once he spies the bed, his mouth actually waters, and he's so ready to lay down. Sleep for decades. Rest his head and be completely and entirely ready to face the day with Leslie instead of always feeling dead on his feet.

She pulls the comforter over his body and cuddles up next to him. She reaches over to turn off the light.
"Thought you weren't tired?" he mumbles, already well on his way to dream land.
Leslie kisses his cheek and wraps herself around him. She doesn't say anything else.
And, then, she snores cutely right in his ear.
See, she does fall asleep on him all the time.
Bus Tour

Chapter Summary

This is an odd chapter... But Leslie and Ben do go for a late night swim.

"Do you think that sumo wrestlers, y'know, feel anything?"

He jolts, and his breath catches in his throat as he turns his head to the side. “What?” he mumbles, rubbing his eyes only to smudge the hell out of the glasses he can’t remember putting on in the first place. Because it’s totally not even dark outside on this Wednesday evening, and he definitely hasn't already showered and isn't dressed for bed.

“Like, when they’re getting the crap punched out of them, do you think they feel it?” Andy asks. He’s standing in his doorway barefoot with his hair crazily disheveled, but at least wearing a stained t-shirt and boxers this time. He's insanely, noticeably sweaty as always.

He shrugs. “Probably.” And he pulls the plaid comforter up over his shoulders before settling back down against his pillows. He’s flat on his stomach, and Leslie’s ruffled copy of Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire rests somewhere beneath the warm sheets, but he’s far too content right here to move much more. “Why?” he questions.

Andy laughs. “Dude, do you know how bad it would hurt if you were a sumo wrestler? You’re only, like, ninety pounds.”

Um... Okay. He doesn’t have any idea how his question translated in Andy’s mind, but that’s not really what he meant. And, at either rate, he gets that he’s small; he’s been told that his entire life. He hears it roughly twelve times per day from his roommates when he’s here, and it gets a little tiresome after the nine millionth comment.

“Man, what would happen if Fruit Roll-Ups were twelve feet long instead of a foot? Y’know, ‘cuz there’s twelve miles in a foot.”

Ben shakes his head and rolls over to where he’s facing the wall, removing his glasses and placing them somewhere in the mass of coziness. His eyes drift closed, and his heart rate slows back down, and he’s resting comfortably when something pinches him on the neck.

“Quit it,” he slurs.

He hears Andy sigh. “You’re no fun tonight.”

~

He’s asleep, but then suddenly he’s not. There’s a curly, blond strand of hair in his face, and his warm blanket cave is no longer all that warm. Obviously, there’s only one person who it could possibly be (or, rather, who Ben wants it to be; Champion’s gotten into his room more than once), and Ben smiles into his pillow when he hears Leslie giggle. She’s lightly rubbing his back now, slowly and nipping at his neck and pulling the waistline of his boxers.

“Good morning, Mr. Drools-A-Lot,” she greets.
Ben blinks, becoming more awake with each passing kiss. “‘s it really morning?”

“Maybe,” Leslie says. She’s on top of him, nibbling at whatever skin she reaches, and he’s... God, he’s so in love with her. “Well, no, not really. It’s more like nine PM.”

He nods, tugging her down beneath him so he can give her a proper hello. She’s sweet and tastes like watermelon and mangos, and her hair smells of peaches. Even after all the times they’ve shared together, there’s nothing more exciting, thrilling to Ben than seeing her. He lives for lazy days, which don’t come around often anymore, to lounge around together, but working their tails off seems to be what’s happening lately; he wouldn’t have it any other way.

Because Leslie’s just a week away from winning her seat in City Council, and Ben’s ready to see his beautiful girlfriend’s dreams fulfilled.

And, after all the ups and downs, the late nights and barely sleeping, he bets she’s more than ready too. This has been one hell of a ride, but, if he’s being completely honest, he’s kind of anticipating its end. Because Leslie’s strong and brilliant, and she has this thing in the bag. He’s never once doubted her; she’s pulled off something so amazing and so wonderful, and Ben’s not sure he’ll ever stop being in awe of this woman.

She cards her fingers through his hair, and he yawns before kissing her cheek and snuggling around her. She flicks him in the ear. “What’s that for?” he mumbles. Sure, it’s only nine, and, sure, he fell asleep hours ago, but keeping up with this stress and the numbers and steering their events and platforms and strategies along with Leslie takes a toll on a guy.

“Get up,” she says playfully. “Let’s go swimming.”

His eyebrows furrow. “But it’s not even May,” he points out.

“Heated pool,” is all she says with a slight shrug before getting out of bed. And, seriously, she’s standing there in a pink and yellow floral bikini, and his downstairs automatically awakens even more than it already was. “At that hotel you took me to last weekend.”

Ben nods and licks his lips and immediately sits up. “How do we get in?”

“I have my sneak-around clothes in the car. Now, come on, Benjamin,” she urges.

He nods and pushes himself off the mattress. “Yes, ma’am.”

~

They don’t sneak in, mainly because Ben doesn’t want to get caught and create a scandal and ruin Leslie’s one hundred thousand percent chance of getting in a spot in City Council. Instead, he gets them a suite for the night, and they make out on the extremely comfy bed before heading down hand in hand to the heated pool. Luckily for them, there’s no one down here during this time at night, and it’s deserted.

But when Ben’s body hits the water, there’s a shock that transforms, envelops his whole body. “F-Fuck,” he manages to get out, still trying to get over the cold burst of energy through his system. “Shit. C-Cold.” And the water’s so fucking freezing that Leslie instantly latches on to him, cuddling her face into his neck and leeching her legs around his hips.

“I-It wa-was h-heated last w-week,” Leslie pouts, and Ben’s too numb to move. He holds on to her just as much as she clings to him, and, for real, this is so not what they needed. He frowns as his girlfriend’s bottom lip quivers, and her hair’s all wet, and she needs to get out of this pool before she
gets sick. Needs to warm her up.

He somehow finds a way to doggy paddle with Leslie on his back to the edge. He boosts her out before using every ounce of strength to get himself standing on the slippery concrete. Leslie hugs him, palming his chest, and he wraps her up in as many towels as he can find. Not cool. So not cool. How could the hotel people (whatever they’re called) do this to them?

They shiver and shake the entire way back to their room. Ben ends up carrying her the rest of the way once they’re in the elevator because her legs stopped working, and she’s so cold to the touch, and he gulps and blinks rapidly. Through blurry vision and with shaky hands, he gets them both situated in the shower, careful to slowly warm it up and not go from freezing to hot too fast because that’s how pneumonia occurs. She lays her head on his chest as he holds her tightly, and he swears she drifts off at some point.

She’s almost too beautiful, peaceful to move.

“Do you have any idea how special you are?” she asks quietly beneath the stream of warm water.

He cards his fingers through her soaked hair. “I... I’m not, babe. That’s all you. This whole campaign has been you.”

She shakes her head. “No. Ben, seriously, you’re amazing. I’ve never met someone with so much heart and kindness. You’ve done everything possible for me to win this thing. You’ve given up so much of yourself to help me achieve my goal, and I don’t think you’ll ever realize how great you are. But please don’t think I don’t appreciate you.”

Ben nods. “I know.”

“I just really love you and like you, and I have no idea what I’d do without you.”

He lifts her chin for a kiss, and they stay like that for what seems like hours, wrapped in each other’s warmth, intimacy, and tenderness.
Win, Lose, or Draw

Chapter Summary

Everything's about to change; Leslie and Ben work it out.

He’s sprawled out on the couch; her poor, massively drunken baby couldn’t even make it to the bed. Leslie wants to shake him awake, to celebrate while they can, but she removes his shoes and black socks instead, draping a plaid quilt over his snoring form. She carefully sits down on the carpet, alternating between running her fingers through his messy hair and rubbing his warm back through his button up. This is it. This is some of the last physical contact she’ll have with Ben for six whole months. Six months? Six months! How is she going to make it?

Leslie won her spot in City Council tonight.

And it’s because of Ben. Because he’s a hot shot, never takes no for an answer, always looks out for her best interest, sexy elf of a campaign manager, and now other people want him to do it all over again. In Washington D.C., where Joe Biden lives, and her ultimate dream sits, waiting there and tempting her, and can it just be 2020 yet? And she stares at her exhausted, brilliant boyfriend, the one person who’s never once let her down, and wonders.

How is she going to survive six months without him?

She should be thrilled about her newest opportunity to make changes to her beloved Pawnee, but she honestly isn’t.

Ben’s sacrificed so much for her. There were no hesitations when she wanted to run for City Council, even though it originally required them to break up, to end their beautiful, flawless relationship where their hands fit perfectly together, and everything about them being with each other made sense (and this, today, still holds up). He even did the dirty work and ended things between them so she wouldn’t have to. And, now, he’s getting his chance to climb the political ladder, a goal he’s been trying diligently to accomplish since the disaster in his hometown.

She knows this should be a no brainer. Let Ben go to Washington. Let Ben live his dream. Let Ben do this for himself. If there’s anything she knows about the love of her life it’s that he’s definitely not selfish. He has so much to offer the world, so much to show and enhance and use his creative, tactical mind to resolve issues. And he thinks he’s worthless, that he doesn’t deserve much, but it absolutely can’t be further from the truth.

Ben is her rock. Her everything. She doesn’t know how she managed to live thirty-five whole years without him by her side because he just completes her. There’s no other way to describe it. Sitting here on the floor watching him sleep, mouth open and drooling slightly makes her feel at home. Yes, she’s physically at her own house right now, but it’s empty and meaningless without the fabulous, amazingly talented, distractingly handsome Ben Wyatt next to her.

~

This isn’t exactly his ideal way to spend his last day with Leslie, but it’ll do. Because he’s currently taking it in the ass from the headache from hell, and he vomited twice before even stepping foot in
the shower. Because alcohol (so much alcohol). Because Jen freaking Barkley offered him a job to run some douche’s campaign in Washington D.C., and he’s taking it.

It’s a mistake.

Mistake mistake mistake.

And Jen’s going to live to regret it because he screws up everything he touches. Ben didn’t really help much with Leslie’s campaign; his efforts were nothing compared to what his beautiful girlfriend has up her sleeves. She’s so amazing, so soft and cuddly, and he doesn’t know why she would ever say yes to such a ludicrous idea. He’s going to light the Capitol on fire with his stupid ideas, going to get that whole “Ben Wyatt’s an idiot” thing started again.

“You seem so far away,” Leslie says, causing him to jump as she rubs his arm.

He stops folding his clothes long enough to shrug. “I’m okay.”

“Please talk to me about how you’re feeling.”

He wishes it were that simple. He wishes he could turn back the clock and not be Leslie’s campaign manager. Because this is about her. This should be about her. She should still be viciously drunk, aggressively arguing her stances and dancing the night away with a huge smile on her face. Not packing up his belongings and helping him ship off to a foreign, vast land where he’ll screw something up so quickly it’ll make their heads spin.

Yesterday was about her. Today is about her. Tomorrow will be about her.

In the end, all Ben wants is for Leslie to be happy and for him to be by her side. She’s so lively and vivacious and spontaneous and breathes in her passions like air. He’s selfish and making her accomplishment about him, and that just can’t happen. It won’t happen. So, he grabs his cell phone and begins to head into their shared office to call Jen. Call this whole fiasco-to-be off.

But then there’s a comforting hand on his shoulder. “What’re you doing?”

He shakes his head. “Nothing. I just... I can’t do this, Leslie. I can’t lose you.”

“I’m not going anywhere, Ben. It’s only for six months.”

“No. No. That’s too long. And... I don’t even really want this.”

Sure, it be a great advancement to his career, but why does it matter if it means leaving Leslie? Why does it matter if he’ll mess it up one way or another, whether it’s with the campaign or his relationship with her or both? He should go back to Barney and take that accounting job and live his life here with her. No harm, no foul. No risk, no reward.

But also: No risk... No risk.

Leslie grabs his hand. “You don’t mean that.”

“Yes I do. I definitely do. This job isn’t worth it. You... You just became a City Council member, and I want to be with you every step of the way. I’m so incredibly proud of you, Leslie, and I want to share these moments with you.”

“Ben,” she starts, rubbing her finger over his stubbly cheek, and he swears he didn’t even notice he’s tearing up until now. Until looking at her clear blue eyes and seeing the light. “Don’t ever think you
don’t deserve good things to happen to you. This isn’t a bump in the road or a hiccup; you’ve got the chance to do something amazing. You’re going to be running a campaign out of Washington D.C.; do you know how many people would kill for that job?"

He frowns, tilting his head a little. “I don’t want it. Look... I-I’m being an asshole here. Don’t you see that?”

But he bites his lip when she kisses him hard on the lips, cupping her hands around his face. “You, Benjamin Wyatt, are anything but an asshole. You gave up these last few months for me. You’ve worked your fingers to the bone and put in blood, sweat, and tears. Yeah, I saw that chair incident with Andy, by the way; color me impressed. But, at either rate, you deserve so much more than what you realize. You’re going to rock Washington’s pants off.”

She wraps her arms around him, and he feels her tears soaking into his t-shirt as he lets some of his own escape freely. This is huge; it’s bigger than them. Their careers are taking off together, but they’ll be hundreds of miles apart. He won’t see her smiling face in person as often, won’t be able to hold her hand, and won’t be able to tell her everything’s okay in real time.

He holds her tightly, never wanting to let go because, if he does, he may lose her forever.

~

There’s a lot of uncertainties in this, but Leslie’s completely and entirely sure of one thing: She loves Ben. She loves him with every fiber of her being, every ounce of her soul, and nothing bad is going to happen to their relationship. It’s harder to convince him of this, even though she doesn’t really have any actual doubts. Sure, she’s devastatingly sad about him leaving for six months, but this is such a huge opportunity for him.

His suitcases packed, all he has to do is shower and get ready in the morning. And that’s it. That’ll be it. She’ll drop him off at the airport, they’ll kiss and hug, and he’ll be at his brand new, exclusive job in an entirely different state. Her heart thumps wickedly into her chest, and Ben stays curled around her, pecking her neck every so often and nuzzling his body into hers.

It isn’t a mistake. This isn’t a mistake.

“I’m going to miss you,” he whispers so quietly she barely hears him. And she loves the post-sex, rumpled and groggy, sleepy version of her Ben so much. He’s all cuddly and touchy, warm and toasty, with his messy hair and scruffy chin.

She rubs her hand on his bare chest. “I’ll miss you too,” she says. “This is only temporary. You’ll have fun; just wait and see.”

He shakes his head. “Nothing’s fun without you.”

And she pulls that line on him all the time, especially when he’s trying to work or simply relax.

“We can Skype every night. We’ll call and text each other, and I’ll come visit you, and then you can come visit me. It’ll be like you never left.”

His eyes are so droopy and bloodshot, and she wants him to feel better about this, even though her mind’s racing entirely too fast, and she’s pretty sure her heart is skipping beats (it may or may not have been because of those seven packets of Fun Dip she ingested earlier while he was downstairs getting some of his laundry). They’ll be okay. She knows that.

“I love you. I really really love you,” he tells her.
She kisses him again. “I really really love you too.”

~

He can’t. He can’t do this.

Leslie’s starting her brand new job tomorrow, and he’s off to the fucking races in Washington D.C., and it’s not fair to her. He still has time to call this off. He can carry her back to the car, they can go back home and make out, and they’ll order pizza for dinner because they’ll be too tired and sore to bother with anything else. Yeah.

He likes that. That’s what’ll they’ll –

“Ben,” Leslie warns. “I can hear you thinking. It’s very loud.”

And they’re sitting in this drafty as hell Indianapolis airport at nine AM on this overcast Sunday morning, and his stomach rumbles with fear. His knees bounce up and down, up a down, up and down, and his pulse pounds relentlessly into his ears. Leslie grips his hand and lays her head on his shoulder, and that helps ground him for a minute.

“Leslie, I –“

“Shh... Shh, it’s okay, Ben. I’m right here, and nothing is going to happen.”

He shakes his head wildly. “Nope. Nuh uh. I can’t. This isn’t right.” He goes to stand up, but Leslie stops him. She throws her arms around him, and he buries his face in her neck, relishing her fruity shampoo and flowery perfume. How’s he going survive not waking up to this in the morning? No more tickle or food fights. No more tricking her into falling asleep curled on top of him. No more watching movies and holding hands until the sun rises.

But then, conveniently, his flight starts to board. It’s only an hour and a half ride; he should’ve just taken the car. Could’ve had more time with Leslie that way. But she gets him to his feet, knees wobbly and shaky, and his whole body feels off kilter. Like one of his limbs is about to go missing. He’s wasted over thirty-five years of his life without this woman, and he can’t imagine that ever happening again. He wants this to work. He needs Leslie Knope.

“You’ll do great, sweetie. Call me when you land.”

But he puts on a braver face when tears stream down her flushed cheeks; he wipes them away with his thumb. “I love you so much.”

She immediately wraps him in a monstrous hug, and they hold, cling on to each other for dear life. “I love you so much,” she repeats softly.

And he untangles their embrace and heads off into the unknown.

But, he does know one thing for certain: He loves Leslie Knope, and that’s more than enough to guide him through anything.
Leslie and Ben spend the evening together at his new D.C. apartment.

His apartment is much more spacious than what she anticipated. There’s an indoor pool downstairs and a coffee bar in the lobby, where she ordered a double espresso in her mocha Frappuccino on her way up because it's freakishly hot, and D.C. is a stupid swamp town. His bedroom is large, but it lacks any personal touches, such as The Empire Strikes Back poster that’s currently hanging in her bathroom (it’s the only place she’d let him keep it) and his collection of comic books stored in her closet.

Of course, Ben’s leagues ahead of her in the cleanliness department; there’s not a crumb to be found, and nothing’s out of place. It’s so sterile that her stomach drops, and she collapses face first on to his plaid comforter, and, seriously, she didn’t even know she could miss flannel so much. She didn’t know she could miss a person so much, either. She knew Ben moving here temporarily would suck, but she couldn’t grasp just how badly.

She curls into a pillow that smells of his cologne and aftershave, allowing herself to relax, even if it’s only for a second. Her blood boils, and she wants Ben to come home from the swanky D.C. gala and cuddle with her. She couldn’t even get that stupid Interior douche’s time of day, and she deserves better. Pawnee deserves better. If he can’t see that, then screw him.

“Are you okay?” he whispers. His breath is hot on her neck, and he’s sweaty, but she couldn’t care less. The A/C in this place works magically, and he’s actually here, holding on to her and making her feel better without even trying. And, yeah, she did kind of blow up on him earlier, but she’s cranky and tired and only really wants to be with him for the rest of the night.

And when Ben’s not around, not a whole lot of sleeping occurs.

Not that it normally does anyway.

“Are you okay?” he whispers. His breath is hot on her neck, and he’s sweaty, but she couldn’t care less. The A/C in this place works magically, and he’s actually here, holding on to her and making her feel better without even trying. And, yeah, she did kind of blow up on him earlier, but she’s cranky and tired and only really wants to be with him for the rest of the night.

She shrugs, but doesn’t say anything. Instead, she rolls to where her head’s on his chest, and he runs her fingers through her hair. She takes in his fresh, pepperminty scent, relishing in its comfort before spotting the bags beneath his eyes. He was all smiles at the cocktail party, handling his business like a suave, sophisticated, sexy reindeer guardian, but he looks almost as tired as she feels. Leslie draws
little circles on his white t-shirt with her fingers.

Soon enough, they’re both yawning, lulled into a peaceful slumber by the other’s presence.

It’s the best sleep Leslie’s had since he’s been gone.

~

She’s more energetic later that evening, even if he really isn’t. Of course, that is until she starts nipping at his neck and making out so hard with him. They share the shower, and he goes down on her right then and there. His bathroom is immaculately clean and smells like cinnamon and cloves, and she just feels so at home with him, and it almost proves that it doesn’t matter where she is as long as she’s with Ben (except she still loves everything about Pawnee).

He makes her waffles while she adds in as many chocolate chips as she likes. He fingers her through her pajama shorts, and she returns the favor, boxers tugged to his ankles, and he doesn’t last very long before she goes for it again. Soon, they’re snuggled up on his leather couch, bare feet tangled together as she strokes his messy hair from his forehead.

“Babe,” he says softly when the end of Ferris Bueller’s Day Off approaches. “Are you sure you’re alright?”

She nods, even though he can’t see it. “I’m okay.”

“It’s just... You’ve barely said a word to me since we got here. And you didn’t even want to go see the Washington Monument. It’s really nice at night.”

Leslie sighs, but continues carding her fingers through his hair. There’s so much of it; she’ll never understand how it’s short, but endearingly, confusingly disheveled. “I want to be with you tonight,” she says. “Only you.”

“But you seem sad and preoccupied and not yourself.”

She doesn’t want to tell him about the guy from Interior. Doesn’t want to ruin the very little time she has left with him. While April and Andy are off doing whatever it is that they’re doing, she just wants Ben and Leslie time. She missed every single thing about him, from his nerdy shirts to his lazy flannel pajama pants to that cute grumpiness that takes over when he first wakes up. She missed his crooked grin and his laugh and his sweet, polite, antsy nature.

“I promise I’m alright,” she says, kissing his ear before cuddling up around him even tighter, effectively deeming him as the little spoon for now.

He pecks each of her fingers before settling back down.

~

The next morning whizzes by entirely too fast. She barely got a glimpse of groggy, crumpled Ben in his baggy t-shirt and plaid boxers before they hopped in the shower together. Because he’s a hot shot with actual things to do, and she’s just some lowly government employee who’s ecstatic about her position in City Council. But he’s high-powered and has authority and calls the shots, and it turns her on massively to even think about that.

He dresses in a suit while she puts on comfy clothes for the plane ride back home. They hold hands the entire walk to his car, which she didn’t even know she could miss either. It’s spotless and smells just like him, and it’s then that she realizes she should probably move here too. Because this sucks,
and it’s hard, and she never wants to leave him ever again.

As he drives, she lays her head on his shoulder, not wanting to spare another single second without touching him. Neither of them will be able to visit for at least two more weeks, and it’ll be officially summer by then. She bites her lower lip as he rubs his thumb across her hand, squeezing it gently every now and then. He’s so cute. So handsome and intelligent, and he always makes her feel special, like she’s the best person in the galaxy.

They arrive at the airport entirely too soon. He walks her to her gate, and, dammit, she promised herself she wouldn’t cry. But she spies the red, white, and blue tie she got him for his very first Christmas in Pawnee, before they were even officially together; he wears it for good luck. Tears stream down her face, and she sees his eyes swell and become glassy before he kisses her, slowly as if to savor every fraction of every passing second.

“Let me know when you land,” he tells her. He wipes the tears away, and she can’t help but smile.

“This will get easier, won’t it?” she asks with a broken voice.

He smiles brightly, and she knows that it’s just to cheer her up. “Of course. And we’ll see each other soon, and we’ll still call everyday.”

She nods, returning the grin. “Go save the world, Mr. Sexy Campaign Manager.”

Ben rubs the back of his neck. “Well, I don’t exactly think it’s saving the world, but –“

Leslie pushes their lips together one last time before pulling away. His hands leaving her hips stings, and he tugs her in for a final brief hug. “I love you, Benjamin.”

“I love you too, Lesliemin.”

She just hopes that, honestly, this will get easier.
Leslie makes an impromptu visit to Ben.

The best moments of her day are when she hears from Ben. Even if it’s just a silly text, he still manages to make her giggle and light up from six hundred miles away. So, when she doesn’t hear from him on this painfully hot late June day, worry floods her system. Sure, it’s only eight-thirty in the morning, but he should be at work by now. He doesn’t tell her every time he’s there exactly, but he sends her photos of the Jefferson Memorial almost daily since it’s nearby the office (at different angles and times of the day too), along with small messages.

“Okay, that’s like the twentieth time you’ve checked your phone in three minutes,” Ann points out, stabbing a piece of chicken with her fork.

She shrugs, sighing loudly. “I haven’t heard anything from Ben today.”

Ann looks at her like there’s not a single problem in the world with that. Which is insane because Ben’s very important to her, and no one should have a butt as sexy as his. “He’s probably busy,” she tells her. “His job seems pretty hectic.”

Trust her, it is. They Skype as often as possible, but sometimes they resort to good old-fashioned phone calls when Ben can’t leave work right away. He’s very rarely at his apartment, and, when he is, he doesn’t sleep very well. At least, that seems to be what’s going on to her because he always has these deep, dark bags beneath his eyes. By the end of the day when they do see each other face to face on screen, his hair’s in disarray, and he yawns every few seconds.

Of course, she hasn’t been sleeping the best either. Not having Ben around takes a toll on her body, especially since he’s the person who normally gets her to rest comfortably in the first place. She recalls the times she’s woken up on top of him or cuddled cozily into his side or with her cheek pressed against his chest, listening to his calm heartbeat as he snoozes. He’s her pillow and her sleeping pill (that Ann keeps suggesting she takes before she goes crazy).

Well too late, Ann. So suck on that.

“Do you think anything’s wrong?”

And, seriously, he’s a nine hour car ride away; she’s going to panic.

Her best friend in the universe nods, smiling reassuringly. “I’m sure he’s fine.”

Leslie trusts the marshmallow-fluffed starfish Ann Perkins to the moon and back, so she puts her phone in her desk drawer for now.

~

Her cell phone rings around noon, and she answers it immediately with zero hesitations when Ben’s name flashes across the screen. “Hey, baby!” she squeals with delight, the unsettling anxiety suddenly fleeing. “How are things going today? Your guy still up in the polls?” She already knows
the answer is yes because Ben’s a super genius and a great campaign manager, but she loves listening to the excitement in his voice when he talks about his job.

She hears what sounds like a moan, followed by some grumbling. “’m not sure,” he says quietly, almost drunkenly. “I jus’ wanted to say hi. Missed your voice.”

“Are you okay?” she asks. He sounds weird, different somehow, like he’s not entirely with it.

He sucks in a breath of air, and she imagines him rubbing his forehead; he seems tense or something. “’m ‘kay.”

She bites her lower lip, and, yep, the panic’s back. “Are you sure, Ben? You don’t sound like yourself.”

“Yeah,” he says. But then he adds, “Feel funny.”

Her eyebrows furrow. Dammit, why does he have to be so far away? “What’s wrong?”

“Head hur’s,” he slurs.

A bit of the worrying edges off, but he’s all the way in Washington D.C., and, judging from how quiet his surroundings seem, she doubts he’s at the office. It’s difficult enough to ensure that he’s alright when he’s in Pawnee sometimes because Ben has a habit of pushing himself at the very bottom of the totem pole. He doesn’t like to cause her to fret about anything, especially him, so he tends to block it out and bottle it up when something bothers him.

But, still, it’s hard to assess the situation when he’s in Neverland.

“How have you taken anything for it?”

The only response she gets is the sound of retching in the background, and, for real, it’s enough.

~

She gets that she’s nuts, but she books the next available flight to D.C. and packs a weekend bag. Ann told her that it’s probably not necessary; he’s not dying. Maybe he just ate something weird, or maybe he’s simply exhausted, but it doesn’t warrant an impromptu trip out there, despite the fact that he’s puking. Her best friend’s a wonderful sea monkey and all, but she misses the hell out of Ben, and this is as good of a time as any to go visit him.

Her plane lands at 7:48, an entire hour later than she hoped. She instantly gets into a cab, rattles off Ben’s address, and eagerly awaits seeing him, twisting her fingers together with her knees bouncing up and down. Even if he isn’t functioning at one hundred percent, she desperately wants to look at his handsome face in person. Because any time she gets to see her amazing boyfriend are the best times of her life, and this weekend will be wonderful for them.

Leslie pays and tips the driver, snatching up her suitcase and heading up to his apartment as fast as her feet will carry her. Her heart pumps quickly, and she tries to slow her breathing before using the key he gave her while she was here with Andy last month. The chilly blast of air instantly cools her, and she toes off her sandals before dropping her bags on the couch and heading straight for his bedroom.

Ben’s curled beneath the comforter on what would be Leslie’s usual side of the bed if this were Pawnee. All she sees is adorably messy hair and the smudges beneath his closed eyes. He’s snoring cutely and breathing deeply. She kisses his forehead and frowns, caressing the stubbly cheek that’s
too warm to the touch before lying down and snuggling up beside him. He doesn’t move much; he just curls into her and pecks her neck.

“This a dream?” he mumbles. And he sounds so exhausted.

She cards her fingers through his hair. “No. I’m right here.”

He sinks deeper into the pillows. “Happy you’re here,” he whispers slowly.

“Me too, baby. Me too.”

~

“Hey, I think I hear fireworks,” Ben says a few hours later. He’s standing at his bedroom window, shirtless and only in his boxers, peeking through the blinds. He throws on a t-shirt, hoodie, and sweatpants before gently taking her hand, getting her out of bed, and leading her into the living room.

“What’re we doing?” she asks, wiping the sleep from her eyes. She wraps her arms around herself, and he places a super soft blanket over her shoulders before opening the sliding door that leads to the balcony. Outside, it’s muggy and humid, and her hair immediately feels like it’s curling even more in the swampiness of this city. They sit on a swing she didn’t even see the first time she was here last month, holding hands and watching fireworks explode in the distance.

She loves Fourth of July, and he knows that. It’s her favorite holiday (well, besides Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year’s, Galentine’s Day, and Valentine’s day... Ooh, and maybe Saint Patrick’s Day), and it’s so amazing that D.C.’s shooting off magnificent, glowy, sparkly fireworks on only June 27th. That’s a whole week before, people!

And he’s sick and quivering in the 80 degree weather and sniffing every few seconds, but he took her outside to watch one of her favorite things in the entire universe happen.

She kisses his hot cheek and lays her head on his shoulder, smiling brightly when he pecks the top of her head.

~

It’s five AM before she hears a peep out of Ben again. He carefully unwraps himself from her embrace, sniffing and shuffling and trying his best to be quiet. She can’t help but chuckle as he scratches his head and destroys his hair even more, and all he’s wearing is that dangerously oversized hoodie and green boxers that fit his ass perfectly; he looks wonderful.

She rolls on to her back and waits for him to get out of the bathroom. Earlier, she tried to get him to eat something, anything, because it looks as though he’s stopped eating all together, but he politely declined without using any words before falling immediately back to sleep, snuggled up on her chest while she rubbed his overheated back. She grins when he sits back down on the mattress, shucking off the hoodie and shirt, not getting back under the covers.

Her grin turns into a frown. “Hot?”

Ben nods, but doesn’t offer anything else.

Leslie gets up, heading in to the restroom and rummaging through his medicine cabinet for something that might help. She settles on Tylenol and two freezing cold washcloths; he swallows the pills while she gets him re-positioned with a rag on his forehead and the back of his neck. She
doesn’t bother pulling the covers over him, but she does turn on the ceiling fan.

“You came all the way here for this?” he asks, long after she’s lying down next to him, careful not to touch too much since he’s uncomfortable. “That came out wrong.” And he scrubs his hands down the sides of his face. “I’m happy you’re here, but didn’t you have that soda tax revision thing coming up? Or did I already miss that? I’m such a crappy boyfriend that I –“

“Whoa. Slow down there, buddy. I postponed the revision until Monday. I missed you, and I knew you weren’t feeling well, so I came out here instead,” she says with a slight shrug. “Figured I could help in some way.”

He chuckles quietly. “This is definitely amazing. I thought I wasn’t going to see you til some time after the fourth.”

“I hope I’m better than the fireworks.”

“Way better than fireworks.”

And then she finds herself unable to resist her temptations to touch him. “Is this okay?” she asks, carefully placing her head on his bare chest.

“Mhmmm. More than okay.”

They talk for a few more minutes, just about life and Pawnee and D.C. and catching up while she lies protectively in his arms. He’s a furnace of a Ben pillow today, but he’s still her pillow nonetheless. Eventually, he drifts off, mumbling about the calzone he baked two nights ago, and she follows suit, kissing his cheek and pulling the covers over him when he starts to shiver.

~

The rest of Saturday passes in a blur. They spend most of the day in bed, alternating between napping and watching movies. He offers numerous times to cook her dinner or take her on a proper sightseeing tour, but he could barely make it more than an hour at a time before needing to rest again. She makes chicken noodle soup, and he spoons her as he sleeps.

Leslie’s never normally this still, but being with Ben calms her in ways unimaginable.

His fever’s broken by Sunday morning, even though he’s tired and doesn’t say a whole lot. He kisses her lazily, slowly as they shower, their body pressed together and tongues exploring thoughtfully. He pouts for the longest time when she doesn’t let him go down on her, but it’s only because he’s dizzy, but he moves past it as he hooks her polka dot bra with trembly fingers. She can’t help but shake her head when she sees his long sleeves and jeans in this weather.

They cuddle up on his couch after getting ready since there’s still an hour before he takes her to the airport.

“I can’t believe you’re actually here,” he says groggily after a few minutes. “You came all the way to D.C. because I was sick.”

She nods, palming his chest. “I was most likely going to come this weekend anyway.”

“You’re the best.”

“You would’ve done the same for me, babe.”
“I love you.” And he slurs those words cutely, and she figures she’ll let him nap against her before she leaves.

She kisses his forehead, holding him as close as possible. “I love you, Ben. Never forget that.”
How a Bill Becomes a Law

Chapter Summary

What becomes of April and Ben flying home to Pawnee the next weekend.

Chapter Notes

I just wanted to thank everybody for continuing to read this story! I'm almost halfway done writing it, and that's so hard to believe!

Leslie runs straight into his arms the second she spies him, collectively ignoring everyone around her, pushing and shoving in the overcrowded airport until she’s wrapped around him. He hugs her tightly because being away from her is like living without air or the sun. She rubs his back while he thumbs her hipbones, and he places little kisses on her neck.

“I missed you!” she screeches moments later after they’ve pulled apart. “Oh my God.” And she gestures to April and Andy on the tiled floor, making out heavily with each other. April’s skirt is pretty revealing, and Andy’s fly is down. They each grab a member of this sexually deprived party and haul them to their feet, where the couple decides to hardcore French as they walk through the monstrosity that is the weekend after Fourth of July in an airport.

Ben takes Leslie’s hand, and everything just feels right. Once they’re outside in the sticky Indiana heat, which oddly resembles D.C.’s, they both put on sunglasses and make their way to her car. April and Andy secure themselves in the back, and, damn, have their lips parted this entire time? Even briefly? He drives because his headstrong girlfriend’s known to get road rage in these situations, and he doesn’t want her to stress.

"Okay, really?” he asks once he looks behind him. “Oh God, Andy. Put that thing aw- Seriously, don’t do that in here.” He doesn’t hear a response, only a series of loud moans, and he rolls down the window with a disgusted grimace on his face because gross. Just gross. Leslie plugs her ears, and this isn’t exactly how he planned on spending their first moments together after two weeks apart.

He drops April and Andy off at their place and then speeds to Leslie’s.

They don’t even make it to the living room before Ben’s pants are around his ankles, and Leslie’s pulling at his hair.

~

“Do you have any actual food in the house?” he asks incredulously, rummaging around in the fridge only to find twelve cans of whipped cream, eight bottles of Extra Sugar Cola Delight, and three containers filled with to the brim with JJ’s famous waffles. And all he was originally searching for was a can of Coke or even some Kool Aid.

Jeez, he really needs to come back home. Because, at least with him here, Leslie gets vegetables with
almost every meal because he sneaks them in, and she eats a more stable variety of foods. Sure, he can’t stop her when she eats seven brownies or multiple packets of Fun Dip or splurges on bags of Cheetos, but he can balance out the crap with something actually healthy.

Leslie’s only wearing underwear and a peach colored tank top without a bra underneath, so he’s a bit distracted, but he does sigh when she answers with, “That is food.”

He shakes his head. “This isn’t food, honey. It’s sugar piled on top of more sugar. You need to start eating fruits and veg –“

“Don’t even finish that sentence, Wyatt. Vegetables are gross.”

“But you kinda need them to survive.”

She rolls her eyes. “I’ve never needed them this far.”

He rubs his forehead and settles down beside her at kitchen table with a glass of water in hand. He takes a drink and offers her some, to which she scowls and continues looking at pictures on his iPad. Usually during his lunches in D.C., he visits the popular sights and chronicles the experiences for her as a way for them to keep a vastly open communication system while they’re so far apart. She does the same in Pawnee; it’s like a massive journal they’re making together that Leslie definitely can’t get enough of.

“Maybe we should go grocery shopping?” he offers. Hey, he’s here until Monday afternoon, and it’s only Thursday, so he figures he’ll cook and eat good food for once. Since he moved to D.C., he usually resorts to whatever takeout is ordered at the office. The nights are super late, and he doesn’t get to his apartment most of the time until after midnight. He crashes in his boxers with the A/C pumping full blast until five and then repeats the cycle daily.

“We could grill waffles!” she counters excitedly.

His eyebrows furrow. “What? No. No more waffles. How about pasta or chicken or something remotely healthy?”

“Sounds boring.”

Ben smiles, leaning over to kiss this lovely lady on her cheek. “I’ll go change.”

He goes to stand up, but she grabs his hand. “Wait. No. I like what you’re wearing now.”

And he glances down at his blue boxers; he’s not wearing anything else. “I don’t think the people at the grocery store would appreciate this.”

“Mmm, but I do.”

They don’t leave for another two hours, but it’s so much more than worth it.

~

“What about,” she asks, taking a glob of his ice cream with her spoon, “when aliens attack? What do we do then?”

He chuckles and then shrugs. “I would assume we just take cover and hide, or they’ll insert tracking devices into our necks and make us their slaves.”

“That’s what you actually think would happen?”
“I dunno. Maybe.”

It's late, late enough to where their walk to the Smallest Park is peaceful, and there's a slight breeze blowing. He's still sweating a bit in his t-shirt and shorts, but Leslie seems calm and cool, eating up her double fudge brownie while he pokes at the rocky road in a cup. However, per her norm, she's more interested in taking bites of his dessert rather than her own.

They take a seat on their park bench. Yes, it's theirs (Leslie made a plaque and everything to commemorate the moment). It's a monumental, historical landmark in their relationship. He wraps an arm around her shoulders and pulls her close, kissing her fruity scented hair.

Nights like these with her are what he lives for.

~

"Nuhhhh," he moans, pulling the pillow over his head. "Few more hours, baby." But it comes out a hell of a lot more slurred than he anticipated.

"It's already five, Benji! Let's go!"

But the bed is so warm and comfortable and inviting, and he only fell asleep around two in the first place. And, yes, she totally passed out before eleven, snuggled against his side as he continued to watch Blade Runner plus a few episodes of Star Trek in their entireties.

Well, of course she's ready to split; she got six hours of rest, and that's way more than usual for her. However, this definitely isn't enough for Ben.

"Make out with me?" she teases, palming his bare chest and effectively straddling herself around him. They kiss, and Leslie's tongue is way more than magical, and he's getting harder with each passing stroke of his crotch.

And that's how Leslie coached Ben awake for the millionth time in their relationship.

~

"Should I be frightened by this? I feel like I should be frightened," Leslie says cautiously, poking at the leaves of lettuce on her plate late Saturday night. She had no qualms with the shrimp scampi, but of course she takes an issue with the chicken Caesar salad.

"It's not going to bite you or anything."

She scowls. "But it's green."

"Yes, Leslie. Some foods are green."

"Well, I mean I love a good green Skittle or M&M or Laffy Taffy, but not this."

Ben sighs, chuckling as he switches plates with her, where she eagerly and happily takes seconds on the pasta. He smiles as she chews, and, seriously, how could he not love her? Even if she thinks vegetables are evil and should've never been created.

He'll just keep sneaking veggies in her waffles for now.

~

They spend their last full day together in bed.
She's tucked protectively in his arms while he cards his fingers through her hair every now and then. The ceiling fan blows cool air around along with the A/C cranking full blast, so they're snuggled up beneath the comforter. Leslie's bare foot rubs his calf every now and then, and he pecks her softly every chance he gets.

It's hard. He knew, of course, that leaving Leslie for D.C. would be rough and the toughest decision of his life. He often feels like he's missing out on so much, especially with her change in career, something he himself helped her achieve (or so she says; Ben's never believed her). And it really sucks because he hates not being with her. Each day he's apart from her is another tear into his soul. It may sound girly or whatever, but he's never really felt like he had a home, a place to call his own, until he met Leslie.

"You okay?" she asks quietly, breaking her intense stare from her ten billionth viewing of The Princess Bride to shift just a bit. "You seem preoccupied."

He nods and pulls her closer. She maneuvers again to where she's straddling his lap, caressing his hips as she kisses him passionately until he's dizzy and out of breath.

"I'm perfect now."

~

Monday rolls around, and Ben's definitely not ready to go back to Washington. Nope. Not at all. Because Pawnee is special; it's where the love of his life lives, and he belongs here. He knows it, can feel it deep in his gut like its a part of his skin now.

They watch the afternoon news as she cuddles around him on the couch. She hasn't been overly talkative or jittery so far, and he feels sadness rolling off her in waves. Her head's on his shoulder as they hold hands, and they've barely been able to part from each other long enough to use the bathroom.

"It hasn't gotten easier," she says softly. "I can't get used to you being gone. I thought it would get better at least, but I end up just missing you more and more everyday."

He nods, placing a kiss in her hair. "It hasn't gotten easier for me either," he tells her. "Um, what about this... How about I drop from the campaign?"

She instantly sits up, giving him a wild, crazy glare, like he's lost his damn mind or something. "No way, Ben!" she says, slapping his arm sort of harshly. "You can't quit!"

"Why not?" he asks. "We're both miserable. I can't stand being without you, Leslie."

She shakes her head. "It's only three and a half more months. You've done so amazingly well with this, Ben. Do you really wanna give it up for nothing?"

"You're not nothing."

"You know what I mean," she tells him. "I'm more than ready for you to come home too, but this is such a huge opportunity for you. Don't you at least want to see it through?"

He sighs, rubbing his forehead. "I guess you're right."

She touches her forehead against his. "C'mere, Mr. Sexy Campaign Manager. You can't just sit there like that and not expect me to jump your bones."
By Tuesday morning, he's sitting in his office with April throwing paper airplanes at his face while he makes a jillion phone calls.

And, by Tuesday morning, Ben Wyatt confirms what he's known all along: He can't live without Leslie Knope in his life.

He's going to marry her. He has to.
Sex Education

Chapter Summary

Ben asks Marlene for her blessing.

Chapter Notes

I'm extremely and terribly sorry if Marlene is out of character here. I watched her awkward interactions with Ben in "The Bubble," but I'm not sure I did her any justice at all.

Ben flies to Pawnee on Wednesday to meet with Dick Baller (yeah, that's his actual name; he already did the research). He's Leslie's favorite jeweler in town, and, oddly enough, she even purchases her candy necklaces from his store. He handles the ring business he couldn't do over the phone before heading to his girlfriend's office to surprise the crap out of her.

His girlfriend. Soon to be fiancé. Soon to be wife.

He's going to marry the hell out of Leslie Knope.

Of course, he still has one last important thing to do before seeing her. He made absolute sure that Marlene Griggs-Knope, her mother, was working today. It's traditional to ask the father for the woman's hand in marriage, and Ben totally talked to the headstone of Robert Knope before going to the jeweler's; it was a little awkward, but important. He wants both her mom and dad to know how much Leslie means to him, how he would never hurt her. How badly he wants her to be his wife.

A cold front swept through just about the entire nation last night, so he has the pleasure of visibly witnessing his anxiety via his breathing as he walks into City Hall on disastrously shaky legs. It's only the third official day of autumn, but he tucks his hands in his jacket pockets and buries his face into the collar. His inhales and exhales erratic and heart rate wild, he tries to focus on not making a fool out of himself.

"Dude, where's April?" Andy asks excitedly, bouncing over to him the second he spies him in the building. He's more than halfway to Ms. Griggs-Knope's office, and Andy has something smeared on his cheeks... Peanut butter? He's not exactly sure and isn't interested in figuring out what it is.

Ben shakes his head. "No April. Just me."

Andy frowns. "For real?" he asks. "You came all the way here without April?"

He shrugs. "She doesn't exclusively come with me as a package deal."

"This blows." The oversized puppy child throws his large red Slurpee on to the tiles; it splatters on the ground as he stalks away with his head low.

"Um," he says, rubbing his forehead. "You should probably clean this up."
Andy just flips him the bird as he keeps going.

Ben sighs, but then shrugs because he's here to see Leslie's mother and then spend the next few days bundled inside his girlfriend's warmth and reassurance and love. He unzips his jacket, taking a deep breath as he approaches Marlene Griggs-Knope's office. Ben knocks on the door before opening it.

Assertive. Be assertive. Don't let her bully you.

Wait. Is that the sort of pep talk he should be giving himself while asking for her daughter's hand in marriage?

"Bus Boy!" she greets loudly, coming from behind her desk and hugging him. "Still boney as ever, I see."

"Hi, Ms. Griggs-Knope," he says, ignoring her semi-insult from their first meeting last year and choosing to remain professional. He tries desperately, diligently to hide the fact that he's trembling just about everywhere, and his mind won't (can't) stop racing.

She pulls away from him before sitting down in one of two chairs in front of her desk. She instantly offers Ben the other seat, and he takes it, careful not to cross his legs or fidget with his tie or do anything that remotely resembles moving. And, good lord, his throat is so tight and dry.

"I think we're on personal enough terms for you to call me Marlene, dear," she informs him, taking a sip of her coffee.

"Of course. But then I also think you're perfectly capable of calling me Ben," he responds respectfully.

"Very true. Alright, Ben," she stresses his name, "Aren't you supposed to be off in D.C. running some big shot's campaign?"

He nods. "I still technically am. I brought all my work home, but I wanted to ask you something in person."

Marlene's eyebrows furrow, and she looks entirely too skeptical for Ben's liking. "Did you get my daughter pregnant?"

It takes every fiber of his being not to gawk at her and remain calm, focused. "No, ma'am. Leslie's one hundred percent fine. In fact, we're very happy together. So happy that I wanted to ask you for your blessing."

"Is that so?" And she says it with slight surprise in her voice, but it's too little for Ben to get anything from. Is she a robot? Is Leslie's mom a sorcerer or something? Because he's teetering dangerously close to saying something dorky and strange and taking off his shoes right here and now.

He gulps, and he hopes that doesn't ruin his chances. Marlene likes a go-getter, an assertive man with no hesitations. It's not at all that Ben has worries about marrying Leslie; she's the absolute love of his life, and he would do anything for her. It's that he's always been overly anxious and has made himself look like an idiot one too many times in front of people he cares about.

"Yes," he answers. "I want to marry Leslie. I love her with all my heart, and I want to spend every second with her. She's the first and only person who's ever made me feel like I belong, that what I think matters. We're a good team."

She nods, folding her hands on her lap. Ben bites his lower lip secretly and tries to stop his knee from
bouncing up and down. Hold it together. He can hold it together for a few more minutes. Unless there's constant scrutiny of their relationship for hours where he has undergo tests and compatibility quizzes or something. What if Marlene's an alien, and this is just her human form, and she wants to suck out his brains and feed them to her alien dog?

That's not what's happening, right?

"And you'll take care of her?"

He snaps out of his trance. "Always. I'll take care of her forever. Ms. Griggs-Kno... Marlene," he draws in a breath, "I would never hurt Leslie. Ever."

She nods. "Okay then. You hurt her, and you'll wake up in New Mexico with only one testicle, no penis, and have no idea what came your way, alright?"

Ben's eyes widen before Leslie's mom, his soon to be mother-in-law, wraps her arms around him. "Thank you," he says. "I promise that I'll-"

"Save it, Skinny Cheeks," she tells him, waving her hand. "I've always liked you."

He smiles, hugging her again before exiting her office, clicking the door shut softly.

And then he promptly sprints down the hall, only to make it halfway to the bathroom before stopping to toss his cookies in a fake ficus.

He gains his composure quickly, washing his mouth out and then popping in a piece of cinnamon gum. Sweat drips from his hairline, and he removes his jacket, nerves still frazzled and rattled. But he still can't help smiling as he makes his way toward Leslie's office; it's been almost two months since they've seen each other, and he's so ready to feel her again.

Marlene give him her blessing.

He's going to marry Leslie Knope.

It's a dream come true for Ben, the man who never thought he'd actually be happy in this life. But Leslie completes him in every way possible, imaginable, and he can't envision the rest of his days without her by his side.

"Oh my God!" she screeches the second she sees him in the doorway. She instantly runs from behind her desk and jumps into his arms. "Ben! What're you doing here?"

He places his chin on his tiny lover's head, rubbing his thumbs over her hips. "I missed you so much," he tells her. "I couldn't wait anymore to see you."

And her lips crash into his, and soon she's kicking the door to her office closed with her foot.
Leslie and Ben move into their new house.

Leslie finds him curled up in the middle of their bed, buried beneath the soft grey comforter. The sheets missing, the mattress and box spring are still on the hardwood floor. Pieces of the frame lay in a long forgotten pile in the corner of their new room, and he didn’t even bother to dig the pillows out of their respective storage bins.

She snuggles next to him on her side, carding her fingers through his damp hair. Ben’s her fiancé. He proposed. And he’s handsome and sexy and suave, and he put a freaking ring on her finger. He wants to be by her side for the rest of their lives, and her heart can’t possibly be any fuller than it is right now. Because he’s so much more than perfect, and they share a house together, and he’s adorable even when he’s out like a light and snoring louder than usual.

He carried in most of their belongings today with some help from Chris. Tom came to welcome them to their new home, but he mostly bossed Ben around on where their “not swag” should go and ate the fancy assortment of chocolates from D.C. that her fiancé picked out specifically for her. Andy and April stopped by too, but it mainly consisted of them breaking almost everything they own.

Crap on a cracker.

They totally forgot to even mention that Ben's her soon to be husband; they were so busy moving.

Now, her baby's sore and flat out exhausted from a full day of work, but he's her future hubby, and he can’t sleep here like this and not expect her to jump his skinny bones.

But she reconsiders that thought quickly when she spies several hickeys on his neck. And she doesn't have to check for the bruises on his hips and lower back; she saw them earlier when he was putting the cleaning supplies under their kitchen sink. Ben's worn out, and he definitely wore her out a few hours ago after everyone left. Maybe they should sleep instead...

Except now her fiancé's eyes open wide, and he tugs on her, kissing her sloppily before unzipping her jeans.

Well, alrighty then, Mr. Wyatt.

~

"Okay, this place can't turn into another crazy hoarder's nest, so the organizers are a must," Ben says. Their cart is already overflowing enough as it is! "And we're going to do weekly clean outs."

Leslie shakes her head. "I don't think that's necessary."

He raises his eyebrows, pointing at his busted chin from falling face first into her pile of raccoon statues. Granted, he knew they were there, but he kind of couldn't see at the moment, so it's not quite his fault. But he did shatter Leonard and Clyde, and she's not exactly happy about that.
She kisses the abrasion that's puffy and bruised purplish-red, which she tried to cover with a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles bandage earlier, but it didn't stick because of his stubble. His sexy, awesome, manly stubble. Mmm... She licks her lips and grabs her fiancé's hand as he stares at her.

"That's it?" he questions as they keep walking. "No blatant refusal because cleanliness is actually dirtiness?"

She just smiles. "Nope. I'm good."

Of course, she's even better when he pushes her down on one of the store's display beds and hardcore makes out with her until an associate shoos them away.

~

He's going through his DVD collection, sitting criss-cross applesauce on the floor barefoot with a quilt draped over his shoulders, pouring diligently over the titles like it's going out of style. He pauses and glances over at her on the couch, where she's sorting through which twelve sets of dishes she wants to keep (every single one, but Ben says there would never be any use for all of them).

"Do you think I should stick with the whole alphabetical order thing, or should I branch out a bit and organize them by release dates or how much I enjoyed the film? Like a rating system or something?" he asks.

She stops looking at the pretty navy blue plates and focuses on his tired brown eyes. "I thought you were alphabetizing?"

He shrugs. "But I do that with my books and CDs too. Maybe I should take a risk," he says. She can't help but chuckle when she sees the three copies of the original Star Wars movie in his grasp. But then he frowns, as if the fate of the world rests on his decision. "Wait. Nope. Never mind. Alphabetizing is a system. I definitely need a system because I'm still finicky on Blade Runner versus The Terminator."

And, yes, she's marrying a major dork, but he's her sexy dolphin of a dork, so it's okay.

~

They’re cuddled together on the couch, and Ben’s arm is wrapped snuggly around her waist. He places gentle kisses on her neck and in her hair every so often. His breathing deepens, and he relaxes completely into her, and she’s so in love with him. Their brand new fireplace works spectacularly, warming up the entire house quickly and efficiently, which Ben enjoys.

It’s so strange. They practically lived together before because of their sleepovers at her old place and Andy and April’s, but this is different. And Ben left his high profile job as a campaign manager to come back to small time Pawnee to be with her. This is exciting, new, and scary, but Leslie’s more than ready to experience whatever life throws at them with Ben beside her.

"You ready to go to bed?" he questions quietly.

Their bed. In their house.

But, as thrilling as this is, it’s still only 1:44 in the morning, and she’s working off four energy shots and two cups of coffee. She’s just extremely content laying here with her Ben pillow, watching C-Span and munching on popcorn.

She shakes her head. "I'm great here."
He nods, nuzzling his face into her neck before losing the battle with consciousness.

Ben starts snoring almost immediately, but it's definitely the cutest noise she's ever heard.

~

Sunday morning rolls around, and her head’s on his chest, cozied protectively in his arms while he pecks her forehead every few minutes. Are they gross? They’re gross, right? Because now they officially live together and are getting married soon, and he still wants to love on her and hold her, to kiss her every chance he gets.

“I think it’s snowing,” she whispers, rolling on her other side to glance out the window from the distance. She totally left the blinds open last night after hearing the weather reports, and Ben was too tired to negotiate on whether or not their neighbors should be allowed to watch them bone (which only happened once before midnight, so...).

She tries to hop to her feet, but two warm hands grab her softly; Ben pulls her back to her original spot. “Few more minutes, baby,” he slurs practically all as one gigantic word, and he’s definitely still exhausted. He’s so cute in his Batman pajama pants and navy blue long sleeved shirt, and she smiles before kissing him on the lips and settling down.

Their date in the falling snow can wait.

After all, they have the rest of their lives to be spontaneous; she’ll just cuddle with her sleepy fiancé for a little bit longer.
Ben's Parents

Chapter Summary

Ben’s thoughts after his parents leave the party.

Chapter Notes

My views of the Wyatt family are a bit darker and more sinister than the show. I know we only met Julia and Stephen once, but their relationship was so powerful from the get go, and I tossed some of my own ideas in the mix.

Nope.

Nope nope nope nope.

This can’t be happening. Because, even though things ended up sort of fine at the party, he’s definitely not feeling fine right now. His parents, the two people who are supposed to love and support him unconditionally no matter what the circumstances, aren’t even able to bury the hatchet for a few hours without bickering. Good lord, he doesn’t even live in the same state as them anymore, and they’ve been divorced for thirty years.

But it doesn’t matter. Henry and Stephanie got by with playing sides; Henry took Dad’s, and Stephanie took Mom’s. And, as the middle child, he was left with the scraps, which really meant nothing, the short end of the stick. Somehow, Mom and Dad rallied for Stephanie’s college graduation and the birth of Henry’s daughter, but they can’t do this for him. Because he’s the practical, tactical son who used to stay up with both of them on separate nights and took the garbage, the insults from one parent to the other, so his siblings wouldn’t have to.

He’s the son who read through the divorce papers at age ten and helped decipher the meaningless bullshit.

And he’s the son who’s birthday they used to forget because it’s near Thanksgiving, and Thanksgiving was normally when Dad got hammered off his ass and pissed from the roof, trying to write Julia in the Minnesota snow with a giant “x” through it.

They couldn’t even be there for him after he had a mental breakdown post Ice Town. Stopped talking and didn't eat and wouldn’t leave his bedroom. That is, until his dad waltzed back in like he still owned the house and threw him flat on his ass, telling him harshly that he’ll do something with his life and not continue to be such a screw up. No. That’s not how it’s supposed to work.

Ben wanted this night, the night Leslie finally met his parents, to be a good one.

He obviously wants his wedding to go off without a hitch too.

But, with those two around, chaos awaits.
And, sure, he’s mulling over shit that happened between the years 1984 and 1993, and it’s 2012, but still. He gets it. He’s a baby and blowing this out of proportion and blah blah blah. Because that’s what he always does, always will do. He used to complain about it growing up, but Henry used to ram him into walls to make him shut up (broke his thumb once, actually), and Stephanie would just want to play with Barbies instead.

It’s a gross, disgusting, nasty scab he’s picking at now, one he thought he tucked behind him long ago. Because he moved from Partridge to Indiana at age twenty-two after college to get as far away from them as possible, and it worked until now. Until they had to meet his fiancé, the love of his life, and the one person he doesn’t want to ultimately ruin.

Not that any of this is Leslie’s fault.

But Stephen and Julia Wyatt attending his wedding?

Nope. That’s not happening.

It won’t happen.

He doesn’t know how he’ll stop them, but he needs to figure it-

“What’s going on, Ben?” Leslie’s voice makes him jump and automatically derails his train of thought.

Because, yeah, they totally made out in the back of a shady cab for twenty minutes a few hours ago, but he hasn’t really spoken since then. It’s in his nature to analyze events, to force them to make sense in his mind; he’s been that way since he was a kid. It’s annoying as hell sometimes, but it soothes his often frazzled nerves.

He shakes his head, shrugging his shoulders simultaneously. “Nothing,” he says, clearing his throat. “I’m fine.”

She’s amazingly stunning lying beneath their comforter, his worn red and grey flannel shirt covering her perky breasts. There’s a book in her lap that she was reading up until now, and he just realized he’s been staring off into space in contemplation this entire time.

Leslie turns to her side. “Well, that’s a convincing argument,” she says teasingly. “Seriously, are you okay? You’re flushed. Are you getting sick?” And she palms his forehead before making a face, pushing his hair back. “Babe, what’s wrong?”

“I’m just tired,” he tells her. “It was a long day.”

There’s no need to bother her with this stupid crap anyway. He’ll process it throughout the night and be good as new in the morning. This was a big night for her, meeting his family and all, and she needs to rest, not worry about him.

“Benjamin, I can tell when something’s bothering you.”

He sighs. “Please,” he says softly, scrubbing his hands down his face. “Can we talk about this in the morning? I’m really tired.”

“I want to help.” And then she cuddles up beside him, running her fingers through his hair before kissing his cheek. “You don’t always have to bottle everything up.”

He should curl into her and spill his problems, unleash what’s been pent up inside of him for thirty
years, but it’s not fair to her. She’s pretty and always on the go, and it’s not fair for him to bog down her overworked mind with senseless drama that he would be okay with tomorrow. He just... He needs time. He wants to mull through it for a few hours and let it go after. But, of course, Ben’s an idiot, and he pushes himself off the mattress. It’s not a big deal. No, it’s definitely not a big deal. He only has to figure out how to stop them from attending his wedding.

Ooh, he could make polite, proper clones of his parents.

Or robots. Robots usually work.

Ben shrugs on his coat, putting on tennis shoes and heading out of their bedroom. Of course, Leslie follows, mimicking him, and they end up on their porch swing, overlooking the neighborhood’s peacefulness at eleven o’clock at night. The cold almost winter wind nips at his cheeks, and Leslie wraps her arms around herself, biting her lower lip. Crap. Crap crap crap. He wordlessly shrugs off his coat and zips her up inside it.

His pulse goes wild and wacky and wonky, and his head feels three sizes too big. He sniffs and continues staring, hoping the calm night sky will bring him some comfort. But then Leslie places her head on his shoulder, and he kisses her hair instinctively. He can’t do this. He can’t torture this sweet, passionate, dork of a woman with his problems.

But he loves her. He loves her so much.

“It’s okay,” she whispers, grabbing his hand. “Whatever it is, it’s okay. We’ll get through it together.”

He gulps. “I... I don’t think it’s that easy.”

“It’s that easy when it comes to us. Look, you don’t have to tell me what’s going on, but I do want you to know that I’m here for you. I always will be.”

He nods. “I know.” He lets out a shaky breath. And he’s trembling and quivering, and his eyes cloud momentarily with tears, and he wraps an arm around her shoulders. “It’s nothing honestly. Tonight just brought back some unwanted memories.”

And then he proceeds to word vomit all over his fiancé who’s probably terrified of him at this moment. He tells her about the time his massively drunk father pushed him from the top of the stairs on accident, resulting in a broken arm and bruises everywhere. He explains his relationships with Henry and Stephanie, which are mostly fine until suddenly they aren’t. And he tells her he doesn’t want to end up like his parents, only wants the best for her.

“You are what’s best for me, Ben,” she tells him, and he doesn’t necessarily believe her.

By the end, a tear or two escapes, and they’re shivering terribly, and he feels so so so bad. But oddly better. Bad for her being out here and having to suffer through his stories, but better for releasing some of the negative emotions. Somehow, he’s lighter with his mind less angry and heart not as heavy. His eyes droop, and he carefully picks up his sleepy fiancé and carries her back inside, back to their warm, toasty bed.

He takes off the coats and her shoes before bundling her up in the comforter, doing the same for himself. Instantly, he spoons her from behind, and they lie beneath the covers together. Her cheeks are chilly, and his fingers can barely bend, but it’s perfect.

She’s perfect.
“You know,” his fiancé starts, settling next to him as he sits back down with mugs in hand, nestling her head on his shoulder. “We should definitely consider adopting a cow, but only a small one. I hear they grow up to be eight feel tall.”

He scrunches his nose and links their arms together carefully, placing a kiss in her hair regardless. “Um, I don’t think that’s necessarily true, and I’m not sure that’s such a great idea,” he says. “We just moved in. Do you really want to destroy this place already?” Because, seriously, the thought of a cow (really?) roaming around on their hardwood floors, scuffing them and pooping everywhere, frightens him. A lot.

Leslie shakes her head. “Shelby wouldn’t ruin anything.”

“Shelby?”

“That’s the cow’s name. And Rupert for a male.”

Ben bites his lower lip. “Well, I don’t think we’ll be getting a Shelby or a Rupert any time soon. How about a fish tank instead? We can set it up together.”

“Nah,” she sighs. “Fish just swim and take dumps in water; there’s nothing romantic about that.”

He makes a face. “And there’s something romantic about a small cow living in our house?”

“It adds character.”

And, seriously, he can’t help but chuckle and hold on to her tighter because she’s a beautiful, strange creature, and he loves her deeply. Their feet up on the coffee table in front of the cozy fire, they’re wearing pajamas and sipping on hot chocolate beneath a plaid quilt on this snowy Thursday night. She’s been extremely chatty, and he gave up on their movie night long ago, relishing in the fact that he proposed to this amazing woman.

Sometimes it’s still hard for him to grasp. He and Leslie will be married in less than a year. They own a house. They shower together every morning, eat breakfast at the same table, and drive to work in his Saturn while her car is in the shop. It’s strange and oddly domestic, and Ben never thought he
would have this in his entire life. He no longer has to run from his past, to avoid conversations and complications, because it’s now all so perfect.

“What about a cat? We could dress him in fish and reindeer costumes daily and make a calendar; we’d be millionaires!”

He shakes his head. “Can’t. Allergic.”

And that’s, apparently, true. Because, after Leslie adopted those thirty-two cats and dogs that roamed and frolicked all over April and Andy’s, he broke out in hives, and his throat swelled a bit, and his nose couldn’t decide between clogging and running. At first, he thought he was coming down with something, but it mysteriously vanished after the animals went back to the shelter. It had to be the cats; he’s never had an issue with Champion, other than his Texas sized and shaped craps.

“That’s right,” she says with a snap of her finger. “Boo. I forgot that you’re no fun.”

“I’m not fun because I’m allergic to cats?”

“Cats are adorable and lovable and awesome, and you just suck because you can’t be around them.”

Ben finds himself smiling even more, softly grabbing her hand to kiss her fingers. “I know. I’m a terrible person.”

“You really are.”

~

He comes home from work hours before her.

She’s still eagerly coming up with plans of total domination, to not let April use Lot 48 for her dog park. Ann’s giving her a ride, even though he offered to stay and help. And, on top of his future wife not being here with him, he turned down that accounting job. Again. And this really better work out because he’s currently unemployed, but received several job offers today. But his main concern, still, is that Leslie’s not curled up beside him.

It’s sickening how attached he’s become to her, but, at the same time, he wouldn’t have it any other way.

So, he chats with Henry over Skype until his baby niece begins to wail her baby head off. After that, he showers and buries himself beneath the comforter on their bed, watching Battlestar Galactica on his iPad and trying desperately not to doze off. His eyes are just so so heavy, and it’s only eight in the evening, but it’s been an increasingly long day, and he wants Leslie here.

He still doesn’t know where she gets her endless gobs of energy; he’s seriously perplexed by it.

But he guesses he does end up falling asleep because he jumps and fidgets when there’s a warm hand on his back and kisses on his neck. He snuggles his face into her chest and breathes in the scent of apples and pears and... dog? He’s not entirely sure, but he doesn’t care either.

“How was your night?” he slurs, and he’s steps closer to returning to his beauty rest as Leslie runs her fingers through his hair.

“It was okay,” she says. “I missed you, though. I kinda just wanted to come home and eat homemade pizza with you the whole time.”
Ben nods, grinning into her breast. “Mmm... Mac ‘n cheese?”

“Don’t start with me, Wyatt,” she snips. “God, I’m so hungry right now.”

He instantly sits up, not wasting a spare second. “Let me go cook you something, m’lady.” He goes to hop off the mattress, but a huge sneeze rockets through his nose. He takes a few tissues off the bedside table and dabs his nostrils, and when did it become so hot in here? He pulls at the collar of his hoodie before he sneezes three more times into the crook of his elbow.

“Are you okay?” Leslie asks, handing him more Kleenex. “And why are your eyes so red?”

“I dunno,” he says nasally. He gets up, turning on the lamp and sneezing once again. “What’s all over your shirt?”

Because Leslie’s totally wearing a black sweater beneath her winter coat, and there’s hair all over it. It’s not her hair, and it’s definitely not his.

What’s going on?

“Oh, Ann and I played with some of the animals tonight,” she tells him nonchalantly.

“But, did any of those animals include, y’know, cats?” And he’s standing in the middle of their bedroom with tissues wadded beneath his leaky, but stuffy nose, shivering slightly since it’s freezing asshole outside. He tries diligently not to focus on the itchiness settling behind his eyes. How did this happen so fast this time?

Leslie’s eyebrows rise. “Oh my God. And you just laid all over me!” she half-shouts, moving to her feet and shucking off the sweater like it’s diseased. Which it sort of, kind of is. “I am so sorry, Ben! I meant to take it off before I sat down, but you were so cute and sweet sleeping there like that, and wanting to jump your bones totally took over.”

She decides to remove the sheets, pillowcases, and comforter just in case, even though he tells her it’s not necessary. It’s only allergies; he’s not actually sick or dying or anything. They both shower together, but he’ll admit it’s not as fun as it usually is because he’s congested and about to claw out his eyes. He hadn’t even realized his reactions were this bad.

“I really am sorry about this,” she says a while later when they’re snuggled up in the guest room beneath two quilts. His nose is still running a bit, but he’s pretty much over it already. A little bit of scratchiness and being mildly uncomfortable was it.

He shakes his head, smiling at her. “Don’t be, love. Are you still hungry?”

She nods. “But I can wait til morning. I wanna lay here with you.”

“You need to eat,” he says. He wraps himself up in a discarded blanket, kissing her on the nose before heading into the kitchen.

“I really love you, Ben,” she tells him softly.

He grins. “I really love you, Les. I’ll be right back with that mac ‘n cheese pizza.”

“That is easily the sexiest thing you’ve ever said to me,” she says on his way out.

He pokes his head back in. “Really? That?”
Pawnee Commons

Chapter Summary

In which our dearest Benjamin protects our lovely Leslie.

Chapter Notes

I’m honestly sorry if this is the lamest thing I’ve ever written; I struggled with this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There are 117 red and green balloons littering Leslie’s office in honor of the upcoming City Hall Christmas Bash, and she brings in three more bags from Fred’s Wheels and Deals and Other Things to bring the count to an even 160. Well, it’ll be even if Andy stops eating (yes, eating) and popping the others. According to him, he’s only destroying the ones that aren’t worthy, which Leslie appreciates, but she also appreciates a good even number every now and then.

“What’s wrong?” she asks the moment she strolls back into the room. Ben’s head is down on her desk, cradled by his folded arms. “Ben?” She sets the items down before settling down next to him in a chair, lightly rubbing his back. He tries to shrug off the touch, but she frowns and moves to rub her fingers up and down his spine.

Because he was totally fine while they were in awe of Wreston St. James’s model for the Pawnee Commons (the actual model, not the asshole-ish, asshat-ish one displayed to them yesterday afternoon). Well, he’s been a bit pale and shaky all day, but those aren’t unusual signs for him; he’s a very white man and struggles with anxiety on almost a daily basis. He’s trembling beneath her touch, but even she has to admit that his back’s a little too warm for her liking.

“What’s wrong?” she asks softly. He doesn’t bother to speak, but he does nod. And something tells her it’s more than just a headache.

Leslie’s heart swells, and she palms his neck, and she wants nothing more than to help him feel better.

“I’m gonna take you home, okay?”

~

She comes home during lunch to find him drooling and snoring, curled in a ball on the mattress with wild hair everywhere. She toes off her shoes before snuggling around him, relaxing her front against his comforter clad back. He squirms and wiggles, and she hears him smack his lips, and she can’t help but smile. “I’m sorry for waking you,” she whispers quietly.

“’s ’kay,” he slurs. “How’s work?”
And, sometimes, she can’t get over how kind, sweet, and considerate Ben Wyatt is toward her. Because he could be dying or have a monstrous headache or need twenty stitches on his knee from a sword related injury (which she stills feel awful about), but he always makes sure she’s okay and taken care of and is genuinely interested in how her day’s going. She’s never had that kind of relationship with any other guy she’s dated.

But now she’s engaged to this sexy gazelle of a man.

She desperately wants to card her fingers through his hair, but Ann briefly diagnosed him earlier with a migraine, or at least the beginnings of one, and she would hate to make him uncomfortable. “It’s okay. I’m just worried about you.”

“Don’t be. ‘m fine.”

But she’s still learning that “fine” for Ben has many different definitions.

“I was really looking forward to tonight with you,” she says sadly. They were supposed to meet at a local bar in Eagleton to support and endorse the Pawnee Commons project, and she definitely doesn’t want to go speak (or even look at) those snobby, snooty, butt-munchers of Stupid Ville-Land without her fiancé by her side. “It’s gonna be so gross.”

Ben chuckles lowly. “I can still go.”

“I don’t think so, buddy. You should just relax tonight.”

“You aren’t meeting them until eight; I’m sure I’ll be okay by then.”

She shakes her head. “As much as I want to say yes to that offer, I don’t think it’ll be a good idea. Stay here and rest.”

“’m not dying,” he pouts, and she can’t help but nuzzle a bit into his neck. He’s all warm and toasty in his Star Wars pajama pants and black sweatshirt, bundled beneath the comforter and an extra blanket. It’s snowing lightly now outside, the sun disappeared behind grey clouds, and she doesn’t really feel like going back to work anymore. Doesn’t feel like doing much else than lying here with him.

Leslie holds on tighter when Ben goes still against her before heading back to work.

~

“Like the dress,” her fiancé mumbles he leans against the bathroom wall. He pulls his knees to his chest and rests his head in the middle, attempting to shield out the light that’s probably burning his eyeballs. Leslie kneels down beside him, placing a warm cloth on the back of his neck before getting him to sit up a bit so she can wipe the mess off his chin. “’s pretty.”

She smiles briefly, worry flooding through her system. Because it’s almost seven-thirty, and she, now reluctantly, needs to be at Miller’s Bar in half an hour. Because her fiancé’s been sleeping most of the day, but still doesn’t really feel any better. Because she doesn’t want to leave him here; it’s the main reason why she left work around three today. “Thank you, babe,” she says softly. “Do you want to shower or just brush your teeth and change your shirt?”

He holds up two shaky fingers to signal that he wants the second option, so she quickly sets up the toothbrush before handing it to him, heading back out into their bedroom to grab him a grey long sleeved shirt. It’s not going to be a good night; it’s definitely not going to be a good night. She, somehow, has to keep her cool with the Eagletonians, and she’s absolutely positive that will only
happen if her fiancé is there to ground her like always.

Leslie gets him back into bed, cuddling him and rubbing his side.

“I’m going to tell Wreston we can do this some other time,” she tells him as quietly as possible.

Ben shakes his head slightly, wrapping his clammy fingers around hers. “Go, baby. This’s your night...”

“I can’t do this, Ben. I can’t talk to them without you.”

“You’re Leslie Knope,” he says, and she beams. “You can do anything.”

~

Beautiful Ann accompanies her on this journey, and she’s glad that there’ll at least be someone to help keep her calm during this heated situation. Which proves to be helpful because Wreston’s guys begin to tease Pawnee relentlessly right away, and her blood boils. Pawnee is a hundred mega thousand watts times better than stupid Eagleton, and the fact that they can’t see that is an absurd tragedy; they really should reconsider their idiocracy.

She really really really really wishes Ben were here. Ben would wrap an arm around her shoulder, rub her hips, pull her into a giant hug, do something, anything, to make her not want to shove a whole steak down these guys’ throats. But Ann’s still by her side through this, so at least it’s a start. She just wants to go home and cuddle with her fiancé.

“Do people from Pawnee even know how to read, Knope? Or should we add tutors to the ever growing list of things we need for this dumb park?” a crazily tall redheaded man asks her. Ew. What’s in his beard? And why is it so red? No, seriously, it’s like Ronald McDonald red. It’s weird. And she sighs out loud at the twelve millionth comment and wants to make fun of him with Ben, but Ben’s not here, and everything sucks out loud.

She frowns. “Okay, when is Wreston supposed to be here? I have some actual ideas I want to discuss with him.”

“Why?” a 900 pound blimp of a woman asks. Well, actually she’s probably skinnier than Leslie because people from Eagleton are typically exceptionally pretty, but her voice reminds her of a 900 pound blimp if 900 pound blimps could talk. “We’re not good enough for you?”

Leslie takes a deep breath in as Ann grabs her arm, and she focuses. Ben wouldn’t let them to get to her if he were here. And Ann supports her in every way possible, so she tries not to explode for the sake of them both. But she can’t take much more. Her eyes bulge, and she physically has to bite her tongue because they’re vile and awful and the worst people in the universe. “No, that’s not it,” she says calmly. “I just want to talk about the replica he built for us.”

“Face it, Knope,” Redheaded Sticky Beard Man tells her. “He’s not coming. This is all a sham. And, unluckily for you, Wyatt’s not around to bail you out.”

“Whoa,” Ann says from beside her. “Leslie’s perfectly capable of taking care of herself. She’s the most independent person I know.”

“Really?” the 900 Pound Whopper asks. “Then what’re you doing speaking for her?”

Leslie rolls her eyes. “Can we please just actually talk about what we came here for?”
She’s trying. She really really is.

But she can’t try for much longer. Must avenge Pawnee. Must destroy Eagleton.

“I don’t think so. Pawnee’s not even worth our time,” says Sticky Ronald McDonald Face.

“Pawnee’s not worth your... What?” she growls. And, yeah, maybe she picks up her fork unexpectedly and wants to use it as a weapon, but –

“Do we have a problem here?”

And what?

Seriously, is this for realskies?

Because Ben, her Ben, Benjamin Wyatt, is standing next to their booth in a suit with his padfolio tucked protectively beneath his left arm. And he looks nothing like he did earlier, all weak and defenseless and huddled up in bed. He places a gentle hand on her shoulder, and she scoots over in the booth, squishing herself between her lovely best friend and sexy as fuck fiancé.

“We were just informing Knope over here that we won’t be completing the project assigned. In fact, we’d rather stick with our first other model,” Bloated Barbie says.

Ben shakes his head, and Leslie bites her lower lip. “First off, it’s Ms. Knope. Secondly, I thought Wreston fired you two?”

“Nope. We’re still here, alive and kicking.”

“Well, you won’t be for long. In fact, I’ll be making some phone calls later -“

“Phone calls can’t help you now. This has all officially been set in the stone at the office, and we’re –“

“No. That’s not what’s going to happen,” Ben says assertively, and could he honestly be any hotter?

“We want what we originally agreed upon,” Leslie butts in, her brain and heart and everything inside her urging her to speak up.

McDonald Beard chuckles. “You honestly thought you guys were gonna get that park? Fat chance. Pawnee’s nothing but a joke. And we should’ve known better to get involved with a bitch like you, Knope.”

She watches Ben’s jaw clench, and she’s about to say something when... “What’d you call her?”

“A bitch. ‘Cuz that’s what she is.”

And then she’s not really sure what or how it happens, but there’s a fist flying at Sticky Beard’s eye, and then, suddenly, Ben’s pinned down on the dirty bar floor, and she’s trying so hard to get the crazy guy to just stop, but then these cops come and break them up. And Ben’s lip is bloody and puffy, and his cheek’s already starting to swell. And her heart thumps out of her chest as handcuffs are put on Beard Guy, who’s still having a hard time controlling himself. Ann immediately starts to look her fiancé over, and she’s... 

What just happened?

“'m really sorry, Les,” she hears Ben mutter quietly. “I didn’t mean for this to –“
But then her lips collide into his, and, suddenly, she can't control herself either.

~

“You punched a guy for me,” she says incredulously. “Again.”

And it’s still sort of hard to believe things at the bar escalated quite like they did. Those backstabbing freaks had no idea what was coming to them because, yes, she’s fully capable of taking care of herself, thank you very much, but Ben’s always on her side. He would punch a thousand guys if it meant helping her, and she can’t get enough of him. He’s sexy and handsome and dorky and lovable and currently quivering in her arms.

“Anything for you,” he says quietly. Because his head hurts even more now, and his lip’s all busted open and kind of gross, and a knuckle on his right hand is broken and bruised. Ann splinted it earlier, as well as giving him a dose of pain medication before allowing them to go home. And, for real, how did she get so lucky? Not that him being injured and feeling bad is lucky, but he's so strikingly perfect.

She kisses his neck. “Thank you,” she tells him softly, cuddling closer to him. “Thank you so much.”

“You don’t have to thank me. I'd do anything for you," he whispers.

~

He’s still feverish the next day and not exactly up for moving around, so Leslie calls in. She excitedly recounts the story to everyone she knows via email while he's sleeping, to which she gets mixed responses from. Overall, though, people think Ben is amazing because he is. Ben is definitely, absolutely amazing and wonderful, and she can’t picture her life without him.

“Any ideas for lunch?” she questions, carding her fingers through his hair. He’s half asleep on her pillowed lap, eyes closed and squirming every now and then. His head isn’t a huge issue today, but he’s cold and hurting and overall exhausted. She keeps touching him soothingly, hoping it will help him feel better, even if it’s only for a second.

He shakes his head. “Lay here with me,” he slurs.

She smiles and maneuvers herself to where she’s spooned up behind him. “Now that I can do.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Feel free to follow me on Tumblr: @supervanillabear31
Ron and Diane

Chapter Summary

Chris spends the night at Leslie and Ben's house.

"Why's Chris on our couch?" Leslie asks. Her hair's wild, and she's squinting in the brightness of the house on this beautiful Saturday morning. Well, Ben's sure it would've been beautiful had she not spent the night in the trunk of Ron's car (Tammy Two's doing). He's still confused and angry, but she has small bruises on her arms, and she seems so tired; he can deal with how he's feeling later once he knows she's okay.

"He's sleeping off a bad night," he says gently. "Don’t worry about him."

But, yeah, Chris is also passed out on their couch. It was another one of those bottomless pit of despair type moments that caused Ben to invite him over. He didn't know he would spend the hours of 9:00 PM to 6:00 AM listening to him talk about horses, Millicent, regular egg nog versus fat free egg nog, Dr. Richard Nygard, or whatever other nonsense sprouted out of his mouth like the leakiest fountain in the universe, but it definitely happened.

And getting that phone call from Ron telling him that Leslie's been kidnapped and such certainly didn't help. But she's here and safe, and that's all that matters. Or, at least, that's what he's trying to convince himself of. Chris is now sleeping peacefully, and, good lord, Ben hopes he gets a few hours of silence out of him. He loves his friend, but he can't quite yet. He just can't.

"Are you sure you're okay?" he questions, grabbing her some clean pajamas to wear. He settles on the blue fluffy bottoms covered in snowflakes and one of his long sleeved shirts. She face plants on the unmade bed, cuddling into his pillow and moaning loudly.

He pats her penguin socked foot. "Shower," he says. "Then bed."

She shakes her head. "Can you just lay with me first?" And she's all pouty and sad, and he instantly snuggles around her. He's uncomfortable in his khakis and cardigan from yesterday and wants to clean himself up too, but she's too cute to resist. "Mmm... Better. You're soft," she notes.

And, what the hell, he pulls the comforter over them both, nuzzling into her neck before allowing sleep to take over.

~

"This is lit'ally the best meal I've ever eaten!"

Ben's eyebrows furrow. "Well, that's strange because it's just a granola bar," he points out. "It's the only thing we have that you'll even let get near you."

And, sure, he and Leslie catnapped for an hour, but he woke up to pee, which caused his Energizer Bunny of a fiancé to rise to action. She made the bed before he even had a chance to lay back down, and now he's cooking grilled cheeses while she folds some of the laundry. They already took showers separately, and Ben just really wants to be alone with Leslie for a bit.
"Don't be ridiculous, Ben!" Chris says with a smile.

"When he's being ridiculous, call him Benjamin; that's what I do," Leslie says from the couch, neatly organizing her mitten collection.

He shakes his head. "Uh uh. How about neither of you call me Benjamin?"

"Do you guys wanna Boggle? That would be the greatest!"

Oh God. No. Please no.

"Yes! I've been waiting for a good challenge! Benjamin over there is no fun!" Leslie shouts, forgetting about the clothes and sprinting to the kitchen table.

No. No no no no.

Chris gets the game, and they chatter nonstop, and Ben burns the hell out of the grilled cheese.

~

He's definitely running out of steam by the time Chris takes a twenty mile jog around their neighborhood. He diligently tries to make Ben go with him, but he's not playing that game ever again. Last time he ran with Chris, he threw up four times and could barely walk for a week. Andy wheeled him around in a rolling office chair, which made it much worse because he was constantly crashing into things; he's petty sure that, at some point, the whole venture concussed him.

But his old partner isn't gone for long. Like forty minutes tops. And he knows that's not how it's supposed to work. That's a two minute mile! Leslie's settling down, her head on his lap and breathing deeply, when Chris runs in. "Yahtzee!" he exclaims, and his fiancé immediately lights back up. This time, she grabs Ben's hand and coaxes him into playing too.

And what the actual fuck is Chris still doing here in the first place?

They're on their third game when Leslie begins to yawn and slowly stop talking. He frowns because he knows it's been a long few days, and he's practically urgent for sleep himself. His fiancé rests her head on his shoulder while his friend rolls the dice. And, God, why is Yahtzee so loud?

"Uh, Chris," he starts. "I think Leslie and I are gonna go to bed."

His radiant smile visibly dampens. "Oh." And then there's a sort of awkward pause. "Oh. I'm so sorry, guys! I've been keeping you up today, haven't I?"

Ben shakes his head. "No. Not at all," he lies. He doesn't want to hurt Chris's feelings or make him seem like a bother. "We're just kinda tired now."

On cue, his friend jumps to his feet. "It's been great staying with you two! You're both literally my favorite people!" He pats Ben's shoulders before actually running out of the house, but that's pretty normal as far as Chris goes.

He breathes out a sigh of relief and chuckles when he hears his fiancé's slow breathing. He gently picks her up, cradling her in his arms as he walks to their room. The bed is actually calling their names, and poor Leslie really needs a good night's sleep. She's tuckered out and exhausted, and it's showing.

Ben kisses her cheek before covering her up and lying down next to her; she curls into him instantly.
"I feel drunk," Leslie whines on Sunday evening.

"Me too," he says, his head cradled in his left hand as he munches on his pizza. Everything is kind of spinny and off kilter and weird today; he guesses it's from not sleeping enough and then suddenly adding in a bunch of rest on top of that. Because they totally slept from 5:30 yesterday afternoon until noon today. And now it's 7:56 in the evening, and they're already falling asleep again.

Leslie sighs. "Can we just go back to bed?" she pleads.

His eyes widen as much as they can. "Are you, Leslie Knope, actually asking if you can sleep?"

She nods, and her bottom lip sticks out, and he can't help it. He kisses her before they stagger from the couch to their bed. Leslie barely makes it on to the mattress, and Ben pulls her over the rest of the way. He never ever ever would've thought he'd live through a day where his fiancé begged for slumber, of all things.

Leslie hums cutely in his ear, and he snakes an arm around her waist.
Two Parties

Chapter Summary

In which a still drunk Ben is a koala and refuses to let Leslie go.

She laughs out loud the second she sees him. He's drooling on the couch, only wearing his plaid button up and even plaider boxers, slacks long forgotten on the hardwood floor. And, to top it all off, there are doodles of penises drawn all over his face. Andy. Andy had to have done that. Or maybe Tom. Or Ron. Maybe Chris. She could just blame it on Jerry if need be because, let's be honest, it's hysterical.

But her poor baby's snoring so loudly that it's even funnier, and she can't help but snap a picture on her phone. She almost sends it to Ann hastily, but she decides on just showing it to her tomorrow. If they can even make it to work tomorrow. Because her heart's bursting with rambunctious energy, but she knows that she'll crash as soon as she lies down with Ben.

He's always had that affect on her. She's been sleeping somewhat decently ever since the first night they cuddled together eons and eons ago. And, sometimes, she honestly does feel like she's known Ben for much longer than two years. He's her other half, the milk to her cookie, the peanut butter to her jelly, the superb, flawless JJ's waffle to her four extra cups of whipped cream.

And, seriously, could he be any cuter?

She wants to snuggle down next to him, curl around his plaid-on-plaid skinny body, but he's sprawled out to where there's no room for her. Poo on a stick. She just really wants to go to bed with her Ben pillow. Leslie shakes his shoulder gently and ends up rubbing his back instead because touching him sometimes still amazes her.

"Mmmphhh..." is the only noise she hears from her fiancé.

She frowns. "C'mon, Ben. I wanna sleep with you in our own bed." She grabs his arm, but it's heavy and limp, and he cuddles his face into the cushion even more. Just because he's handsome and sexy and incredibly cute doesn't mean he gets to win this way. "Beennnn."

"Sleep, baby," he murmurs. He's fifty shades of drunkeningly exhausted, and there are penises drawn on his face in Sharpie, and her body's too stiff to put up a fight. She's about to withdraw her case when Ben, somehow, manages to sit up. Except his face turns a shade of green before returning to pale and elfy. "C'me 'ere."

He extends his arms, and she sighs before letting him wrap her up anyway. Because it's the day after her bachelorette party, and they didn't even get wasted. Didn't even stay up all night and watch C-Span. Didn't even color code the regions of Indiana by order of geographical importance.

Ben slumps back against the cushions, holding her close. She palms his chest before he starts snoring obnoxiously once more.

Come to think of it, she'll do those things with her soon to be husband when he's not this drunk.

~
"Nooo..." Ben whines, latching on to her like a tiny baby koala when she tries to leave her spot on the couch. He's been clinging to her all afternoon, and, to be honest, he needs a shower and a good teeth brushing and probably, like, at least twelve more hours of sleep. "Stay with mee..."

She chuckles and cards her fingers through his destroyed hair that's sticking up in every direction possible. And the doodles and the boxers and pretty much everything about his dopey appearance drives her crazy. She needs to take this guy to bed. Now.

And in more ways than one.

"Ben, let's shower together," she says, kissing his scruffy chin as she complies, smushing herself on him again. Normally, that's all it takes for the groggy, rumpled, cranky version of her fiancé to arouse in the morning. 6:00 is too soon in most cases for him, and she does what she has to. He's not lazy or unmotivated; he just has a hard time getting going before 8:00.

He shakes his head. "You're gonna trick me," he mumbles.

Leslie's eyebrows raise. "Trick you? How?"

Ben sighs exasperatedly as if it's obvious. And maybe, just maybe, that makes her want him more. "You only want me for my body. Never can just let me sit here."

"Are you being for real right now?" she asks. "Because I need to know if you're actually being serious."

He shrugs. "Maybe. Maybe not."

At that, she cackles. He's ridiculous and kind of smelly, and he's absolutely delicious in his plaid ensemble. She could do without the penises, though. "C'mon, Benji. Let's go."

She manages to get to her feet before his sluggish movements grab ahold of her again. Taking his hand, he groans and moans like this is the end of the world, like she's trying to steal his limbs and sell them on the Black Market. His fingers are cold entwined with hers, and she stands on her tip toes to kiss his cheek before they stagger to the bedroom.

"Nope," is all Ben says, collapsing face first on their mattress. Leslie uses this to her advantage and quickly tugs off his black socks. She's working on getting him out of his shirt when he stirs, sort of lively once more. "See? You just wanna use me for my body."

"Yeah, that's it," she says with a smile. "You know me so well. Care to help?"

He pushes himself up, but Leslie spots that his arms tremble from the pressure. She gets him in a sitting position again, peeling off the over and undershirt, and, wait, there's more. There's crazily large bruises on his back and around his rib cage. She gasps and delicately traces her fingers over the swollen flesh.

"What the hell happened to you last night?"

"Football," he says almost a little too eagerly.

She frowns. "Football?" And wow. Just wow. And her heart immediately swells in affection for this man because he's going to be sore as hell tomorrow; he's probably already starting to feel it. "Okay, Wyatt. Shower time."

He gets to his feet shakily, stumbling as he walks to the shower. She swiftly removes her clothes
before jumping in behind him. Instantly, he grabs her and holds her to his chest, and he's koala Ben again, all snuggly and warm and sleepy. But Leslie has an objective in here, as sad as that is because he's definitely boneable.

She wipes off the seemingly thousands of penises on his face, only to discover two more pink and purple bruises near his left eye and lower cheek. He's more or less pretty useless, slouched against the shower wall and barely coherent. She helps wash him and then herself before toweling both of them dry. Ben brushes his teeth slowly, on the brink between babbling in drunken delirium and falling straight to sleep.

He handles the pajamas well until the long sleeved shirt, which he puts on backwards; not a big deal in her eyes. He refuses to wear the sweatpants she got out for him, and she decides not to even bother. She waves her hand and coaxes him into bed, where he flops and immediately cuddles into her side.

Leslie kisses his cheek and nuzzles right back.

~

The next morning, they both call in. Ben's sore and extremely cranky and makes it very clear that he wants to stay with "his Leslie" for the rest of the day.

She doesn't try to argue or reason; she loves him and his adorable clinginess and his plan to relax in bed until tomorrow.
Women in Garbage

Chapter Summary

Tom's in a pickle and comes to Ben for help... in the middle of the night; Leslie just wants to cuddle.

Chapter Notes

My Tom is probably horrible and nothing like the actual Tom, so I apologize for that in advance.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With a sea of eleven exceptionally important binders spread throughout the coffee table, Leslie writes in each one of them, chronicling her time in City Council. She’s currently jotting down potential solutions for Pawnee’s candy crisis, which is as riveting as it is disturbing to her.

The house is peaceful with C-Span playing quietly in the background and toasty flames from the fireplace ignite her heart with happiness. She smiles as she continues cataloguing notes, plans, ideas, and only stops when the doorbell rings. Five times in a row.

She briefly gets excited and wonders if it’s June, her personal chocolate delivery system, but she frowns the instant she sees that it’s Tom. And what the hell is he doing here? This place isn’t exactly “swaggy enough for his presence,” especially with her maps of the United States and Ben’s comic book collection and memorabilia.

“Lesssslie! What’s up, chica?” he asks loudly, immediately inviting himself in. “Listen, where’s Nerd?”

She sighs and glances down at her watch. “Tom, what’re you doing here? It’s almost midnight.” And, even though she was very much enjoying her binder time, thank you very much, she was looking forward to calling it a night and lying down with Ben soon.

Tom needs to shoo because her future hubby's getting the crap cuddled out of him tonight.

“I think I’m on the brink of financial disaster,” he explains, using hand gestures that don’t particularly make sense to Leslie. “I need Nerd to nerd-up some things and help a brother out.” There’s a few crumpled spreadsheets in his hands, and, wow, his coat looks like it’s made out of... “Elephant skin,” he says proudly once he sees her ogling at it.

Her eyebrows furrow. "Elephant skin? Is that legal?"

“Honey, everything’s legal when it comes to fashion.” And he’s totally wearing sunglasses at night, which she would probably find amusing under normal circumstances, but not when she’d rather do a bit more binder work and then snuggle with Ben. “So,” Tom says, stepping forward and shifting his feet to look around. “Where’s Nerd?”
“First off, his name is Ben. Secondly, he’s asleep.” They showered together as soon as they got home from work, changing into pajamas and sprawling out on the couch. He had been sticky, covered in caramel after a day at the Sweetums Factory (a vat exploded, and he had to help clean it up; his shoes are basically done for). Leslie nipped and nibbled at him because he tasted delicious, but he lost the fight with consciousness around 9:00, way too wiped to carry on with the day.

Tom expresses his shock and dismay wildly, throwing his hands up in the air. "Asleep?! How can he sleep when Rent-a-Swag might be falling apart? Also, it’s so early! You guys are old."

She rolls her eyes. "I'm gonna go ahead and guess that he doesn't know it yet. But can you wait til tomorrow? He's tired, and I'm tired, and, to be frank, I'm in serious need of cuddling tonight, so shoo..." she says, pushing him and his elephant skin jacket toward the front door.

"Wait! No! Please, Leslie. This is important. I don't think I can wait til tomorrow."

"Will you go away if I get him?"

"Yes," he tells her matter of factly. "I'll go as soon as he's finished nerding out over these nerd-sheets."

She pouts. "Fine. But you owe me a double mocha espresso in the morning."

"Done and done, darling."

Leslie stalks off to their bedroom with her head hung low, rubbing at her tired eyes. It’s pitch black, and her heart feels incredibly heavy because she knows that Ben greatly values his sleep. Most nights, they don’t get too much of it, and, when they do, they usually pass out on the couch, Leslie practically on top of her Ben pillow. She turns on the bedside lamp and shakes his shoulder gently. He’s all bundled up, and his hair’s so messy, and he’s very scruffy.

"Ben," she whispers. "Wake up."

He whines lowly and quietly, and she leans down to kiss his cheek. "Mmmph. You 'kay?"

She's about to nod, but his poor eyes aren't even open yet. "I'm fine. Tom's here, though. He says he really needs your help."

"Ha ha," he mumbles, smushing his face into the pillow even more.

"No, honey. I'm being serious. He wants to talk to you."

He shakes his head. "Tomorrow."

"I tried that. He won't leave. Will you please just talk to him because I'm sleepy and cold and need to be cuddled."

At that, his eyes pop open, and she smiles. He pulls himself off the mattress, but not before tugging at her, wrapping his warm body around hers. "I'll be right back. Why don't you lay down?"

"I'll just go back to the living room and wait for you."

He shrugs, and there are deep bags beneath his eyes as he throws on a crumpled flannel over his red and white striped long sleeved shirt. He crosses his arms over his chest; it’s an early January night, complete with three more inches of slush on the ground tonight, and they’re both shivering.

“Tom,” Ben says with a raspy, tired voice. “I’ll talk to you about this tomorrow.” They’re standing in
the foyer, and her fiancé puts his arm around her shoulders, pulling her close and kissing the top of her head. He almost sounds like he’s talking to Andy or a little kid.

He instantly stomps his foot. “Please. This’ll take, like, five minutes.”

Ben eyes him. “Five minutes. Then we’re going to bed.”

“Deal.”

They sit down at the kitchen table, pushing her binders out of the way, and Leslie notes that he’s squinting heavily at the papers. He’s not wearing contacts, and his glasses are in the other room, and she would go get them so it was easier for him to read, but her legs feel useless as she tucks her knees beneath her chin, curling up in the chair.

She listens to Tom and Ben spitball ideas back and forth at each other, but she’s so busy alternating between resting her eyes and watching her future husband be all authoritative and helpful that she loses sight on what they’re even talking about. She sees Ben’s eyes droop, and his grey sweatpants are low on his hips, and she wants to take this guy to bed because damn.

Because, honestly, he can’t just sit there and be so attractive without any consequences.

Tonight, the consequence is cuddling with her until she falls asleep because, even though they live together, she feels that, occasionally, she doesn’t see him enough.

Crazy. She’s still going with it that they’re definitely a gross couple.

“Dude, you even dress like a nerd when you sleep,” Tom points out once they’re standing up and pushing their chairs in. Leslie stays put and trembles when Ben places a warm hand on her shoulder.

“Yeah, you’re welcome,” he says sarcastically.

She doesn’t hear what comes next because she snuggles the side of her face into his shoulder as he lifts her seamlessly. He cuddles himself around her the second the lights are off, and he tucks them both under the covers. His breath is hot on her neck, and he’s seconds away from snoring.

“You’re a good friend, Ben,” she whispers.

He just hugs her even more, placing tiny kisses in her hair.

Chapter End Notes

Feel free to follow me on Tumblr: @supervanillabear31.
Leslie takes care of Ben after the calzones betray him.

He’s curled in a tight ball near the toilet, ghostly pale and trembling violently. Leslie immediately scoops him up in her arms, resting his head on her lap as she strokes his damp hair. She carefully lifts his soft cotton shirt and rubs his swollen, nauseous belly, and he crumples even more, nuzzling his cheek into her jeans. He moans, and drops of sweat stream down his cheeks like a leaky hose, and she just feels so so awful because it’s painfully obvious he’s beyond miserable.

After several minutes pass, Leslie’s butt goes numb from sitting on the tiled floor, and the strange smell circulates through the stale air, and she’s nearly gagging herself. “Ben, honey,” she whispers, still palming circles on his stomach. “Do you think you’re okay to go to bed?”

He shakes his head, burrowing deeper into Leslie’s thigh and shivering harshly. It’s January, and he’s only wearing boxers and a t-shirt, and it’s part of the reason he should be buried beneath their warm comforter. He’s exhausted, and his poor body’s rebelling against him in every way imaginable, and she wants nothing more than to make him feel better.

“I think we should at least try. I’ll bring a trashcan into the room and everything.”

He sighs raggedly. “Don’t think I c’n move.”

Because he’s totally been expelling horrors from both ends for almost an entire day at this point, and he’s massively dehydrated and sleep deprived. She contemplates calling Ann because his lips are so chapped, and he seemingly doesn’t have any strength, energy left in his system. She gets him settled against the bathroom wall, and he instantly draws his knees to his chest.

She stands, turning on the shower almost as hot as it’ll go before helping Ben undress. He’s usually adamant about being independent, but now he succumbs and lets her do the work, pulling his boxers off and helping him in. His face turns a mild shade of green before he coughs and gags and coughs again, doubling over to throw up for the umpteenth time.

“Shh... Try to relax,” Leslie coos quietly, reaching in to knead the suffering muscles on his side. She stays right beside the tub just in case he falls or needs help, but the rest of it goes without a hitch. Ben shampoos his hair and rids his skin of sweaty germs and towels himself off. He changes into blue flannel pajama pants and a grey long sleeved shirt, tripping over his own feet numerous times on the stagger to their room.

He collapses on his side of the mattress, trying, but failing, to pull the comforter over his body. Leslie kisses his cheek and tucks him in, placing the trashcan on the ground and settling down behind him. She gently rubs his chilly, clammy back, and she feels his joints loosen, and he jolts every few minutes as sleep slowly begins to take over.

But then he immediately hangs his head over the side of the bed.
“They betrayed me,” he mumbles weakly as Leslie spoons up behind him, carding her fingers through his hair. It’s nearly nine at night, and Ben’s still queasy, but he hasn’t thrown up in almost an hour and a half, which is a miracle in itself. He’s in desperate need of food and sleep and cuddles. He’s trembling, and she snuggles her face into his neck, relishing the scent of peppermint filling her nostrils because that’s so not what she smelled not too long ago. “Can you believe they did that, babe?” And he sounds unbelievably tired.

She chuckles, tracing up and down his covered arm; he gets goosebumps almost immediately. “I’m sorry they did that, honey. But you kinda do deserve it.”

Of course, she doesn’t really mean that. “What? Why?”

“You thought that calzones were the perfect, proper wedding food. This serves you right.”

He shakes his head. “At least it’s better than an unlimited waffle buffet. Would you even have enough time in your day to actually marry me if we did that?”

She pinches him, and he laughs. “You take that back, Wyatt.”

Leslie kisses his chilly skin softly, and he entwines their legs together. “Cold feet,” he murmurs.

“You really should eat something before you go to bed.”

He gags. “Uh uh. I just got things to finally stay where they’re supposed to...”

“You haven’t eaten in two days,” she points out.

Ben shrugs. “I’m not hungry anyway. Wanna sleep.”

He’s quivering slightly and already on the verge of unconsciousness, so Leslie recedes from her argument. She snuggles closer and giggles when he starts to snore.

~

3:56.

It’s 3:56 in the morning, Ben’s not in bed anymore, and she barely has the fortitude to discover where he’s hiding. She was so cozy and toasty; he had switched positions early on in the night and wrapped himself around her completely. Sure, he was snoring pretty loudly right in her ear and even drooling just a bit, but it’s okay because he’s been sick and exhausted.

Shivers wrack her body as her bare feet hit the hardwood floor, and she instantly grabs a pair of Ben’s wool socks, flopping and flailing to put them on as she maneuvers down the darkened hallway. The TV she doesn’t even remember turning on when she got home lights up the living room, and she finds her fiancé on the couch, sitting criss-cross applesauce while slurping something from a bowl with a quilt wrapped around his shoulders.

“I’m sorry,” he apologizes immediately, taking her hand as she sits down next to him. “I didn’t mean to wake you. I was coming back to bed as soon as I finished this.”

“You’re eating the soup,” she says, smiling brightly.

He nods. “How’d you get the recipe?”

“I finally caved and called your mom. I was on the phone for almost six hours.”
“You didn’t have to do that for me, Les.”

“It wasn’t a problem. But no more calzones for you, buddy.”

Ben grins. “I make no promises, m’lady.”

She yawns and rubs her eyes and places her head on his shoulder. He takes a few more bites before placing the bowl on the coffee table. Ben maneuvers himself to where he’s lying flat on his back with her nuzzled protectively on his chest, squished comfortably between the couch and him. He tugs the quilt over her, and she spreads it out for the both of them. He’s sweet and considerate and would rather freeze to death in the middle of January than let her be slightly chilly.

“Love you,” she whispers.

He kisses her forehead. “Love you too.”
Eleven

She's wearing one of his rumpled, worn out flannel shirts, her bare ass taunting him in every way imaginable. Because, yeah, they totally just finished their "boning extravaganza," but now she's up and moving and tired of lying on his chest. Because, also yeah, he managed to keep her down long enough to snuggle naked beneath their grey comforter for almost two whole hours.

"Can't you come back to bed for a few more minutes?" he pleads. It's Friday night, the sun went down hours ago, and he's still in desperate need of touching her.

He's in love with her. So so so deeply, madly, ridiculously in love with this woman. He's never been a touchy feely person by any means, but all of that goes straight out the window when his future wife comes near him. He turns into a "cuddle machine," and there's nothing more exciting to him than wrapping his arms around her and holding her as close as possible.

Leslie sighs jokingly before settling beside him, placing her head on his chest once more. She rubs circles with her finger on his bare stomach, and he throws the comforter over her too. She doesn't move, doesn't say a word as she entangles their legs together.

"You're still sleepy," he points out.

"I'm not." But, even then, she doesn't budge from her proclaimed spot.

He squishes her closer to him, smiling and kissing her hair.

~

Ten

"Remind me again why we're watching Halloweentown in February?" he questions, popping in the DVD before sitting beside Leslie on the couch.

She pinches his leg. "Never ask that question again, Benjamin."

"Okay, um, I'm confused."

Leslie rolls her eyes. "Ann's the only one who understands." And she sounds actually sad, not like "oh, I'm just joking" sad, or "he accidentally ripped a tiny corner of one of her scrapbooks" sad.

Ben grabs her hand. "Then help me understand."

"Halloweentown is the single best cinematic experience of your lifetime; I can't just explain that to you."

But she lightens up as soon as he presses play and flicks popcorn at her.
Nine

Sometimes, he still can't fathom how he got so lucky.

He actually likes his job, has a good group of friends, and is going to marry the love of his life in three and a half months. Ben never saw himself being happy. In the long run, he always pictured him dying alone after spending years trying to find his soulmate. He didn't know he'd find that and more in Pawnee, Indiana.

This place really is First in Friendship and Fourth in Obesity.

And now he has a home and a lady that drives him wild in the greatest way.

Because, yeah, she's totally filling their shopping cart with five gallons of chocolate milk, but he wouldn't have it any other way.

~

Eight

He wakes up on Monday morning with a swollen, irritated throat and a fever. He goes to work anyway since it's a huge day for the Sweetums Foundation, despite Leslie's insistence that he stays in bed.

Naturally, he comes home with almost no voice, covered from head to toe in nougat. He even left tonight with more stuff to get done than he originally went in to do.

The second he shakily unlocks the front door, Leslie greets him with a monstrous hug despite his disheveled stickiness, and he just crumples against her touch. Nearly loses it right then and there because he's such a massively fortunate guy. His fiancé gets medicine in his system, and he's relaxing in bed before he even actually realizes it.

She places a cold washcloth on his forehead before lying with him beneath the covers, even though it's barely six o'clock. His head's mushy, and he's a big enough baby to admit that he doesn't feel well, but Leslie's here, rubbing his back and talking to him quietly about her day.

And that's all that matters.

~

Seven

He doesn't go to work the next day.

In fact, neither of them do.

Because, now, Leslie's throat hurts too, and she's running a temperature of 100.6, and Ben's almost too miserable to move. But, he makes her soup and shares his unnatural body heat and cards his fingers through her hair.

"I'm sorry I got you sick," he mumbles sincerely. She's warm beneath his touch; he presses himself closer anyway because not being close to her is impossible, even if they're both achy and exhausted.

Leslie yawns. "It's okay. I'm sorry I couldn't take care of you more."
His poor fireball of a woman. She's usually so into working and jumping around and yelling obscenities for no apparent reason. She's just lying here, curled in his arms and content with this and only this.

"Don't worry about that, baby," he says, placing a gentle kiss on her neck.

~

Six

It's not exactly expected, but it happens anyway.

He spikes a stupidly high fever in the middle of the night, one that leaves him doubled over and puking his guts out for hours. He doesn't know what's wrong, doesn't even care to know, but all he knows is that he's so extremely sorry.

Sorry because she's not feeling the best either but wants to take take care of him. Sorry because Leslie has to deal with the fact that his body rebels against him, like, once a month (sometimes more). Sorry that she's not with someone who has the immune system of an ox (he's tried taking vitamins, honestly, but they never seemed to work, and they always tasted like chalk). Sorry because she's sweet and pretty and perfect, while he's... well, you know, him.

Of course, he ends up in the ER, pricked to death with needles by a bumbling intern and throwing up violently into a kidney shaped container. Leslie's by his side the entire time, refusing to leave until someone (Ann) gives him medicine. He collapses into the overly flat pillows, out of breath.

But Leslie's here, holding his hand and brushing his sweaty, gross hair from his forehead.

She's his anchor.

~

Five

"I'm sorry..." he says, nuzzling his face into her neck.

"For what, babe?" She rubs her fingers up and down his arm, and he shivers. "You can't help that you're sick."

He sighs raggedly. "Feel like I'm sick all the time... And I-I don't want to burden you." His voice is nowhere near up to code, but he's just happy to be snuggled up with her in his own bed after a devastatingly long night in the hospital. And he's even more ecstatic because she got over whatever this was at lightning speed and isn't in pain anymore.

She kisses his forehead. "You're not a burden, Ben. You've gotta stop thinking that about yourself. I love you so much, and I'll always take care of you. Plus, your hair is always amazingly hot when you're sick."

Ben chuckles lowly against her skin. "Dork."

~

Four

"Stay there, Wyatt," she says, playfully and gently slapping his leg as he tries to swing his feet over the side of the couch.
He scrubs a hand down the side of his face, and, damn, he really needs to shave. Except Leslie's basically got him on bed rest today, even though he's pretty sure he's well enough to go to work.

Ben pouts. "Do you really have to go?"

"I've been gone for three days now, Ben. That's thirty-six hours of work I haven't done!"

He frowns, curling in a ball on his side. Leslie instantly sits on the edge of the cushion, and he places his head on her thigh. He's fine. Yeah, he's fine, and he should be a man and let her go to work. Let her earn money like a responsible adult. But, no, he doesn't mean any of that.

"Do you want me to work from home today? Considering you're too tired to take proper care of yourself, Mr. Sicky Pants." She nudges him softly.

He smiles. "That'd be nice."

And that's all it takes before she opens her laptop, and he sits up to snuggle his head on to her shoulder.

~

Three

He's not sure how much longer he can wait.

Because he had an awfully crappy day, spent huddled behind a desk while Jessica screeched and hollered about his absences (and she, by the way, totally had a replica nude painted of Ben to look like Nick Newport, Sr. just to spite him), and seeing Leslie immediately cheered him up.

He forgets about the sexual harassment and the horrifyingly awful innuendo (and that a small devil dog chewed a clear hole in his pants near his crotch) the second she spies Leslie grabbing a snack in their kitchen.

"How was your first day back?" she asks after taking a swig of chocolate milk.

Ben wraps her up in his arms, inhaling the mangoey scent of her hair and trembling in her presence.

"I really really love you," he whispers.

And he's honestly definitely not sure how much longer he can wait.

He wants to marry her now.

~

Two

"Not fair!" Leslie yells, ducking behind the bushes.

But it doesn't matter because there's a giant snowball in his hands, perfectly crafted and perfect to (politely) shove in her face.

"You're going down, Knope," he says, rounding the corner only to be jumped on top of by his fiancé. His heart pounds in his chest, and he's out of breath by the time he pins her down in the newest snowstorm of 2013. And he kisses her slowly. For all those times she's been there for him, for all those times she's made him feel like he matters.
"Pants," is all Leslie says when their lips part.

He nods. "Yeah yeah yeah. Let's do that."

~

One

"When do you think it'll stop being winter?"

"Some time in March."

Leslie sighs. "Beennn... That's such a long time away. How am I supposed to wait til May? I'll die of anticipation before then!"

He pulls her closer, kissing her neck as he palms her side. It's past two in the morning, but his fiancé is wide awake, discussing topics ranging from their marriage to Finding Nemo to how often she should mow the lawn once spring rolls around. He should be tired, should be fighting off her cute, tiny little touches and the way she keeps running her fingers through his hair, which, in turn, just makes him sleepy.

But his heart is full of love and adoration, and she giggles and chats and is, overall, his favorite person in the universe.

And she's definitely right; May is super extremely far away.

~

Zero

"This is the best wedding present ever," Leslie says happily. "This is best night ever. I wish we were getting married tonight."

He smiles. "Well, we only have three more months."

But that’s ninety-something whole days of torture just waiting to be with this woman he loves so much. She makes him feel lighter, like a marshmallowy pillow cloud with magical sunlight surrounding his very existence. And, trust him, he’s never been the overly affectionate type, the type to weep at the sight of a beautiful woman, but Leslie Knope’s enough to absolutely bring him to his knees.

"I can’t wait three more months. God, I just hate the feeling of not being married to you."

And there’s that classical light bulb moment that explodes through his skull.

"Well, let’s just do it then. Let’s get married here. Tonight.” He’s all grins, and the words flow off his tongue effortlessly, like they’re exactly what’s supposed to leave his lips on this day. “I mean, we’re all in black tie. We’ve got plenty of food and entertainment. And you did want to invite the whole town to the wedding, right? Leslie, let’s get married. Tonight.”
Leslie and Ben

Chapter Summary

After the wedding, Ben has a bit of a crisis.

Chapter Notes

This got a little dark, and I definitely didn't mean to make this so angsty, but it kind of happened on its own and wouldn't leave me alone until I wrote it. I'm so sorry if this wasn't the wedding chapter you were expecting, but I promise to make up for that!

He's struggling to breathe. His lungs won't seem to fill with air, and his ears overheat as he lies in this too stifling, unfamiliar bed. His heart beats quickly, wickedly, relentlessly in his chest, thumping in his skull and sending his pulse all over the map as he focuses hard on not throwing up because his stomach is revolting, and there's nowhere for him to go, and he's dying.

Ben married the love of his life tonight.

And, yet, it's as if the world doesn't make sense anymore. How could a woman as smart, gorgeous, kind, compassionate, independent, competitive, snarky, kissable as Leslie Knope ever want to marry him? He's Ben Wyatt, the Ice Clown with a crooked political past with insane amounts of self-doubt that cause his brain to swell until it threatens to explode.

She's too perfect for him.

But he loves her so much. More than anything. More than everything that has ever existed, past or present, because she's such an amazing woman. She has the undeniably magnetic energy that pulls, sucks him in at an ungodly speed. She's here. With him. In this hotel room bed. Right now. And it's wonderful and where he's supposed to be, but he feels like he's drowning.

She's curled on her side, a limp, light arm over his chest that doesn't exactly make it any easier for him to breathe. He tries to count by nines to some magical number that will wear him out, make him able to drift off next to his wife.

Wife.

Leslie's his wife.

He scrubs both hands down the sides of his face and exhales raggedly, only for it to get stuck in his throat all over again. That's when he decides enough is enough and slowly gets out of bed, bundling up Leslie beneath the comforter on this snowy, blissful February night.

Their wedding night.

Ben throws on his boxers and discarded black slacks and white button up, toeing on his dress shoes
before immediately opening the door to their fancy balcony. A gust of bitter cold air smacks him in
the face, and he trembles harshly and tries. Tries to make his nerves calm down. Tries to breathe like
a normal person. Tries to rationalize that all of this will be okay, that he’s not really a fuck up, and
Leslie’s the best person for him, and they’re a great team together.

He crosses his arms over his chest, shivering violently as fat, fluffy flakes fall around and on him.
Tears swell up in his eyes, but he rubs them away with his fingers. Stop. Stop. His brain has to stop.
It has no idea what it’s doing right now, and he just needs to back away for a second.

"Babe?"

And Leslie’s standing at the half open door, hair wild and beautiful as ever. She’s already redressed
in a pair of fleecy reindeer pajama pants, and he spies his dark grey hoodie beneath her puffy coat.
Her cheeks are pink, and there’s an absolute expression of worry plastered all over her face, and he
didn’t make to wake her.

"I-I'm okay," he says shakily, clearing his throat after. "Go back to sleep."

Of course, though, Leslie steps outside into the frigid winter air, his own coat in her bare hands.
Gloves. She needs gloves. He should find her some. Her hands are so soft and tiny and pretty.

She stands on her tip toes to throw the blue coat over his shoulders, and he's instantly grateful for the
pleasant warmth. His heart slams in his chest every time she glances in his direction with those
gorgeous blue eyes, and he melts a little when she reaches out to slowly palm his chest.

"What's going on?" she whispers.

He shakes his head, rocking back and forth slightly on his heels as he jams his hands into his
pockets. "N-Nothing. Just enjoying the view."

Which, by the way, is of Pawnee, the greatest city in America. They're staying at the Super Suites for
the night.

"You know," she starts. "We're married now, so you legally have to tell me everything that's on your
mind, or I can divorce you."

She says it all with a friendly, nonthreatening smile, but Ben doesn’t reciprocate it. His is stomach
loose, but his throat is unbearably tight, and when the hell did it get so hot out here? A drop of sweat
trickles down his face, and he concentrates even harder on breathing.

"Ben," she says quietly. He dips down to hide his face in her neck, wrapping tighter around her.
"Honey, what's wrong? Aren't you happy?"

He's supposed to be happy.

Then why does he feel so awful?

He's already a failure and a fuck up and the worst husband in the universe.

And, yeah, he totally chokes back a sob that causes Leslie to grip at his coat, lifting the tail end to rub
his back.

"I'm sorry..." he apologizes so quietly he hardly hears himself.

He's ruining their wedding night by chronic Ben Wyatt-ing, and that's definitely not fair to Leslie.
"Shh... C'mon," she says. "Let's warm you up."

He pulls away, wiping the tears from his eyes and cheeks before backing up slowly. He leans over the railing, staring down the icy ground below. At the moment, he doesn’t even have the capacity to understand what’s going on with him; it’s like he’s broken or hit a brick wall or something. His shoulders shake as his entire body starts to fail him.

But her hands soothe him in unfathomable ways, and she’s so perfect. So so perfect. And he’s queasy and kind of wants to throw himself from this spot just to get away from how big of an idiot he’s being. Leslie doesn’t deserve him. Doesn’t deserve this.

They’re married.

Married.

He hears Leslie shuffle from beside him. “Ben, it’s freezing, and you're sweating, and we need to go inside.”

At that, he shakes his head. It’s so much easier to breathe out here. That room is evil and gross, and he doesn’t... He can’t...

“Honey, please. Please come in. You don’t even have to talk about it,” she says, tears spilling over her cheeks, and they’re not happy tears like earlier, and that’s it. How is she supposed to live like this for the rest of her life? She needs better than him. “Ben. Come on.” His feet refuse to move until she grabs his hand, squeezing it gently as she guides him to the hotel room.

The second he’s inside, he crumples to the ground, back against the door with his head cradled in both hands. Snot drips on to his slacks, and more tears threaten to invite themselves out, but he forces them back. “I... I-I’m so sorry, Les. I don’t even know what to say...” he whispers.

Leslie soothingly rubs the back of his neck, kneading over the shaken, shocked muscles with her sorcerer-like fingers. “You don’t have to say anything, Ben.” But she sounds so scared and anxious, and he can’t believe he ruined their wedding night. He probably ruined their marriage too.

“No. I... I’m just so scared. A-And I know I don’t have a reason to be, but, Leslie, I love you so much. I can’t possibly imagine messing up your life. You’re so smart and talented and have the world out in front of you to grab, and I’ll only hold you –“

His wife stops him at that moment, cupping her hands on his cheeks and forcing him to make eye contact with her; he gulps and trembles and can’t picture a world without Leslie Knope’s hands. “Don’t even finish that thought, babe, because it couldn’t be further from the truth. Do you have any idea how lucky, how honored, I am to have you, Benjamin Wyatt, in my life? You’re so so so brilliant and are full of amazing ideas, and I’ve never met someone kinder or more sincere than you. You have to stop bringing yourself down.”

Ben shakes his head, trying to will his tongue to move and his brain to formulate words, and Leslie presses their foreheads together.

“I know I can’t stop you from analyzing or stressing or worrying, but I can help. I can help you with whatever is going on in that mind of yours, but you have to let me, alright?” she continues. “The world is dark and dangerous and full of unknowns, but I’m here, and you’re here with me, and that’s all that matters. I love you, Ben, for everything that you are.”

He swallows harshly and thickly, sniffing as his breathing tries to level out. “I-I don’t wait to... disappoint you or h-hurt you or make you regret... marrying me.”
She smiles cutely, and it’s as if the universe around them dissolves; all he sees is Leslie and her beautiful smile. “I could never regret that.”

“But I ruined our wedding night.”

“But I ruined our wedding night.”

“Stop. You did not, good sir. We had an absolutely amazing wedding; it was easily the best wedding of the millennium!”

“You’re perfect,” he whispers, tugging her closer to him. A wintry draft slips, sneaks through the door, but Ben and Leslie fight through it like they’ll fight through anything. Together. “I love you so much.”

Leslie’s lips touch his, and she runs her fingers through his hair. “I love you so much, Ben. Never doubt that.”

~

The next morning, he leaves a bit before she wakes up, tracks down a bouquet of wildflowers, and swings by JJ’s Diner to pick up her favorite breakfast.

She greets him and thanks him with hugs and kisses and everything in between like she hasn’t seen him in years.

He’s not really sure what he was so worried about because this much is obvious: He loves Leslie Knope more than anything in the galaxy, and nothing will ever stand in the way of that.

Chapter End Notes

Feel free to follow me on Tumblr: @supervanillabear31.

Thank you all so much for reading! :)

~
"Beennnnn." She shakes his bare shoulder, and, dammit, they'll miss it at this rate. Sure, they only fell asleep four hours ago in the first place, but there's plenty of time to rest when something so amazing, so spectacularly beautiful isn't happening right in front of their very eyes. "Baby, let's go!"

But her husband moans and grumbles, smushing his face deeper into the fluffy, soft pillows. His dark hair's adorable and everywhere, and she desperately wants to bone him; he's all naked and cute and warm and scruffy, and she bites her bottom lip. "Nooo," he manages to mumble. "Tired."

"We have all day to sleep, honey. Let's watch the sunrise!"

As if she hasn't pulled him out of bed every morning since they arrived in Hawaii for this same action. She can't help it though. They're in Hawaii! It's magical and beautiful, and she has to soak in, absorb as much as she can before they travel back to Pawnee, Indiana, the ultimate destination station (but she's sort of slightly second guessing that because Hawaii is so amazing).

Ben groans before pushing himself off the mattress, scratching his head and making his hair look wilder than ever. Leslie pinches his great ass as he puts on plaid boxers and a black Star Wars t-shirt, shuffling to their outside patio barefoot with his arm wrapped protectively around her shoulders and yawning ferociously. He plants tiny kisses on her neck before they sit in chairs, which she quickly reconsiders. Because, now, she can't go more than a few seconds without touching him, so she plops on his lap, and Ben places his head on her back.

"It's wonderful," she whispers, rubbing his arm, knowing full well that he's probably falling asleep there.

He nods into her skin. "You're wonderful."

~

Sometimes, she still can't get her own mind to understand that Ben's her husband. It seems weird, but definitely not in a bad way because she loves him more than anything in the universe (more than Ann and even more than waffles). And they're on their honeymoon in Hawaii, and they basically eloped in front of the whole town, and Ben's pretty excited that his parents weren't at the wedding.

It's sunny and toasty all over, nothing like Pawnee, Indiana, in the middle of February. It's not overly humid or sticky; it's perfect in every way possible, especially right here in the sand. They're in reclined beach chairs beneath an umbrella, Leslie reading a magazine and Ben pretending to re-read Jurassic Park.

Really, he's cutely sleeping; she couldn't tell exactly with the sunglasses on, but now his head's tipped back, and he's snoring softly.

The waves crash against the shore, and she grabs her husband's hand.
"How's the water?" she asks with a giggle, cackling loudly when he splashes her swimming suit.

Ben smiles and wades over to her, kissing her lips with his salty tasting ones. "Great," he says, low and quietly, and she entangles herself around him, nipping at his neck.

It's their fifth day here, and they're night swimming at the pool. Leslie firmly believed they would be the only ones here, but there are three other couples (probably searching for some aquatic-themed privacy too) and a few tykes that keep squirting them with water guns. But the water is warm and fabulous, and Ben's here with her, and that's all that really matters.

"I love you," he breathes out, curling their fingers together. "More than anything."

~

"What's wrong?" Ben asks. He's particularly delicious looking on day seven in a pair of light blue swimming trunks and sunglasses and literally nothing else. He's spent the last hour perfectly grilling hamburgers and hotdogs, even though it's just the two of them. There's sand in between their toes, and their patio is hauntingly pretty, and everything is fan-diddly great.

Except this.

She sighs loudly. "I miss Pawnee. I know I'm crazy, and I should love it here, and I do love it here to pieces, but it's not home."

Ben takes a seat beside her, crossing his legs, and, damn, he's like a compact little waterhorse that she wants to ride into the night with. He grabs her hand, rubbing over it softly with his thumb. "I miss home too. I love Hawaii, especially being here with my lovely wife, but Pawnee is definitely special."

"You know, it's a real turn on when you talk about how amazing Pawnee is."

He smirks. "Why not show me some appreciation then?"

She laughs and jumps up and drags Ben back to their room.

~

He's such a sweet, considerate husband.

Not that he wasn't a sweet, considerate friend or boyfriend or fiancé; he's always been great to her.

But she's entirely way too sunburned from their hike to a volcano (volcano!) yesterday afternoon, and he's spent the morning cooling her down with multiple fans and rubbing aloe on her body. He's attentive and caring, and she wants to jump him so hard.

However, the second she tries to sit up, her arm touches the sheets the wrong way, and she pouts before sulking back into the pillows. Stupid sunburn. Has to ruin her vacation with her brand new husband who's carding his fingers through her hair and kissing her softly, gently.

Their room is almost too quiet, only filled with the white noise from the fans and Ben's breathing from beside her. He's more than half asleep, cheeks red from the epic sun exposure and love rolling off him in waves. Because they're here in Hawaii three months before they planned on it, and they've seen Honolulu's City Hall and the park bench where a young Barack Obama used to wait for the
school bus. They've had beach sex (which was interesting; so so so much sand!) and eaten exotic flavored snow cones and passed out with all the windows open.

"You okay?" he slurs, careful not to put too much weight on her.

"Is there a way for us to bone without moving?"

At that, his eyes widen, and he scoots closer before moving in for a hard, passionate kiss that leaves her breathless and full of life all at once.

~

"I don't wanna go home tomorrow," she pouts, hiding her face in his neck. She's entirely wrapped around him in the ocean, the water a little too frigid for her taste. But Ben's also shivering, so she figures she'll share some body heat with her husband.

"Me either. It's been nice being away from the world with you."

And, yeah, she may've complained about missing Pawnee, but now they're staring down their last night in beautiful, tropical Hawaii, and it sucks. Like a small piece of her soul where paradise lives will die. And, God, the snow. Ann texted her a picture of the three and a half inches of snow that recently fell, and she can't. She just can't.

Not to mention, she's never seen Ben this stress free in the years that she's known him. He's relaxed and gotten plenty of rest (which they both desperately needed) and laughed the days away with her. The constant worry that often absorbs him has been kept at bay by this honeymoon, and she is forever grateful that they got this break.

"You still taste like a Bahama Mama," he says with a low chuckle. "Wait. You don't think we'll drown because of all the alcohol in our stomachs, right?"

She just kisses him slowly and brushes his wet hair from his forehead.

~

"Take me back," Leslie whines, curling into the quivering form that is her husband. She tucks her face in his coat as they stumble back to his Saturn in the flurries of Indianapolis. By the time they reach the car, their cheeks are entirely red, and his eyes are watering from the wind. "It's too wintry here. When's spring again?"

Ben moans, rubbing his forehead before turning the heat on full blast. "March. We still have one month left."

"Bleh. Gross."

~

The jet lag weighs them both down like bricks, and they snuggle against each other beneath their comforter without putting any of their belongings from the trip away. Ben rubs a socked foot slightly on her calf while she cards her fingers through his hair.

"Goodnight, husband," she whispers.

He kisses the tip of her nose. "Goodnight, wife."
Bailout

Chapter Summary

Leslie's kind of drunk and wants to bone Ben until she notices how sweet and exhausted he is (but she still definitely wants to bone).

It's just after midnight when she pulls her car into the driveway beside Ben's (thankfully, she only drove less than two blocks). Her insides are warm and weird and gooey, and she probably shouldn't have ingested those tequila shots so quickly. But, seriously, it was the post Galentine's Day celebration with her mother and the gorgeous sunflower that is Ann Meredith Perkins; how could she not indulge and enjoy herself?

The inside of the house is still, quiet, calm, the exact opposite of how her body feels right now. She wants to do jumping jacks, to run through a blazing fire just to prove to herself that she can, to eat about fifty packets of Fun Dip because its so tasty. But, out of all the things she could possibly do with her sugar rush, doinking her husband is at the very very top of the list.

Since it's way past ten, the likelihood of Ben being awake is virtually zero, she tip toes into their bedroom, blindly crawling in next to him beneath the comforter. Only there's no Ben here. Huh. What the hell? Is he in the bathroom?

Leslie waits for a few minutes before hopping up, discarding her coat on the floor and huffing as she begins to wander through their living space in search for her husband. He's obviously here somewhere, and she was completely positive that he'd be passed out on their exquisite mattress, dead to the world, especially since it's technically the next day now.

But no.

Why does he have to shake things up on a night where she just wants to bone him? Hard.

She ascends the stairs sluggishly, the force of all that alcohol weighing her down exponentially. Jeez. What did she do to herself? And why the hell isn't Ben where he's supposed to be? She rolls her eyes and trudges down the hallway into their shared office, and that's when she finds him.

Her husband is dead asleep at the desk, head resting on folded arms. He's holding a glue stick loosely in his right hand, snoring wickedly for someone as small as he is; she swears his snoring gets louder and louder with each passing night. As she rounds the corner to wake him for their epic boning extravaganza, she takes note of what he was working on prior to shutting his eyes.

A scrapbook.

It's stuck on a page from their honeymoon, her favorite picture ever a little off center to the left. It's the one with her sitting on his lap on their dolphin tour, his arms wrapped around her. They're both laughing, and she touches near the photo delicately, tears swelling in her eyes. It's in the process of being decorated with tiny hearts and palm trees and other assortments, and her heart swells astronomically in her chest.

He's such a sweet husband. A sweet, handsome, sexy, selfless, perfectly and wonderfully amazing
husband who cooks waffles and cleans the bathroom and makes scrapbooks for her.

A few tears drip down her cheeks before she gently shakes his shoulder. He jumps, and a snore gets stuck in his throat, so he coughs immediately. She hands him a bottle of water before brushing his crazy, messy hair from his forehead, kissing it softly. There are dark smudges beneath his eyes, and he has a sun sticker stuck near his scruffy chin.

"Hi, honey," he mumbles, scratching his head and leaning the side of his face into her stomach. He's warm and toasty, but shivering slightly on this late February night. Or morning. She doesn't know; she's happy and elated and probably a little too drunk for such an analysis. She leans against the desk, careful not to disturb his beautiful creation, wrapping her arms around his shoulders and pulling him close.

She keeps running her fingers through his hair. "I missed you," is all she whispers.

"I missed you too," he says hoarsely. "I even made mac 'n' cheese pizza in anticipation for you to come home."

"Mac 'n' cheese pizza?" she asks incredulously, and, yeah, maybe a bit too loudly. "You made that?"

He nods into her belly, wrapping a clammy hand around her own. She feels him yawn and switches from carding her fingers through his hair to rubbing his warm back. God, how did she ever get this lucky? Ben's way too perfect, too sexy for her. "And I started on our honeymoon scrapbook for you."

"I see that," she says quietly with a huge smile on her face. "You know I love you more than anything, right?"

"I love you too. I just... You deserve so much, Les."

She massages beneath his long sleeved tee. "You will never know how much you mean to me, Ben."

"You could show me," he says jokingly, yawning once more.

Leslie chuckles. "Don't tease me, Wyatt. I'm still a little drunk and very horny and in desperate need of bone jumping."

"'bout pizza instead?" he asks sadly, staring up at her. "'m sorry, love. 'm just really tired."

"Well, I have been working your penis pretty hard lately." She extends her hand out to him, and he takes it. He's all rumpled and sleepy in grey sweats and maroon shirt, so enticing and so unbelievably, undeniably sexy. But she takes one last glance at the scrapbook page and cuddles into him as they walk instead. They're both exhausted, and he stayed up way later than usual just to make something amazing for her.

They stagger down to the kitchen, Leslie leaning heavily on her exhausted husband. He smells like peppermint and cloves and Christmas, and his hair's endearingly, adorably messy. He guides her to the island, and she sits as he reheats the pizza he made specifically for her.

She loves him. So much.

There's no one better than Ben Wyatt.

Soon, she has three full slices in front of her that she devours in no time. Ben lays his head back
down and closes his eyes, and Leslie traces the fingers of her left hand up and down his spine. He's so cute. How on earth did his parents create someone so delicious and sexy as him anyway?

"Baby," she whispers, not too long after she finishes eating. Ben's back to snoring lightly, but she hears it growing more intense as time elapses. "Sweetie, I think it's time for bed."

He doesn't say anything; he just gets off the stool and stumbles toward the bedroom while she sets her plate in the sink. She turns off all the lights in the house and then turns on her bedside lamp, grinning as she checks out Ben's ass. He's flat on his stomach, hugging the pillow and not even under the covers. She shakes her head before grabbing two quilts out of the closet and placing them over him.

The instant she lies down, he snuggles into her side, nuzzling and kissing her neck with his perfect Ben lips.
Partridge

Chapter Summary

It's a long journey home.

Somewhere, Southern Wisconsin

The instant the third and final Percocet begins to wear off, it feels like a massively giant, humungous weight is lifted from her tired, exhausted shoulders. Because it’s been three almost unbearably long days of driving and hospitalizations and copious amounts of bathroom stops and her husband being seriously out of commission, and, God, she just really needs to sleep.

She shouldn’t be grateful in the slightest, though, since Ben’s grumbling a bit in pain from beside her on this itchy motel bed. She wants to go home. She wants to snuggle up next to a coherent version of Ben who rubs her back and whispers in her ear and wraps around her like a warm, tiny blanket. Their bed back home is so comfy and perfect, and Pawnee is definitely not freaking stupid like Partridge, the two that repeatedly and constantly screws her husband over.

His forehead’s slick with sweat, and she slowly cards her fingers through his unruly, damp hair. He’s very obviously holding on to his crotch for dear life as agony shreds its way through his ultra sexy, but still defeated and depleted, penis. It’s just past four in the morning, and neither of them have slept. Ben may have passed a ridiculously large kidney stone yesterday, but he’s nowhere near up to working order yet, and tears swell in her eyes.

Because it’s so early or late or whatever this is, and she has to drive all the way to Indiana. Leslie sighs loudly, huffing and rolling over to where her forehead smushes into Ben’s arm. Instantly, he tugs the comforter over her a little more, lacing his clammy fingers with hers as she lies against him. Sleep. She needs sleep. Is it hot in here? Or is it cold? Is she short-circuiting?

Oh God. Is Joe Biden okay?

“Rest, love,” Ben mumbles softly, sincerely.

She nods against him, willing her eyes to fall closed.

~

“Are you guys okay?” Ann asks around one in the afternoon. Leslie’s combing the knots out of her hair while Ben sits on the toilet with his head in his hands. He’s dripping wet from their shower, only wearing a white undershirt and plaid boxers, and he’s so sexy, but still in pain and having a hard time staying alert. “Leslie?”

“We’re okay, you lovely, gorgeous, ethnic clownfish,” she says.

“You texted me yesterday saying that Ben was dying,” her best friend points out.

Leslie almost chuckles into the phone. Almost. But her nerves are just about done; she has no idea how her husband’s even upright at this point. “He had kidney stones. Or has. I think there was only one, but—“
“Kidney stones? Is he okay?”

Of course, Ann’s a nurse, so Leslie spares the medical stuff and proceeds to tell her about his morphine-induced hippie-isms and how he tried to feed nuts to a bronze eagle in the current mayor’s office. And has she mentioned how happy she is that those pills are gone? Because she loves Ben to pieces and more than anything in the universe, but seriously. Just seriously.

“Make sure to give him Tylenol every four hours. It sounds like he’ll need it. And call me if you need anything,” Ann says.

She smiles. “Thank you, starfish.” Leslie hangs up the phone and returns her attention to the pale, shivering guy staring at the tiled floor. “We should get going soon,” she says, brushing strands of hair from his forehead.

He nods and stumbles and quivers as he gets himself into loose jeans and his grey hoodie. Ben doesn’t shave, doesn’t even bother putting product in his hair; the only thing he does is put his contacts in, and she’s sure that’s just so he can wear sunglasses. She doesn’t even know if he managed to fall asleep at all this morning, and her heart pumps quicker with worry.

By the time they settle down in the car, Ben’s groaning quietly, and Leslie lightly massages his thigh.

~

Somewhere, Eastern Illinois

“Well, this isn’t something you see everyday,” he says slowly.

She nods, biting her lower lip.

They’re pulled over on the shoulder of whatever interstate this is. Ben’s hood is covers his head against the brutal March wind, and his cheeks are tinged red. Leslie pulled on his tan jacket before exiting the car, her hands stuffed in the pockets as she breathes into the collar. And they’re standing here. Staring at this thing, whatever it is.

Because it so totally can’t be what she thinks it is.

“Should we call someone?” he asks?

And, yeah, their windshield totally isn’t cracked, and Ben totally isn’t hunched over the car in pain, and Leslie’s totally not freaking out because this definitely can’t be happening.

She shrugs, her eyes wide as he eyebrows rise. “I honestly have no idea.”

“Les, this isn’t your fault.”

She nods. “I know. It just came out of nowhere.”

“I’m alright?” Now, his arm’s around her shoulder, pulling her to his chest. She gulps as he trembles. He smells so amazingly great, and she wants to fast forward however many hours until they’re home and safe in bed. She’s honestly not sure how much more she can take, and it marvels her that Ben’s actually standing and having a normal conversation.

Well, this absolutely isn’t normal, but still.

“Yeah,” she whispers. “What should we do with it?”
“Um, it’s kinda a national treasure,” he says.

She nods into his hoodie. “I know, Ben, I’m scared. What if I go to jail?”

“I doubt you’ll go to jail for a bald eagle flying into your windshield.”

“You just said it’s a national treasure! These things are important! They’re supposed to be preserved!” She pauses. “And what the hell is a bald eagle doing in Illinois anyway?”

~

In the end, Ben takes over driving and calls someone (she doesn’t even know who at this point) about their unfortunate run in with that flying specimen. Leslie lays her head on his shoulder as he struggles not to swerve, one hand protectively covering his groin.

~

Pawnee, Indiana

She’s never been happier to be home.

Never ever ever in a thousand years. She loves, adores, fully supports her hometown, but she’s never been this excited to see the signs or smell the raw sewage from yet another leak or accidentally step in a cola puddle outside their house. It’s raining and cold and miserable, and she’s in desperate need of warm blankets and a shower.

She settles on the warm blankets, though. And the couch because she can’t make it any further.

Ben wordlessly climbs over her, spooning her body and kissing her hair.

~

Leslie’s fully functional the next day, but Ben doesn’t, or maybe can’t, get out of bed. They had tripped over their own two feet to get to that bed around seven in the evening yesterday, not even bothering to get under the covers. And he’s still wearing jeans and black socks and his patented white t-shirt, and she feels awful. He’s all quivery beneath the single quilt, and he’s more than obviously done. Just done. Much like how she’s been up until she got some sleep.

But he’s still recovering and didn’t really get much of a chance to relax until today.

Hey, at least he’s not ridiculously, cluelessly loopy and high as a kite.

“Do you want some soup?” she questions. “Maybe a Sprite?”

He shakes his head into the pillow. “I’m not sick.” And then he pulls the blanket up over his shoulders to where it covers his chin.

“More Tylenol?”

There’s another shake of the head before he speaks again. “Wanna cuddle...” he says so quietly, cutely that she barely hears him.

“Are you sure you don’t need –“

Ben’s fingers wrap around hers, and she smiles before lying down beside him.
“Love you, Baby Smurf,” he slurs.

She chuckles, kissing his neck. “Love you too.”
Animal Control

Chapter Summary

The gang heads to another one of Donna's lakeside cabins.

“Bug spray?”

He rifles through the tasteful purple and blue polka dotted suitcase, locating the can. “Check,” he says, but then he pauses. “Wait, why do we need bug spray? It’s only March.”

Leslie stops folding her (really, it’s his) red and blue flannel. “Mosquitos are huge and dangerous, Ben. They are a force to be reckoned with.”

He eyes her before shrugging, returning his attention to the four bottles of Extra Cola Sugar Delight at the bottom of the bag, buried beneath her clothes. Good lord, was she actually trying to hide them? “What’re these doing in here, honey?”

“Quit going through my stuff, Wyatt,” she says, teetering on the edge of seriousness.

Ben’s eyebrows rise. “Um, this is a joint suitcase, as in my stuff is in here too. Why are you smuggling soda to Donna’s cabin? Hold on, are you and Ann doing that thing again?”

“Whatever do you mean, dear sir?”

“Oh, you know what I mean. That thing where you hole yourselves up in a room and drink soda and eat chocolate til you puke and talk about your lives? You know, you could do that without the junk food overload,” he points out.

Leslie rolls her eyes, and Ben takes the opportunity to lightly, gently shove his wife on top of their bed, squishing her closer to him and holding her to his chest. She doesn’t struggle; she just lies there contently, stroking his shirt. “I need this, babe.”

“Did I do something wrong?”

“What? No. You’re perfect, as usual. Ann’s trying to get pregnant, and I want her to know that we’re still super tight, and she can talk to me about anything, especially since me and you hang out nonstop.”

He nods, smiling a bit. “I get it, love. I know how important your female friends are to you.”

“But we’re still boning in the hot tub, right?”

“Of course.”

~

Donna’s third cabin is seriously off the chain, and Ben’s incredibly happy it’s in Pawnee and not Alaska or Washington or California. This trip was originally set up by Chris to be filled with teambuilding exercises to get the Parks Department back on their game (which they were never
really off it in the first place, but it has been a bit of a struggle with Leslie working as a City Councilwoman), but everyone quickly shot down that idea.

Now, they’re relaxing around a fire outside, enjoying this pre-spring night. Ben and his lovely wife are sharing a double camping chair, snuggled beneath a quilt that smells like cinnamon and home, her head on his shoulder as he entwines their fingers together. There’s gusts of freezing wind that rocks through them every few minutes, but the sky’s clear, and there are stars everywhere, and the freshness he breathes in makes him feel so lucky, so happy to be alive.

“Time for ghost stories!” Andy shouts enthusiastically. “Me first! Okay, so, once upon a time, there was this girl... No, wait, a boy... And he had these fangs, you see,” he rambles, sticking his fingers beneath his own teeth to mimic said fangs. “They were big and sharp and pointy, and it made all of the other vampires jealous. They were all, like, ‘dude, how did your fangs get to be so huge?’ And the boy responded with, ‘Dude, all you gotta do is practice,’ and then...”

But, thankfully, Tom stops him from the madness. “Dawgs, it’s cold out here. Let’s go inside and get cozy.”

Leslie shrugs from beside him. “I dunno. It’s really nice out tonight.”

“Well, I’m freezing,” Ann says. She’s in a different chair beside Leslie, and Ben gulps. He doesn’t want to lose his wife right now. He wants to settle down and spread out in the chair, her nuzzled on his chest as they stare into the crisp wilderness together. Leslie works so hard most nights, and it leaves him feeling like he barely sees her, even though she’s usually right next to him, poking away on her laptop while pecking his skin every chance she gets. “I’m going in. Anyone else coming?” And she gestures right to Leslie.

But Leslie snuggles against him even more. “I’ll be right up. I promise.”

Ann grins briefly before heading off with everyone else. Andy carries April while Ron, Chris, and Jerry retrieve some of the folding chairs. Tom and Ann venture off together, chatting and then arguing a few seconds later, and Donna shakes her head from behind them, undoubtedly Tweeting the whole thing. It’s just Ben and Leslie out here beneath the stars.

It’s wonderful.

Leslie hooks her arm with his, and he kisses her hair. The fresh air does wonders for the staleness that accompanies heavily-affiliated office positions, and he’s so incredibly in love with this woman. It’s still hard for him to wrap his mind around the fact that they’re married, and he comes home to her and vice versa every single night; he wouldn’t have it any other way.

“I love you,” he whispers.

She cuddles harder. “I love you too.”

~

Leslie’s a little damp and sticky when she crawls into the magnificently luxurious bed (seriously, the mattress is delightful and has to be crazily expensive, so expensive Ben doesn’t even want to know the true cost). He breathes in sharply before settling back down against the fluffiest pillows in the universe. He fell asleep lamely around ten on Leslie’s lap while everyone was playing charades, drifting off between sounds of Andy yelling frantically and Ron proclaiming that this activity was horrifyingly dumb, but his wife had stayed entirely still, carding her fingers through his hair and leaning down to plant kisses on his forehead.
“Hi, babydoll,” he mumbles, rolling over to face her. “How was girl time?”

“It was ‘kay,” is all the response he gets. Leslie wraps her arms around him and smushes her cheek against his chest.

But, for real, she is wet and sticky, and Ben gently gets up, clicking on the lamp to rummage through their suitcase. The bottles of cola are now gone, as well as the eighteen pack of Hershey’s bars and four bags of marshmallows he found before they left home. Her hair’s wild and crazy, and there are smudges of chocolate on her cheek and lips. She’s perfect. Too perfect.

“Do you wanna take a bath?” he whispers, running his fingers through her hair.

She shakes her head, and she’s almost to adorable to move, but he lifts her anyway. Something tells him that it wasn’t just soda and chocolate that Leslie and Ann consumed; it seemed more like copious amounts of alcohol. His wife murmurs and groans, but she doesn’t try to move from her current position. “No. Hot tub,” she says instead.

“You wanna go to the hot tub for a bath? It’s 2:30 in the morning, honey.”

“Not for that,” she says, wiggling her eyebrows. “I still owe you from earlier.”

“Oh,” Ben says, eyes growing wide. “Yeah yeah yeah. Let’s do that instead.”

“Coffee?” he offers. “And I made you some waffles and bacon.” He sets the tray down on her lap, and Leslie only scowls instead of showing her appreciation. Ben chuckles and lies next to her, grabbing her left hand as she takes bites of the already cut up delicacy. She munches on her food without so much as a word, and that’s how he how confirms the suspicion of a hangover.

That, and she tried to jump him approximately eight times while he slept (he immediately agreed seven out of the eight occasions, but it was already daylight out when he reluctantly told her that he needed some sleep; she had pouted and whined, but she soon followed). Everyone else has already left, seeing as it’s now past four in the afternoon, and Donna told him to just have Leslie return the key to the house tomorrow.

Hopefully she’ll be up to moving by tomorrow.

Soon, she’s finished eating, and he places the tray on the dresser. The instant he gets back in bed, his wife wiggles closer, and he covers her up with the exceptionally cozy comforter. “Get some more rest, love,” he whispers, kissing her softly.
Article Two

Chapter Summary

Ben's being stubborn and ridiculous.

“Ben, medicine, bed. Let’s go,” she says, trying to shoo him away from his laptop and spreadsheets with her commander voice that she used about a week ago during an extensive, well thought out role-play scenario.

Her husband gently swats her hand that’s attempting to cover the paper without crinkling it. She rolls her eyes and sighs, rubbing his overheated back through his button up. It’s Thursday night, so close to the weekend and, yet, so far away. Because, if this were Saturday, she figures he wouldn’t be working as hard to get these charities selected, sorted, and accounted for at 11:42 in the evening, but that’s only her general theory.

“I’m fine,” he grates out. “It’ll just take a few m –“ But he breaks out in volcanic, explosive whoops before wiping his mouth on his sleeve. He makes no attempts to finish his declaration; he just pretends he’s not shivering enough to cause a stroke on this almost spring night and keeps thoughtfully, decisively chewing on his blue pen.

“You would feel better if you got some rest,” she points out. He’s been fighting, desperately fighting, this cold from Hell since Monday, and it’s an understatement to say that she’s worried about him. He’s never really tried to stifle his symptoms quite like he has this time around; her heart swells in affection for him, but she’s kind of tired of the act. In fact, this charade is almost enough to make her sick too because he’s terribly miserable, and it shows.

Crap on a shingle.

He’s acting exactly like her. When she’s ill, exhausted, stressed, or even simple cranky, she pushes through it a bit too much. Well, she attempts to, at least. The last few times any of the above has happened, Ben’s caught on super quickly and forced her to take a brief sabbatical until she felt up to par. And this is awfully, horrifyingly strange because it usually doesn’t take him long to cave in and succumb to being cuddled and taken care of by her.

But, still, her husband shrugs. "I’m okay here. Thanks, though, love."

And he goes back to scribbling tiny notes in the margins of his spreadsheets.

~

“Can you please come to bed?” she tries later. He’s now hunched over the desktop in their home office, a blue blanket wrapped around his shoulders as he sniffs. A cup of coffee (coffee? She thought she “broke” the machine so this exact thing wouldn’t happen) in his grasp, he stares at her with blank, bloodshot eyes before returning his attention to the screen. “Ben, it’s past three AM, and you’re running on steam.”

He’s slow, sluggish to shrug again, and his eyes are dangerously close to drooping shut for the final time tonight. He’s watching applications for the Sweetums Foundation, a legal notepad within reach,
but there’s only two or three bullet points she can make out; the rest is unintelligible scribbles. Her poor husband. Well, her poor, stupid, stubborn husband, that is.

“Lay down with me, honey. I’m cold and lonely,” she says, nipping at the burning skin of his neck. Holy triplet cows, this shouldn’t be happening. He should be tucked into bed and passed out, snoring through his rapidly growing congestion and apologizing for it in the morning. Instead, he’s still trying to be the most ridiculous idiot in the world (and congrats to him because he’s definitely winning the title), and the routine is so ancient. So ancient that she tried sneaking NyQuil into his mug, but he dumped out the soda earlier to switch to the magnificent ultra caffeine mix Leslie created on a night like this for her use.

At this, though, she watches a wall crumble. Ben sets down the writing utensil in his grasp, his exhausted facial expression softening as he tugs her to him. She complies, sitting on his lap, a pang of regret shooting through her system when she realizes he’s shaking all over. He smushes his face into her back, arms hooked together around her waist, and, oh God, is he falling asleep right here? Because this is so not what she had in mind.

She rubs his blanketed arm. “You need a real bed. Why don’t we go lay down?”

Leslie feels him nod against her, and she stands up, grabbing his clammy hand and ushering him into their room. He grabs a handful of tissues and hastily, nastily blows his stuffy nose, but she can hear how forceful it is because nothing comes out. He coughs and hiccups and coughs again, and she helps give him an actual, real dose of NyQuil before settling beside him. He places his head on her shoulder, and she swears he’s asleep because of all the loud breathing, but then she feels his fingers begin to slide to her waistline and beneath her pajama pants.

“Ben, you don’t have to do –” But then she stops mid-sentence because, God, it feels so fucking good. “Okay, yeah, this should be fine.”

Of course, she loves him and this plan, but he’s still being a bit ridiculous.

~

“Dammit, Wyatt!” she shouts, heading straight into the bathroom. The stupid shower’s running, and, jeez, does he have a death wish? How has that NyQuil not floored him yet? Why is he being so difficult? He needs to rest and get better, not keep this game up. He’s barely slept in a week and has overworked himself to the point of near insanity, and he just needs to relax.

She opens the shower curtain, and he’s loofahing his sexy elf body with this amazing smelling soap. He shrugs, which seems to be his general response, and points to his throat before shaking his head. What the hell does that mean? What’s going on?

“You need to get back in bed and sleep this off. It’s gonna keep getting worse if you don’t.”

Ben noticeably sighs, but zero noise other than a crackling cough comes from him. He turns around to rinse off his body, and she almost pinches his ass because, come on, he’s naked and gorgeous and, whether he’s being an idiot or not, he’s still her husband. A husband that’s in true, dire need of being knocked out, but her husband nonetheless. Ooh, maybe she could get Andy or Ron or someone over here to somehow scare him into staying in bed.

Nah. Too mean.

He swallows thickly and begins to get dressed once the water’s turned off after a quick towel dry. It’s past 7:30, so they’re both going to be late for work at this point, and why isn’t he listening to her?
She knows that his job is important and has deadlines, but he’s struggling to button his shirt, which is a pretty freaking simple task, and she ends up helping him because she can’t watch this happen.

“You’re laying down the second you get home,” she says, fastening the last button.

Wait, why is she caving in?!

~

She’s home, for once, before him. She cooks his mother’s famous chicken noodle soup, diligently following the recipe, gets out his pajamas, and pulls the comforter on their bed back. Because, whether he likes or agrees to it this time or not, Ben’s getting some sleep. She’s spent one too many nights listening to him suffer but not letting her help him in any capacity.

He comes through the front door half past eight, and she never figured he would be gone this long. Twelve hours of work. Twelve whole hours of work with an awful, out of control cold. She can’t imagine it. Any time that’s happened to her since she met Ben, he’s forced her to take some time to get better. Now, he’s being ridiculously stubborn, so it’s her turn.

The instant she spies him, he embraces her and nearly crumples to the floor. He’s disastrously quivering, and his breathing’s too heavy and harsh, and she can feel his heart beating wickedly through their layers. She rubs his back, and they stand there like this until his hug becomes weak, and he’s on the verge of either collapsing or falling asleep; she can’t tell which.

Leslie guides him to their bedroom, and Ben immediately slumps on the bed. She wants to tell him to change out of his work clothes and into something more comfortable, but he’s miserable, so miserable that it makes her heart ache, so she takes off his shoes and bundles him up in blankets. He’s still breathing really hard, so Leslie turns on a handy dandy humidifier she unearthed from the closet a few hours ago.

Ben grabs her hand with his overly heated one, and she spoons up behind him, rubbing his back until he falls asleep.

~

The snoring’s the worst part.

He’s so sick, and it’s so so so loud. Even if she pushes him to where he’s on his side instead of flat on his back, it’s still bad. He coughs and murmurs incoherently in his sleep, and Leslie finds herself alternating between wiping trails of snot and wetting washcloths to place on his forehead. Ann even comes over to check him out and recommends a visit to the ER if his fever doesn’t drop and his congestion doesn’t at least somewhat alleviate soon.

She’s giving him until tomorrow. He hasn’t actually woken up since he got home last night, but she’s giving him doses of medicine every four hours. He swallows it wordlessly (can he even talk? At this point, she doubts it) before falling straight back to sleep. And, as she does it again for the seventh or eighth time, she frowns when she touches his sweaty brow.

“Oh, honey,” she whispers, carding her fingers through his hair. “Why did you have to be such an idiot?”

~

By the time Monday morning rolls around, Ben’s acting responsible enough to at least text out a call in. Because he can barely string together more than a few words at a time without coughing. His
congestion moved away from his nose, so he’s breathing easier, but it moved more toward his chest. Ann had Dr. Harris prescribe him an inhaler along with a course of antibiotics, and even she has to admit that he’s doing a bit better as the hours pass.

Currently, he’s hunkered down on the couch, flipping through articles on his iPad. His left hand is on leftover mucus duty, while she watches his right hand start to shake. “Ben, it’s time for a nap,” she tells him. Sure, he’s only been up for less than two hours, but she’s not taking anymore chances with him. And he complies immediately, sprawling out on his side as Leslie tucks him back in, pulling the two quilts up to his scuffy chin before kissing his forehead.

“I’m really sorry, Les,” he whispers, coughing briefly after. “Shoulda listened to you...”

But, instead of feeling anger or annoyance, all she feels is love for this dorky guy. Leslie climbs in behind him on the sofa, wrapping her arms around his skinny frame and pulling him close to her. “Don’t apologize, baby. I just wanted you to take care of yourself. I’ll always be here for you, stubborn tendencies and all.”

Her husband nods. “Love you...”

“I love you too.”

And, yeah, the increasingly loud snoring starts back up, but she wouldn’t have it any other way.
Jerry's Retirement

Chapter Summary

a.k.a. "Things you said when you were scared" (prompted by sakurablossomstorm-blog).

She wasted their day off.

Completely and totally denied the fact that they both have crazily hectic schedules and haven’t been spending as much time together lately as they should. She made it seem like going home to watch movies and make out on the couch while munching on macaroni pizza and buttery popcorn while sipping wine was a bad thing. And, trust her, that would most definitely have not been a bad thing. Not even in the slightest.

She doesn’t need big, fancy, elaborate dates; in fact, most of the time she could do without them. Sure, it’s nice to get dressed up and go out with just Ben, but that very rarely happens. Part of their job requirements is to meet and greet with others, which often involves suits and dresses, but, on most occasions, she doesn’t feel like doing anything like that.

Leslie just wants to be with Ben. That’s it.

And she was so freaking worked up over making sure Jerry had a proper, exciting last day on the job before retiring forever that she neglected the one person who means more than anything to her. She hadn’t even gotten to eat any of that mac ‘n’ cheese pizza with him! She fell asleep the instant she got home, and apparently he watched more of Fringe again (which, by the way, she really needs to figure out how to block that show because he’s more than seriously addicted to it).

Now, she’s stuck behind her City Council desk all day while Ben’s miles away at Sweetums, analyzing and picking charities like the wonderful, dutiful, supremely sexy elf of a husband he is. Blah. She doesn’t want to do this. He had visited during lunch, where she proclaimed they take a real day off soon to discuss having their family, but it’s not enough.

She just can’t believe she wasted all of yesterday.

Leslie sighs, dropping her pen down on a mile high stack of papers she needs to sign.

That’s it.

She’s done wasting time.

~

It’s scary. It really really is.

She’s so dependent on him and badly wants to always be near him and wants to carry his children, and she’s never been more frightened in her life. Leslie never thought she be this type of woman; she thought she would be strong and not “need a man” because that’s how she was raised. She still doesn’t exactly know what she would’ve done, probably thrown, submerged herself in her work one hundred thousand percent, but she doesn’t want to envision that now.
Because now she has Ben. She has this crazily adorable guy that she kisses goodnight and good morning every single day. She has this insanely considerate guy that insists she eats vegetables even though they taste like garbage so she stays healthy. She has this remarkably dorky guy who stays up with her all night long to cuddle or talk or watch movies or bake cookies with her. She can’t imagine her life any other way than what it is at the moment.

So why is she so scared?

By the time she arrives in Ben’s office, her nerves are exploding. He’s jotting something down on a spreadsheet, glancing up at his desktop computer every few seconds, and she can’t. She just can’t. Leslie barges in without any warning, climbing directly in his lap to straddle around his skinny frame. His hair is soft and smells like rain and happiness all bundled together in one Ben Wyatt-ish package, and he’s so perfect. Why and how is he so perfect?

“Hi,” he breathes out after a few minutes of making out.

Leslie nuzzles her face into his neck, shielding herself from the world despite the very public-ness of his office with way too many windows. “Missed you.”

“Are you alright?” he asks, worry accenting his every word. He lifts up her blouse to place his palm on her bare back; she guesses he’s checking to see if she’s sick or something, but that’s not it. She doesn’t know why, but she’s overwhelmed by the need to be in his proximity, for their skins to meld together as one, for her breathing to match his. “Les?”

She nods against him.

“Do wanna go home, babe?”

All it takes is one more nod for him to take action.

How did she ever get this lucky?

~

“I’m scared I’m going to fail you,” she whispers. Their socked feet are tangled together in their bed, and her head’s resting comfortably on his chest, his right arm wrapped around her with his hand on her hip. He rubs it gently every few seconds, and she shivers at the touch.

He clears his throat. Maybe he was almost asleep. “What? Why, babe?”

Leslie exhales. “I ruined our day off.” She waits a little bit to see if he’s going to say anything about that, but Ben’s the type of husband who lets her blow all the steam off first before giving her his input. Most of the time, that’s exactly what she needs, but, every now and then, it irritates her. “I wanted it to be special, but I got so wrapped up in helping Jerry have a decent last day that I ignored you. What if I turn into Jerry? What if I leave City Hall and never move on to anything bigger? What if this is it for me, Ben? And what if I never learn to take a step back and just spend a simple day, one day, with my husband?”

It comes out rambly and rushed and crazy, but she doesn’t care. Doesn’t care. See. That’s all it is. A bunch of worries she didn’t even really knew existed until she said them, but it’s out in the air now. She tries to maneuver herself to where she can watch Ben’s facial expressions, but he quickly tugs her back to him, and she rolls on to her side instead.

“Leslie, first off, you didn’t ruin anything,” he starts, making sure to squeeze her reassuringly. “And, secondly, I’ve never met anyone more determined than you. You work so hard, and you deserve
every single good thing that’ll come your way. City Council is a great starting point, but you have to realize, you have to know that this is just the beginning for you. Knope 2024, right?” He nudges her gently with his fingers. “And there’s no possible way you could ever turn into Jerry, alright? That’s not humanly possible.”

She sighs and draws patterns on his long sleeved shirt. “I’m scared I’ll lose you.”

He chuckles. “Well, that’s definitely not going to happen. I’m not going anywhere, Les.”

“Promise?” she whispers.

Ben kisses her hair. “Swear.”
Ben and Leslie share a lazy Sunday indoors.

Lazy days are known to drive Leslie Knope crazy.

She hasn’t had a lazy day in, like, well... Really, it’s more along the lines of never. She’s never had an honest to God lazy day. Sure, work and such is put on the back burner when she’s sick, but that’s just because her husband forces her to stay in bed to recuperate and threatens to spill coffee over each individual binder if she sneaks off in the middle of the night to sort through her ideas. But, seriously, she’s never experienced a day where she’s in her completely right mind that she hasn’t picked up a pen or her phone in order to get things done.

Today, though, is going to be that first day.

It’s one of those nasty overcast, rainy spring mornings, and she’s seriously not feeling it. So, yeah, it’s totally past seven AM, and she isn’t in her home office, plucking away at the computer while munching on a bagel, and it’s weird. It feels like part of her soul died or forgot about her or something. But, still, it’s the right move, especially after she torched her and Ben’s only day off in a century together in order to help Jerry have a decent last day of work before retirement.

So, she lies in bed and watches C-Span on Ben’s iPad while her husband snores the hours away. He’s so warm and toasty and adorable, but she really kind of wants him to wake up. She exhales, hoping for a twitch or for him to jump up and come downstairs with her, but he doesn’t move from his comfy position on his stomach, hugging the pillow closer to him.

Leslie sets the electronic device on the bedside table and scoots over, rolling on to her stomach too and slinging her arm around his waist, cuddling into his side.

~

She never manages to fall back asleep.

But Ben’s sort of awake by a little after nine-thirty, half observing the news with squinty, glassy eyes and still bundled beneath the comforter. It doesn’t help that it’s incredibly cloudy out, which makes it seem like it’s almost pitch black in their room due to the heavy curtains. He keeps dozing off, curled up on her chest while she rubs his back and plants kisses in his hair.

And, for some reason, she’s perfectly content with this. Because he’s all Mr. Cutey-Pants Benji Wyatt in his white t-shirt and black sweatpants, bare feet cold but soothing to her skin. Being with her husband always mellows her out, even if it’s only a little bit. Right now, though, her nerves are calm and collected, and her only focus is on the gentle breathing coming from Ben.

Except when he starts to snore again. He’s such a loud snorer sometimes, and she could just tell that this little morning nap was bound to be a deafening one. The second she pinches him, though, it stops, and he smacks his lips before snuggling back in his proclaimed spot.

~
“It’s nice to actually see you standing, Mr. Wyatt,” she says with a chuckle.

Ben’s eyes are still droopy and a little bloodshot, but he smiles regardless. “I’m sorry I slept for so long.”

Because, yeah, he totally fell back asleep for a good hour and a half before Leslie worked up the gumption to pinch him again. He was handsome and sexy and seemed so tiny, so small nestled against her. Now, he’s rummaging through the closet for something to wear, and he’s pulling out a button up when she stops him. “You realize it’s past noon, right?”

He shrugs. “We can still go out. Don’t you have that environment study for Ramsett Park coming up? I figured we could go there and re-scope it out.”

She shakes her head. “Let’s just stay in.”

Ben’s brows furrow, and he seems genuinely confused. Or surprised. Or both. “You want to stay in? It’s Sunday.”

“So?”

“So you always have running around to do on Sunday.”

“Can’t a woman cuddle with her husband all day?”

At that, he climbs back in bed, comforter and all. He tugs Leslie close to him, so close that there’s no space between them, and she smells the fresh mintiness on his breath. She wraps her arms around him and hides her face in his neck. “Are you sure this what you want?”

She nods, and Ben snuggles harder.

~

“You’re still horrendously bad at this game,” Leslie tells him, giggling immediately after.

Because he’s a super genius accountant extraordinaire with a giant brain and giant hair, but he freaking sucks at Uno.

“For the millionth time, it’s a game of chance!”

They’re both sitting crisscross applesauce on their big bed, a piled of assorted color cards in between them. This competition heated up a while ago and ended with them boning right here, Ben’s face buried in between her thighs and loving the daylight out of her. They’d showered after, changing right back into pajamas before sprawling out for their game session.

But she notes that he keeps narrowing his eyes to glance at the ones he’s been dealt.

“Wait, can you not see those?” she asks incredulously.

“Of course I can see them,” he says. “I’m not blind.”

“Are you even wearing your contacts?”

He shrugs, placing down a green eight over her green six.

God, for someone so smart, he sure can be super dumb. She reaches over to his bedside table, nearly knocking over his glass of sweet tea as she grabs his glasses case. Leslie hands it to him, and he
drops his cards on the sheet. “I don’t need these.”

“Um, Squinty McSquinterson, I think you do.”

“These are for distance, m’dear. If you wanted a peek, all you have to do is ask,” he says, putting them on and gesturing to his face. “You like?”

And, yeah, their deck gets all messed up because Leslie’s lips crash into his, but it’s not like Uno really matters that much anyway.

~

“You sure you just want waffles for dinner? I could make eggs or bacon or something too?” he offers, placing the plate with three delicacies on her lap. She’s about to hum for his attention when he hands her the cold can of whipped cream and sets her cup of orange juice on the coffee table. She sprays the deliciousness on her waffles and takes her first bite.

“This is great. Thanks, husband,” she says, taking a time out from chewing to kiss his cheek. “You’re almost as good at making these as JJ is now.”

He gives her his patented crooked grin. “That is the highest compliment you could give me.”

“It really is. Aren’t you going to eat?”

Ben shakes his head, taking a seat on the couch and tucking his socked feet beneath him. “I’m not hungry. Go ‘head and enjoy your food.”

“Whoa. Wait. That’s not fair. You should eat. You haven’t had anything today.”

He chuckles. “Thanks for the concern, babe, but I’m fine.”

“You don’t even want a calzone?”

“Well, that’s not really an option, so...”

“I’m gonna go order you one from that little Italian place three blocks over and see if they’ll deliver it,” she says, putting her plate in between the two of them.

“You don’t have to do that, Les—“

But he’s caught off guard by a sloppy, wet upside down kiss from the backside of the couch.

~

He falls back asleep as soon as his stomach’s full from his spinach and cheese calzone, head in her pillowed lap and snoring considerably quieter than she’s used to. It’s not even midnight, but he lost the battle with consciousness around ten; she hasn’t had the fortitude to move him yet.

Their crazy, hectic lives resume tomorrow morning, but, for now, she’s just going to enjoy this.
"Volunteer Weekend Task Force assemble!" Leslie shouts, pumping her fist up in the air.

It works really well because Andy's wearing a Superman cape and socks and everything.

"How long is this gonna take?" April asks.

"Yeah, 'cuz my neck can't be exposed to sunlight for long periods of time," Tom points out.

"Your neck?" Ben asks from beside her. He's all cute in his Karma Police t-shirt, worn out jeans, and sunglasses, and she almost wishes they were at home in bed instead of here.

And, no, not sleeping.

She just really wants to bone her husband.

He'd spent the better part of the morning buried inside her, making her feel things she's sure weren't actually humanly, physically possible.

Leslie assigns everyone an area. She would've preferred to delegate by actual task, like her cool name for this community of awesome sauce people suggests, but it's mainly just picking up trash, so there's no reason to go through specific, detailed policies and procedures, even though she wrote up two and a half binders worth on that a few days ago. Ben begged her to come to bed, and, with that, he effectively squashed her plans for binders number four and five.

She guesses it was worth it, though, since she fell asleep as soon as he snuggled around her.

Today, it's humid and muggy, and her husband holds her hand as they maneuver themselves throughout the gravelly mess that is the Pawnee River, steadying her like a sexy little anchor. The sun blazes overhead, and, jeez, is it seriously only May third? What's summer going to be like? Are they going to boil and die because the sun can't control itself?

“I’m starting to think this wasn’t my best idea,” she admits to Ben, whose cheeks and nose are already pink from exposure. “I mean, I obviously love Pawnee, but they want to recall me. They want to send me away to live with the wolves, never ever to be heard from again.”

He scrunches his eyebrows, and she bites her lip because, damn, did she pick a handsome man to marry in front of people. “I don’t think that scenario would have anything to do with wolves, honey. And I, for one, am still pretty pissed about yesterday. You deserve better than them.”

“Deserve better than Pawnee?” she questions incredulously. “There’s no such thing.”

Ben rubs his forehead. “Look, I know this city means everything to you, but I’m actually really irritated about this whole recall thing. I guess it’s selfish of me to admit it, but I’m pissed. I don’t
know how someone as wonderful and smart and beautiful as you could get recalled from a job you’re obviously perfectly made for. I’m not trying to make this about me, so please don’t think that, but I wish this was completely different.”

And that right there, ladies and gentlemen, might be the single best, sexiest thing Ben Wyatt’s ever said to her.

Because she frenches him. Hard. With plenty of tongue.

And then she loses her footing. And did she mention they’re on a small ledge that they were about to hike down to get to the river? Because yeah. That’s totally a thing, and, suddenly, she feels her ankle twist, and it immediately begins throbbing, and they’re full on barreling into the water. She gasps and tries to breathe, and why did she have to kiss him? Why? Because her left foot really fricking hurts, and they’re all wet, and is Ben even okay?

Luckily, the water isn’t deep, and her husband pulls her out with ease. His chin’s all busted open, and there’s a gash above his right eyebrow. Wow. What the hell? All she did was kiss him because he said something wonderfully sexy and amazing and supportive! But, the instant she tries to stabilize herself, to regain some balance and composure, her weight is pushed entirely on to a shaky Ben, who catches her. She wraps an arm around his shoulders.

“Is it your leg?” he asks, almost a bit too frantically.

She shakes her head. “My ankle,” she says with a hiss as she tries to step on the ground once more.

“Whoa. No. Don’t put any weight on it. I’ve got you.”

He lifts her into his arms like a mighty, elf-like superhero and carries her to Ann.

Leslie still has literally zero idea on what just happened and how, but he’s so extremely tentative, careful, gentle with her that her worries fade, disappear to nothing.

~

“You don’t have to do this,” she tells him.

Ben eyes her. “Do what?” There’s a thick, fluffy towel draped over his shoulder, the very same shoulder she’s pretty dependent on right now. There’s three candles burning in the bathroom, and the tub’s already filled with soapy water. It’s so peaceful and relaxing and so not how she envisioned spending the rest of the day. “Do you need help with your clothes?”

“I sprained my ankle, Ben. I didn’t combust into a million tiny pieces.” But then she quickly reconsiders. “I’m sorry. I’m just cranky.”

He nods, giving her a brief smile. “It’s okay. You have every reason to be cranky.”

Ben lifts her, and she almost pretends not to hear him strain to do it (he didn’t exactly come out of their venture unscathed, but he’s in denial at the moment). The deliciously warm water’s so magical on her sore body, does wonders for her already, but it still doesn’t stop her from making her points. “No more carrying me,” she says. “And I mean it.”

He noticeably pouts. “Why not?”

She points to his splinted right hand with a soapy finger, her eyes narrow. They’re both covered from head to toe in scrapes and bruises, but, between her ankle and his hand, they’re seriously lacking on
the limb department. “Try to take it easy, Ben. You don’t have to walk around like this only hurt me. Why don’t you get in here too?”

Ben shakes his head. “I was gonna go set up our room for you. I figured we’d relax and watch movies the rest of the day.”

“What about you?”

He shrugs. “What about me? Les, I’m fine. I’m a little sore, but that’s it. Tell you what, I’ll go get the room and some food ready, you de-stress and take your bath, and then we’ll cuddle the rest of the day. Sound like a plan?”

Leslie really doesn’t want to agree. Because she knows he’s suffering too. But she’s growing more tired as time passes, and, while the water is soothing against her broken skin, she wants to do that cuddling bit right now. So she nods, and Ben smiles, kissing her forehead before walking off (or is he limping? It’s kind of hard to tell) to accomplish said goals.

He returns a few minutes later with pajamas for her to change into. He’s already showered and apparently re-bandaged himself and looks cozy, yet kind of uncomfortable, in his oversized blue t-shirt and infamous plaid pajama pants, while he helps her dress in a tank top and soft cotton bottoms. Her mind spins, and things are starting to become blurry, which she’s pretty sure isn’t a good thing. “Ben,” she whines, and, no, she really doesn’t care how it sounds because she’s miserable.

“I know, love. Let me carry you.”

“Nooo... That’ll hurt your hand.”

“It’ll just hurt for a second. I’ll be good as new once I get you settled.”

What did she ever do to get so lucky?

“Okay,” she whispers.

Ben lifts her in his arms bridal style, but not with as much grace and poise as last time. He grunts and bites his lower lip, but breathes out a sigh of relief once she’s tucked beneath the blankets. She’s not heavy, and she knows he can carry her with no problem, but Ann said he sprained his wrist pretty badly, so it’s bound to not feel so great right now, which is exactly the reason why she wanted to walk to their room herself.

“Oh yeah,” he says. “I have homemade waffles with whipped cream, Hawaiian Punch since that’s what you’ve been craving lately, and whatever movie you’d like.” He settles a green tray over her lap, and she seriously couldn’t be anymore grateful if she tried. Because he’s oozing, glowing happiness and supportiveness, even though he’s injured just as badly as her. He elevates her foot with a comfy pillow before placing a baggy of ice covered with a towel on the swollen, tender area. “I’ll take the ice off in twenty minutes. Now, what movie do you wanna watch?”

She smiles. “Halloweentown.”

“Halloweentown it is.”
London

Chapter Summary

London was a blast, but both Leslie and Ben are super exhausted.

He’s snoring.

And it’s seriously way too fricking loud. Her eardrums threaten to explode and bleed, and why does it sound so awful tonight? Usually, he only has this problem when he’s under the weather, and, even then, it has to be the flu or a terrible cold to be this roaring and deafening. She’s felt his forehead multiple times just in case, and he seems fine. It’s just so so so loud.

Has she mentioned that it’s super loud?

Because it definitely is.

Leslie sighs. He’s lying on his side and everything, so she can’t think of another way to combat against the ridiculous noise other than waking him up. He’s all cozy in his plaid pajama pants and long sleeved shirt, the hotel comforter wadded in front of his face, and even that doesn’t muffle anything. He did have an incredibly long day filled with chasing Andy around London whilst trying to remain professional enough to make Lord Edward Covington endorse their charity. Of course, all Lord Covington cared about was ice cream, though.

“Babe?” And, seriously, thank God. Because it’s ridiculously early-late, and she needs rest. “What’re you doin’ up?”

But he should know better not to slur his words with his deliciously deep sleepy voice like that.

“Your snoring’s keeping me awake,” she pouts, curling into him. He wraps an arm around her and lays his head on top of hers. He’s warm and tired, and this is easily one of her favorite versions of her husband because it just so happens to be when he’s the snuggliest. Except he’s over-exhausted and twitches every few seconds like he’s still mostly unconscious.

“’m sorry, Les. Want me to go to the liv-” He pauses. “Wait, we’re not at home.”

She chuckles. “No, buddy. We’re not.”

“What should I do?” he asks drowsily.

Leslie shrugs. “Don’t worry about it, okay? Just go back to sleep.”

They’ll be back at their house later tomorrow anyway.

He nods and kisses her hair and cuddles tightly against her.

~

Ben falls asleep with his head on her shoulder in the airport. She doesn’t know how it’s even possible considering Andy’s running around and screaming like a Banshee with April latched to him.
with a map, proclaiming there’s a hidden key to Narnia buried in Ben’s carry on (they nearly shattered his laptop, but Leslie stopped them), but he somehow does it anyway. He’s unshaven and barely had the fortitude to put on jeans this morning instead of staying in his pajamas. Instead of saying anything, she holds his hand and tangles their fingers together.

~

“We should paint our deck,” Leslie says. It’s the fourth hour of their flight, and she’s bored out of her mind. This is the eighth time she’s flipped through this home life magazine, and she keeps stumbling across this teal deck stain she really loves. Unfortunately for her, though, Ben’s eyes keep fluttering open and shut, and he’s resorted to squirming every few seconds.

He shrugs. “I thought we just did?”

And has she mentioned how tired he looks?

Because he definitely is.

“I know, but this is a better color. Look at how it pops, Ben!”

He smiles, but all she sees are droopy, bloodshot eyes, and a guy who can’t get comfortable to save his life. This plane is freezing cold, and Andy keeps eating everything in sight, proclaiming them to be the ultimate free samples. They still have roughly six hours until they land in Indianapolis, and it’ll take a couple more hours to drive back to Pawnee. The thought alone makes her nauseous, and, seriously, this is awful.

London was amazing and a blast and all, but Ben’s at his wits end, and she feels like she could short-circuit soon too.

“What about a lime green deck instead? That would really pop.”

She pinches his arm, and he chuckles before kissing her.

~

“I don’t understand why this plane is so cold,” she whines. She’s already completely covered in a blanket Ben stored in his carry on for her, and she’s bundled up in his dark grey hoodie. She can’t do anything all cuddled in the only sources of warmth like this, so her jet lagged husband’s been quietly reading Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets to her for the last hour.

Ben just continues reading. “The rain was falling more heavily now. On Madam Hooch's whistle, Harry kicked hard into the air and heard the telltale whoosh of the Bludger behind him. Higher and higher Harry climbed; he looped and swooped, spiraled, zigzagged, and rolled. Slightly dizzy, he nevertheless kept his eyes wide open, rain was speckling his glasses and ran up his nostrils as he hung upside down, avoiding another fierce dive from the Bludger...”

He starts to lose inflection, and Leslie glances over at him just in time to watch his eyes close and head dangle toward his chest.

Great.

~

He drives home from the airport while Leslie thaws out from her gentle thirty-nine thousand feet in the air freeze.
And, no, it’s absolutely not their smartest decision because Ben’s babbling about Star Wars to keep himself awake, and Leslie can feel her ears start to bleed again.

Just joking.

She loves her husband to pieces.

And the mostly incoherent rambling is oddly adorable, so it’s okay.

~

Ben cuddles around her wordlessly, nuzzling his face into her neck and burrowing beneath their comforter. They aren’t unpacking a single thing tonight, as Leslie announced when they pulled into the driveway. He brushed his teeth and took out his contacts while she laid out clean pajamas for both of them. It’s past one in the morning, and they are so not going to work tomorrow, even though it’s Monday, and they both should.

She’ll ignore this whole recall fiasco for a little bit longer. And the best way for her to avoid it is to spend as much time with her husband as humanly possible. Because they’re married, and he makes everything better, even when he isn’t speaking.

Except when he starts to snore loudly.

Again.

She pinches him.

“What?” he mumbles, his breath hot and minty against her skin.

“You’re snoring,” she complains.

Damn, this is major déjà vu.

He sighs. “Living room?”

“No. Just try to breathe quieter.”

Ben nods and wraps himself around her even more, and she smiles brightly before closing her eyes.

And, yeah, the ridiculous snoring lasts for hours, but she falls asleep in his arms anyway.
The Pawnee-Eagleton Tip Off Classic

Chapter Summary

Ben reassures and comforts a worried Leslie.

“But do you think I made the right decision?” she asks. And her stomach’s queasy, and everything feels off kilter. Ever since the announcement of her idea, she’s been fighting off the urge to throw up in her ridiculously oversized Sweetums Extra Sugar Cream Soda that Ben bought her earlier (despite the fact that it usually gives her whole body jitters that last for hours, sometimes days).

Not even waffles from JJ’s Diner help her at the moment. The batter is perfect, and the homemade whipped cream suits the delicacy so well, but she’s in desperate need of consolation, and she’s not afraid to admit it. Her walls shatter, crumble to the ground, and she’s left in the presence of the one man in this universe that has never failed her. And he’s perfect and adorable and already in his pajamas, his socked feet in her lap as he pauses the TV.

“Of course you did. Honey, without you Eagleton’s financial crisis eventually would’ve spread to Pawnee and made things a lot worse.”

Curse him and his stupid handsome mouth. It’s too distracting.

As much as she wants to make out with her husband, the will to throw her enemies, her rivals, the scums of the earth under the bus builds like a burning fire in her belly. “I’m not supposed to help them, Ben. Now Pawnee, the city I actually give two farts about, hates me, and I’m gonna be recalled, and then raccoons will nest in my hair, and I’ll probably die.”

Ben sits up, swinging his legs over the side of the couch and scooting to where his shoulders touch hers. He tangles their fingers together and plants a gentle, soothing kiss on the side of her head.

“Breathe, babydoll. Pawnee doesn’t hate you, and you definitely aren’t going to be recalled. I know you’re worried, and that’s understandable, but you have this thing in the bag.”

She shakes her head, gulping. “I-I really don’t think so.”

“Do you remember your City Council campaign? You stayed up for practically three weeks straight at a time going over polling numbers and mapping out plans and chronicling ideas. You never once stopped to think if what you were doing is the right thing because you just knew. It’s one of the things I admire most about you, actually,” he tells her.

Her heart thumps quicker in her chest, and she finds a way to smush herself closer to her husband. “But I don’t know now. On one hand, I could lose my job as a Councilwoman, but, on the other hand, I could actually make things for Pawnee significantly better while still remaining in City Council. I can’t believe they want to recall me.”

And that’s honestly what it boils down to for her.

Pawnee, the city she’s dedicated her entire life to, doesn’t want her in office anymore. And it couldn’t be a worse stab in the back, blow to the face, raccoon to the butthole. It’s awful, and she hates it, and she wants a buttery bowl of popcorn and movies and cuddles with Ben to make her feel
better. Because she can’t be like this all night; it’ll drive her insane. She’s uncertain and wobbly on her stances, and it’s so unlike her that worry bubbles up her throat.

“I can’t believe they want to either. But we’ve… You’ve got this, Les. I have no doubts about it.”

“Really?” she asks. “You’re not just saying that because you’re my husband?”

He shakes his head. “Absolutely not. I’ve seen you overcome a lot more than this. How about this: We’ll plan out what we want the merger to consist of tonight. It doesn’t have to be tangible or final, but it could help you get more of your ideas out there. And I can be your own personal soundboard, and I’ll get you ice cream or waffles or soda whenever you want.”

“That sounds amazing.”

~

“What do you think about re-opening the swimming pool?” she asks. “I know animal control still hasn’t gotten all of those bees out of the pumps, but surely they can do it before next summer? I mean, it’s only the end of September, so they have plenty of time.”

He nods, tapping his pen, and, God, he looks so exhausted. “That could work.”

It’s 5:09 AM, and neither of them has slept. They’ve effectively made a twelve page long list of plausible ideas for the Pawnee-Eagleton merger. Some help the towns directly, but others involve more political matters, such as Leslie trying her best to keep her job and Ingrid being booted out on her ass. Yeah, Leslie’s still bitter about this whole fiasco-in-the-making, but Ben’s here and trying to make it better and stayed up with her all night long.

“Do you wanna take a quick nap before work?” she questions. “You’re looking pretty rough there, Mr. Wyatt.”

He chuckles, holding up his weary head in his hands. “I’m okay.” And he reaches across the kitchen table to rub his thumb across her knuckles. “What would you like for breakfast, m’dear. You’ve had plenty of waffles over the last twelve hours, so I would suggest something different.”

“I don’t want anything different, though,” she says.

“Les, you’ve had so many of them. How about bacon and eggs or French toast?”

She shakes her head and sticks out her bottom lip ever so slightly. “Beeennnn…” she whines.

He nods, waving both hands in surrender. “Got it. Will do.”

~

“I don’t know how I could possibly thank you enough,” she tells him, resting her head on his chest. He shrugs. “Don’t worry about it, love. I would do anything for you.”

“Even staying up for thirty-six hours straight and making me waffles three times?” she says with a nudge.

“Yes, goofball,” he tells her, and she hears the smile in his voice. “Even that. But, now, it’s time for a nap at least.”

She goes to push herself up to give him some time to relax, but he wraps an arm around her and
holds her to his chest. “No! I have a lot to do. You can nap all you want, but my job isn’t going to
save itself.”

But Ben just tugs her closer. “Your job isn’t going anywhere. It’s safe, and you’re safe and pretty
and perfect and deserve some rest.”

“I’m not tired,” she pouts.

He nods. “Yes you are. Give yourself a minute to unwind, and you’ll be laying all over me in no
time.”

And, yeah, she’s actually extremely comfortable in the middle of their big bed with a plaid quilt
pulled up to their waists. He’s soft, warm, and snuggly in all the right places, and she doesn’t
understand how her husband always smells like cinnamon and the holidays, but she loves it (and
him) to pieces. They tangle their bare feet together, and he runs his fingers through her hair.

“I still don’t like this idea,” she slurs out, eyes drooped close and rubbing circles on Ben’s t-shirt.

He kisses the top of her head. “Sleep, baby. I love you.”

And has she mentioned how lucky and fortunate she is?

“I love you too, Ben.”
Chapter Summary

Ben reminiscences about his old life.

Compared to now, Ben can easily say he hated his old life.

He hated being impeached at age eighteen. He hated the loathed sensation that followed him like an overly hyperactive puppy nipping at his heels. He hated going to college to better himself and being treating like a five year old (or not acknowledged) for his mistakes in Partridge. He hated becoming a state auditor. He hated shuttling around from city to town to rural village to Children of the Corn-like areas to community in Who Cares, Indiana. He hated living in motels with delightfully unstable temperatures and bedbugs. He hated being pelted with things, having beer bottles thrown at his skull, and practically getting run out of town by people that didn’t even know him.

Mostly, he hated how closed off and sheltered he made himself. At first, he honestly thought it was a smart, solid move to shy away from social situations. He would hole up in his motel room and scan message boards, read, or watch TV until he fell asleep, most of the time before nine o’clock. He would stay that way until his alarm went off at six; he’d hit snooze half a dozen times, not exactly able to even pull his forever exhausted body off the creaky mattress.

Getting out of bed was so hard. So much harder than he ever thought it would be. Near the end of that horrifying career, he came to Pawnee. People cared, and he bonded with others and somehow managed to crack his shell. Sure, it was horrifying at first. Letting people in was never his strong suit, especially after the whole kid mayor fiasco-thing. He tended to avoid any type of non work-related activity, but he quickly found out that wouldn’t fly here.

Of course, this leads him to the best thing that’s ever happened to him.

Leslie Knope.

She broke down the walls and barricaded herself inside his heart. He fell in love with her easily, swiftly, and all at once. And Pawnee helped that happen, so, really, he owes a huge part of his marriage to a city where raccoons never sleep, and dentists howl at the moon every Friday. Really, though, he swears wouldn’t have it any other way.

Because being out with Chris tonight helped him see that he’s more than happy with how his life turned out. Sure, he hated the old version of himself, but he’s picked up the pieces and put himself back together, and it feels wonderful. His old life was filled to the brim with uncertainty, but it taught him to be prepared when something (someone) truly amazing comes along.

And that someone is Leslie, who’s currently scrapbooking at their kitchen table. She’s wearing his hoodie and her Cookie Monster pajama pants, sitting crisscross applesauce in a wooden chair. She’s focused, face scrunched cutely just a bit as she concentrates with her hot glue gun and puffy stickers and gel pens in reach. He grows more in awe of her every single day.

How could he not fall head over heels in love with this woman daily? Or hourly? Because she’s always here when he needs reassurance or guidance, and she’s more than willing to go above and
beyond whenever it comes to him. She takes care of him in ways he never thought were possible, and she balances out all of the anxiety bursting through his skull as it happens, as opposed to waiting around and letting it rupture all over everything (which is what his parents did).

“You okay?” she asks quietly, snapping him from his train of thought. “You really zoned out.”

He nods, scratching the back of his head. “Yeah. I’m great.”

“Okay, that definitely didn’t sound convincing.” And she gets up, marching over to his seat across the table and settling in his lap, effectively straddling around him. She’s warm and smells like his cologne and sunshine. She immediately places her head on his chest, rubbing over it delicately with her fingers. “It’s never a good thing when you’re this quiet.”

“I promise that I’m okay. I was just thinking about how lucky I am to have you.”

“Are you sure there’s nothing wrong?”

He nods, placing his chin on top of her head. “There could never be anything wrong with you here.”

She giggles and wraps around him.

Leslie really does make everything better.

~

It’s four AM, and he can’t sleep. He’s been tossing and turning for hours with his brain firing on all cylinders. To be honest, he’s not even thinking about anything in particular, just that he loves Leslie and wants to poke her awake to ask what she wants for breakfast. But, like he mentioned, it’s only four in the morning. While that’s not necessarily early or late for his wife, she’s actually asleep, mumbling adorably with her head pressed against his back.

Nothing’s wrong, but he finds himself longing for her to be up with him. They could watch TV or cook breakfast together or simply lie here, but he wants her to share in the peacefulness that comes with being awake at this hour.

“You aren’t asleep,” Leslie points out, shaking him from his trance right on cue.

Hey, at least she’s up.

Ben nods. “I know.”

“Are you sure you’re okay? Do you not feel well or something?”

“I feel fine, love. Why is it that something has to be wrong?”

She sighs, and he rolls over, wrapping an arm around her so she can nuzzle her face into his chest. “You’ve been really quiet since you got back after hanging out with Chris.”

He shrugs. “I’ve just been thinking about how great my life is now. For a long time, I never thought I’d actually be happy, and now I am. It’s nice.”

“I’m glad you’re happy,” Leslie says sincerely, rubbing his arm. “But you also need to rest. You’re very cranky if you don’t get enough sleep.”

“Nah. It’s already too late. I’d only be able to for about two hours, which would probably make it worse.”
She shakes her head. “Nonsense, Benjamin. Go in at noon.”

“Only if you stay with me.”

Leslie pats his chest. “I make no promises I won’t work or read, but I’ll be right here with you.”


She chuckles. “Goodnight, Benji.”
Gin It Up!

Chapter Summary

Ben leaves to D.C. for a few days; Leslie's not happy about it.

“You could always come with me,” Ben says as he folds his cute striped sweater. “Plus, you’d be in the same city as your one true love: Joseph Robinette Biden, Jr.”

She stares at him. “Was I talking about Joe Biden in my sleep again?”

He nods, grinning. “All night. It was super cute.” He leans over his suitcase, kissing her softly.

And she really really really doesn’t want him to go anywhere. Because not being with him honestly sucks raccoon butt. Not that she knows what that’s like, but still. He’s heading to Washington D.C. for five days to help Jen Barkley with some last minute campaign work. And the next five days are going to be horrible and awful and filled with everything bad; she has that overwhelming bubbling sensation in her gut, and she would prefer he stay home.

Which is why she finds herself asking, “Are you sure you have to go?”

“It’s only for a few days. Seriously, why don’t you come with me?”

But she knows she can’t. “I don’t want to lose the recall election, Ben. They might look at that as running away after the merger. But I wish I could go...” He wraps her up in his arms, resting his chin on top of her head as her hands steadily slide down to his perfectly flat ass. It’s the last evening they’ll spend together for over 120 hours, and she has to make it last. He’s scruffy from not shaving in days, and his plaid pajama pants hang low on his waist.

Has she ever mentioned how irresistibly boneable he is?

Because it’s definitely a good quality to point out.

Somehow, the contents of his suitcase are spilled all over the floor, but he shrugs, and they continue on.

~

“It’s too early,” Ben grumbles, hiding his face in her neck at the airport. It’s drafty and freezing on this mid-October morning, and they’re both shivering. He’s cute and amazingly handsome his sweater vest and slacks, but it’s slightly before five AM, and his brain’s not ready to be conscious. He only has an hour and a half flight so he arrive before seven, but she’s pretty sure he’ll sleep the entire way there like he did on the car ride here.

She kisses his hair. “I know, baby.”

And Ben’s well on his way to dreamland already when his plane begins to board. She nudges him, and he snuggles a bit longer before pecking her skin and standing on shaky legs. There are dark bags beneath his eyes, which are droopy and bloodshot, and she has no idea how he’ll function on exhaustion coupled with jet lag once he lands in D.C.; it’s a mystery.
He hugs her deeply, passionately, kissing her on the lips and then heading to the loading gate.

She has no idea how she’ll survive five entire days without him.

~

“I miss you!” she says the instant she sees him over Skype. “Andy peed on my desk today, and April killed my plants!”

He frowns. “I’m sorry, honey. But why did they do that?”

“April blamed the blood orphans, and Andy blamed Champion,” she tells him. It was a fairly interesting, eventful day, but all she could think about was that their bed was going to be half-empty tonight, and she’s to the point where his presence while she sleeps is an absolute necessity. “How was your first day back on the old job? Fun?”

Ben exhales, scrubbing a hand down the side of his face. She can tell that he’s already in his pajamas and freshly showered for the evening, and he looks so tired. She just saw him less than twenty-four hours ago, but that doesn’t make a difference to her. “It was alright. A lot of yelling and screaming and running around. I’m just really wiped out, and I miss you.”

“Do you wanna go? It’s almost midnight. I don’t wanna keep you up.”

He immediately shakes his head. “Absolutely not. Tell me about your day.”

~

They go the entire second day he’s gone without physically speaking. He sends her a good morning text around six, saying that he’s leaving for the office. She tries to call him during her lunch, but an assistant answers and tells her he’s very busy. Leslie comes home around 6:30 and dials his cell instead, but he shoots her a quick message proclaiming that he’s not sure how much longer he’ll be there. It’s two in the morning before she gets a text informing her that he’s back at the hotel.

It’s easily the longest, most boring day of her life.

~

“Oh my God, what happened to your face?!” Leslie questions, her heart thumping in her chest when she sees Ben on her laptop screen. Because her husband’s lip is busted open, and he’s sporting a pretty gruesome black eye. He’s still wearing his button up, but the tie’s missing, and the first few latches are undone. There are specks of blood on his white t-shirt, and she literally can’t stop frowning.

He shrugs. “It’s not a big deal.” But his voice is quiet and suggests otherwise.

“I’ll kill whoever did this to you. You’re a power political operative, Ben!”

But he shakes his head. “Definitely not a powerful operative. And I don’t even know who did it.”

“What do you mean?” And she doesn’t bother hiding the panicked confusion in her voice.

“I didn’t see who did it. I just kinda happened.”

“You were mugged?!” she questions incredulously.

He sighs, rubbing the bridge of his nose but stopping once he winces. “I guess so. I dunno.”
“Ben, you have to go to the police!”

“Nah. It’s fine. It’s not that bad. I only had forty-something bucks on me, and I already cancelled my credit and debit card.”

She doesn’t even know what to say. This never would’ve occurred if he stayed in Pawnee. And who mugs a guy wearing a suit and tie in Washington D.C.? Are they freaking crazy? Is this a thing that commonly happens there? Why would she ever want to live there? Her goals of moving up the political ladder set aside, what happened to her husband is completely unacceptable, and she can’t believe he’s being so nonchalant about this!

“That’s not the point, Ben! He could’ve killed you!”

“But he didn’t. I’m fine. A little sore, but that’s it.”

“I want you to come home.”

He nods. “I do too. But I can’t leave until Friday just because I was mugged.”

She exhales loudly. “Well, I think that’s a pretty good reason.”

“Honey, it’s okay. Don’t worry. Don’t freak out. I’ll –”

But she doesn’t really hear the rest of what he’s saying because she’s too busy packing her duffel bag.

~

She arrives at his hotel at 11:45 PM, running on energy drinks and beyond frazzled nerves. There’s no way in hell should would’ve been able to drive, but the earlier flights were booked, so she had to wait for a different window. It’s not ridiculously late for her, but it’s an almost unreasonable time for her husband when he’s extremely busy during the day.

“L’slie?” he mumbles, scratching the back of his head. He’s all squinty eyed, and his shirt is hanging completely off one shoulder. His cheek marked with the indentation of the sheet, he lets her in, and she immediately embraces him. He’s cozy and inviting and smells so wonderful, and she wants nothing more than him to come home. His left eye looks awful, and he can barely open it, and she just now noticed he’s walking with a little bit of a limp.

He collapses back on to the bed, lying flat on his back while Leslie sits on the edge, brushing his hair from his forehead. “I’m sorry,” she says quietly. “I’m just really worried about you. I didn’t like the idea of you leaving in the first place, but now you’re hurt. I took a few days off, and I’m gonna stay and sightsee... Or maybe not. I’ll bring my pepper spray.”

Ben tugs her to where she’s nuzzled into his chests, and she comes closer easily. “I love that you’re here.”

~

Leslie does her best to patch up Ben’s face when they wake up the next morning. Of course, she attempts this with makeup, and it doesn't work that well. His eye is still swollen, and it’s definitely more on the noticeable side. Eventually, he sighs heavily after half an hour of trying to get his contacts in and resorts to wearing glasses. Leslie’s heart sinks into her stomach, and her brain ignites on fire, and has he always been this incredibly good looking?
Obviously, the answer is yes.

She shoves him back on the mattress, kissing him hard.

Ben doesn’t protest.

~

“Thank you for coming all the way here,” Ben says, grinning softly.

She shrugs, swirling around the pasta with her fork. “I just really missed you. And you were mugged, and D.C. clearly isn’t safe, and –”

“I’m okay, love. Nothing bad’s gonna happen now.”

Leslie nods, cuddling her face into his collarbone. It’s slightly past seven PM, and they’re both already in their pajamas, settled down for takeout and a movie night. It’s like being home in Pawnee, and she can’t be happier about that. Because she loves this guy to the moon and back, and all she ever wants to do is be beside him. “I love you.”

He kisses her forehead. “I love you too.”
Leslie and Ben may’ve celebrated a bit too hard.

There is no one more handsome than Ben Wyatt, especially when he’s naked.

His cheek smushed against her left breast, she brushes his damp bangs from his forehead. He’s all scruffy with warm alcohol rushing through his system, and she hasn’t even gotten a chance to remove the roller skates off her own feet. She had previously been bogged down by guilt, even during her filibuster, but Ben’s perfectly okay with how the day planned out now. And she’s more than slightly convinced he’s well on his way to sleep.

Because he’s stopped talking altogether and fidgets every few seconds. She pulls the blankets over his bare shoulders, and this prompts him to nuzzle harder. “L’ve you ‘nd the skates,” he mumbles, his words slurred and voice super deep. She chuckles and kisses the top of his head. “Great birthday,” he adds a few seconds later, entwining their fingers together.

“I’m glad you had a great birthday, Benji. You deserve it.”

And that can’t be any truer. He’s her rock. He’s what glues her together, particularly on those days where she’s exhausted and doesn’t feel like climbing out of bed. Because, yes, Leslie Knope has those moments and occasions too, and Ben’s never once just let those seem like nothing, even when she swears they are. He’ll call them both in and make her relax on the sofa with never ending streams of popcorn, soda, and movies. He’ll give her a nice, gentle, soothing massage (he even did it once with a badly sprained wrist; she protested, but he’s pretty stubborn).

He’ll do anything to make her happy.

Leslie tugs her exhausted, drunk birthday boy of a husband closer, and he kisses her nipple.

~

The morning’s after anything like what they did last night are rough.

Hell, Ben’s even limping, his left knee a shade of dark purple and marred with red bruises. And both of Leslie’s ankles oddly swollen. Sure, she didn’t consume as much alcohol as he did when they arrived home, but her head still pounds, and she’s certain she’s seeing double. She cradles her head in her hands as Ben hobbles around the kitchen, cooking a very late breakfast and stopping to kiss her every few minutes.

“You don’t have to do this, babe,” she whispers, and, God, why is she so tired? All they did was have blazingly drunk roller skating sex. Six times.

Oops. Seven. There was the brief encounter on the lawn.

At least she can scratch “public sex” off her list.

Even though it was two AM, and they did it near a mysterious bush.
But Ben doesn’t bother articulating any further. All he does is peck her forehead and grin.

And then sprint-limp to the bathroom to toss his cookies.

~

“Wha’ d’ya think aliens feel like?” she hears Ben mumble, breath hot against her neck. She could’ve sworn he was asleep, judging by how toasty and snuggly he is. And he totally started snoring a few minutes ago. It’s been an afternoon filled to the brim expelling bodily fluids and recounting their steamy sex that gave them both a lot of rug burn. “Slimy? No. Wait. Buttery?”

She grimaces. “Buttery? That’s what you think aliens feel like?”

He shrugs against her. “Dunno. ‘s why I asked.”

And she can’t help but giggle. “Are you still drunk, Ben?”

“Maybe. Are you, Mrs. Wyatt?”

“Ooh, Mrs. Wyatt,” she repeats, maneuvering herself to where she’s straddled around him, a leg on either side of his body. “I like the sound of that.”

She kisses him, and he tastes like cinnamon, and eventually she finds herself being thrust underneath his compact, slight body.

~

“Finding Nemo is a cinematic masterpiece,” Leslie points out, squeezing her husband’s hand. He’s fresh from the shower in his white U2 t-shirt and plaid pajama pants, his head in her lap as they view Finding Nemo for the thirty-seventh time in their relationship. Yep. Thirty seven times. It’s one of her favorite films, and she finds no shame in that statement. Ben’s learned most of the lines; he typically quotes it, but he hasn’t uttered one word since it started.

He nods, but he doesn’t offer anything else. Because, yeah, maybe he just turned forty, and they probably drank a bit too much last night, but it’s all good in the hood, man. But that’s a lie, and Leslie knows it. It’s the price that comes with getting older. And now her husband’s forty and not in his thirties anymore, and, ever since she herself turned forty, hangovers are a bitch. Not that they weren’t bitches before, but now they’re seriously mega dicks.

“How about some donuts? Do you want donuts?”

Ben shakes his head instantly. “I think ‘m good on food for ‘least a week.”

“You haven’t eaten today,” she informs him. He made that breakfast-lunch thing earlier, but he didn’t even manage to swallow a single bite.

He shrugs. “Not a big deal. ‘m seriously afraid I’ll just puke it back up.”

She cards her fingers through his hair. “I’m sorry I made your birthday awful.”

“What?” he asks. “No. No, honey. You made it wonderful. I’m sorry ‘m tired and feel like Li’l Sebastian stomped on my brain.”

“Are you sure it was okay? I mean, I filibustered throughout your entire party, and now you look kinda like death.”
Ben nods. “It was amazing. I don’t need a giant party or anything like that. All I wanted was to spend time with you,” he says, reaching to kiss her hand. “The skates were definitely a huge bonus, though.”

She leans down and plants a kiss on his forehead.

~

“’m gonna be honest here,” Ben grumbles. “Don’t think I c’n work today.”

She giggles. “Well, that’s a good thing, buddy, because it’s Sunday.”

He lets out a massive sigh of relief, scrubbing his hands down the sides of his face. “Oh, thank God.”

“Remind me never to break out that batch of Snake Juice again.”

“Done and done, buttercup. Wanna watch Halloween Town?”

Leslie immediately jumps into action. “Absolutely!”
Recall Vote

Chapter Summary

Ben's having a rough day and doesn't want to talk to Leslie.

He desperately wishes he were like her. He wishes he could bounce back from catastrophe so easily, so seamlessly, as if it hadn’t even affected him, ruined him, tortured him. Because Ice Town still burns and singes holes into his brain like it were a fresh memory instead of occurring over twenty years ago. Because, the day after Leslie returns to work as her usual self after the recall, eager to please and do copious, unbelievable amounts of paperwork, Ben can barely pull himself out of bed. In fact, honestly, he doesn’t pull himself out of bed.

“You’re gonna be late if you keep laying around, sleepyhead,” his wife jokes. But his insides feel hollow and empty and like a ton of bricks weigh heavily on his chest all at the same time. He’s entirely, completely numb, but his head aches endlessly, and his pulse seems throbby. He doesn’t even have the energy to respond, his tongue glued to the roof of his mouth as he rolls away from Leslie and curls deeper into, now, her side of the big mattress. “Are you okay?”

Even though she’s fully ready for work, she slides under the covers, pushing her front against his back and running her fingers through his hair. It’s comforting, but it hurts. He doesn’t know what’s wrong, but tears sting his eyes, and he wants, needs to sleep for a million years. Because he’s hungover and groggy, and why does he feel so horrifyingly awful?

“Ben, you’re really worrying me,” Leslie whispers, concern riding her every word.

He still doesn’t respond. He doesn’t have anything left in him.

Because his wife was recalled from office, and he can’t keep the negative thoughts from swirling around in his mind. If she, Leslie Barbara Knope, the most successful, beautiful, intelligent person in the entire galaxy, can’t hold on to her passion, what makes his goals accomplishable? God, no. He should be there for his wife. He should hold her and be her shoulder to cry on. Except it’s been three days since the news. The first day was filled with those things, but she got over it astonishingly quickly, and he hasn’t had any time to register any of this.

Why is Ice Town still on his mind? Get over it already.

But his mind refuses to accept that key, important factor.

He peaked at age eighteen, and he’s never going anywhere else.

He’ll work at a stupid candy company for the rest of his days.

He’ll never see another political office as long as he lives.

But this is just a bump in the road for Leslie. She’s strong and resilient and never takes “no” for an answer. She’s already back on the horse, for Christ’s sake. Ben can’t even pull his head out of his ass long enough to find a career he fully enjoys. Sure, he liked being Assistant City Manager, but he gave that up ages ago, and he’s perfectly content with that decision because it meant getting Leslie back, but now he crunches numbers and finds charities for Sweetums, and that’s it.
That’s all he’ll ever be.

“Okay,” Leslie says, sucking in a deep breath. “You need to talk to me. Please. It’s not healthy to bottle things up; you know that.”

At the urgent, panicked tone in her voice, he wants to say something. Anything. But what he does is scoot to make brief eye contact before hiding his face in her chest. She wraps her arms around him, and he almost feels like he wants to cry. There are tears in his eyes and everything, but nothing happens. It’s disgusting and awful, and, good lord, why can’t he do anything?

He’s trapped. Trapped forever in a sea of the nothingness that is his career.

~

Ben doesn’t go to work.

Neither does Leslie.

He hasn’t spoken in well over a day, and he doesn’t believe he can use the hangover excuse anymore, even if he were to speak. All he does is lie there on their mattress, curled up beneath the comforter and shivering relentlessly as his head pounds viciously, violently into his skull. God, where the fuck is this coming from? He’s been trying to snap out of it, but it isn’t working.

What the actual fuck is wrong with him?

Leslie’s the one who lost her dream job of being a City Councilwoman.

He didn’t lose anything.

“Hey,” he hears his wife say quietly as she enters their bedroom. “I made you some soup.”

Ben doesn’t reply. Doesn’t even know what he’d say to something that basic.

Conversation, Ben. It’s called conversation. Why can’t he make some?

“You really should eat.” She’s tentative and not very Leslie-like. She’s not being loud or overly aggressive. She places the bowl on his bedside table, and he wants so badly to reach for it, to acknowledge her in some way. But his body’s made of sludge, and his eyes droop, and he finds himself nauseous and queasy and in desperate need of alone time.

He exhales shakily and manages to tug the comforter over his face.

To be honest, he’s not sure what reaction he thought he would receive, but Leslie lies down beside him and gets under the covers too. She wraps her arms around him, and he pushes his face into her neck, trembling slightly as she carefully, slowly rubs up and down his back. She doesn’t try to say anything else, doesn’t mention a single Goddamn word.

And, at that moment, he feels himself break.

Break into a billion different pieces he could’ve sworn he picked up ages ago. Tears stream down his cheeks, and he chokes back bitter sobs and hears his father’s voice telling him he’ll make nothing of himself. Go nowhere in life. And he’s right. He hasn’t gone anywhere. Hasn’t even begun to rebuild from stupid fucking Ice Town, and Leslie’s hurting from losing the recall, and she lost her dreams too, and why the fuck is he being so selfish?

But he can’t bring himself to speak.
Leslie holds him tighter, and he grips at her (his) t-shirt while continuing to cry.

~

“They’re the ones with Vicks Lotion in them,” she informs.

And, Jesus, she’s wiping his nose for him.

Oh God.

He doesn’t know how this can get any worse, but he still doesn’t have energy to protest.

“How do you think you can sit up for a sec? I’m just gonna give you some Tylenol, and then you can go back to sleep.”

Somehow, Ben pushes himself up. The late fall air slams into him, and he’s desperate, urgent to rest. It’s the first time in almost a day that part of him hasn’t been safely hidden beneath the blankets, and he grimaces. He shakily gulps down the two capsules and sinks back into the pillows, re-ball himself as Leslie tucks him in. She kisses his cheek before placing a wet, freezing cold washcloth on his forehead, covering his eyes.

“Rest, Ben. I’ll be right here.”

~

It’s past eleven AM when he wakes up.

Eleven?

Seriously? Holy shit.

He knows he’s been out since at least eight o’clock yesterday.

“Good morning,” Leslie whispers, causing him to jump.

“What happened?” he asks slowly, wincing at the uncomfortable knot in his throat. Because, holy hell, he hasn’t even uttered a word in a day and a half.

He hasn’t spoken to his wife.

But she hears those two words, and her own eyes soften drastically. She sits down on the edge of the bed, and he scoots over a bit for her. “To be honest, I’m not sure. You just wouldn’t talk or get out of bed or anything yesterday.”

There are unshed tears that force guilt to bubble up in his gut. “I’m so sorry, Les. I-I... I don’t really know what happened either.”

“Ben, are you okay? Like honestly okay? Did I do something wrong?”

He immediately shakes his head, reaching out of his blanket cocoon to grab her hand, soothing over her knuckles with his quivering thumb. “No. No no no. Nothing like that.” He swallows thickly. “I think I just... p-panicked. Or whatever. You got kicked out of office, and we were both really really drunk, and I thought I was okay. You bounced back from this so fast, and it just... I dunno. Brought back crappy memories or something.”
“I know that what happened with Partridge was rough on you, but I’m gonna be upfront here: I don’t think that this was... normal.”

His eyebrows furrow. “Um, I... I don’t...”

“I don’t mean that in a negative way, but you scared the shit out of me, Ben. You wouldn’t talk to me. You wouldn’t even look at me. And you were in this, like, shocked state for a whole day, and it was... the most awful thing I’ve ever gone through.”

He gulps, and he instantly kisses her fingers when tears start to stream down her cheeks. “I—I’m sorry,” he whispers.

“Don’t apologize. God, Ben, I was just so worried about you. You get that, right?”

“I know,” he murmurs softly.

“You have to start talking to me. Actually talking to me. Because I don’t think I can go that long without hearing your voice ever again.”

He nods, scooching to where his cheek is cozied against her thigh. “I know. I’m so sorry. I’m so so sorry.”

~

Ben forces himself to put his feet on the floor.

His emotions still scrambled and brain not working quite up to capacity after being on strike for that time, he shuffles to the bathroom and takes a leak for the first time in over thirty-six hours. Leslie enters just as he’s washing his hands without knocking, clean pajamas in hand and a worried expression plastered on her face.

“Figured you’d wanna take a shower too,” she says quietly.

He dries his hands before taking hers in his own. “You don’t have to be scared of me.”

She nods, gulping. “I know. And I’m not scared. I’m just worried.”

“I won’t ever do that to you again,” he says. “I promise.”

Ben pulls her close, and she tenses before melting against him. “You swear?” She’s so perfect. So so perfect, and he knows deep down he doesn’t deserve her. But his heart pounds when he’s in her presence, and, while he doesn’t exactly feel like himself quite yet, he knows everything is better, gets better when Leslie Knope’s here.

He kisses her forehead. “Swear.”

~

That night, he tells Leslie everything. Absolutely everything.

And, for the first time in his entire life, he knows it’ll be okay.
Leslie and Ben discuss their emotions (pertaining to the previous chapter).

She waits for it.

Waits for an outburst or for him to shut down altogether like he did last week. Waits for him to utter a single sentence about his disappointment or irritation. Waits for him to tell her exactly how he feels. But it doesn’t happen, and she doesn’t push him. Instead, they go to bed that night with him cuddled up around her, his brand new very blue t-shirt tickling her bare side.

Nothing happens.

Not a single thing.

He even wakes up before her the next morning, despite the fact that he no longer has anywhere to go, and it’s entirely her fault. Because she decided that becoming a loose cannon was her best option and felt resilient to any and all threats opposing her. And those behaviors got her husband fired. Granted, he proclaimed that he didn’t want to work for Sweetums anymore yesterday, but how can she believe him after what they experienced a mere nine days ago?

Leslie should be booming, overfilled with joy that he’s dressed and moving around at six in the morning without so much as a prompt, but she isn’t. Her heart thumps relentlessly in her chest, and she’s still actively waiting for something unwanted to occur. So why is she waiting? Really, honestly, she’s not even sure, but she figures it could be bad enough to take a bit for it to sink in.

“Hey,” he says with his signature crooked grin as she stumbles into the kitchen. He kisses her cheek and sets a cup of coffee in front of her as she sits at the table. “Good morning. Waffles?” And he sounds so normal. Not overly upbeat or hyperactive or anything, but very Ben-like. Grounded and focused and wanting nothing more than to help her day be a good one. He’s such a special, lovable husband that always looks out for her in every way imaginable.

She nods, and he hands her a plate with two perfect waffles stacked on it. He grabs two cans of whipped cream just in case and pulls up another chair beside her. He hasn’t shaved, and he’s squinting, and he’s only drinking a mug of steaming coffee. She spreads the delicacy over the fresh morning treat, but her stomach doesn’t exactly feel right.

“What’s wrong?” he questions. “Are they no good today? I can go get you some from JJ’s if you want.”

Leslie shakes her head and finds herself pushing the plate away. “Are you alright?” she asks.

And her heart is about to go forty-six shades of wacky because what happened last week was so awful. She’s never seen him so... depressed. And now he doesn’t have a job because of her, and he’s acting like Ben. Average, everyday Ben. It’s super weird. Why doesn’t he just tell her how he’s actually, honestly feeling? She’s tired of the run around.

He nods, taking a sip of his coffee. “Yeah, I’m fine. Are you?”
“Ben, don’t do this.”

His eyes widen. “Do what?”

“Deflect. If something’s wrong, you should tell me, not hide it.”

“I really don’t know what you’re talking about,” he says. And he seems like he means it. There’s no stuttering or mumbling or change in his voice. She can always tell when Ben’s lying. Even if she doesn’t directly call him out on it, his demeanor turns from its usual amount of nervous to rambling in anxiety, and he sweats. A lot. Like almost a humorous amount.

She sighs. “You lost your job yesterday, Ben,” she tells him like he doesn’t already know. “Because of me.”

He instantly reaches for her hand. “That wasn’t because of you. Plus, I already told you I don’t want to work for Sweetums anymore.”

“But do you mean that? Like for real?”

“Yes,” he says. “Why don’t you believe me?”

“Because of last week,” she slurs out quickly.

Is it appropriate to even bring that up? Is it something she should pretend never happened? Because they haven’t exactly talked about it since, even though she’s been wanting to. He’s been himself at least. They’ve gone out to eat and had a date night with Chris and Ann and watched movies and pigged out on vanilla ice cream with caramel sauce. They’ve watched movies and made out and had sex and cuddled and fallen asleep on the couch in each other’s arms.

They’re acting normal. He’s acting normal.

So why is she living in the past?

Ben rubs over her knuckles. “I know that was...rough for you,” he starts.

But Leslie cuts him off there. “No. Ben, this isn’t about me. This is about you.”

He nods, swallowing shakily. “I don’t know what went wrong on that day, okay? I was worried about you and stressed out, and everything kinda fell apart around me. It’s happened a few times in the past, but I never thought it would happen again, especially once I found you.”

“So then what did I do?” she questions. “How did I screw up and make that happen to you again?”

Ben shakes his head. “It’s nothing you did, Leslie. Sometimes, it just happens. I swear.”

“How many other times?”

He inhales sharply, shrugging his shoulders and starting to fiddle with her napkin. “Six or seven.”

Her eyes widen. “Six or seven? It’s happened to you that many times?”

But Ben continues to not make eye contact with her. He looks like he’s about to jump out of his own skin, fidgeting and biting his lower lip. “Sometimes, I just shut down,” he says quietly, so quietly she barely hears him. “Not often. But I don’t know why. I don’t wanna get out of bed. I don’t wanna talk to anyone. I don’t wanna eat or drink or watch TV or read or anything. I block everything out and try to refocus my mind on something else...anything else.”
“You don’t have to do that with me. You know that, right?”

He nods. “I know. But I’m not doing it on purpose either. And last week I tried so hard to just say something to you, but nothing would come out.”

“Do you think you can do me a favor then?” she asks, scooting a bit closer to him.

“Of course. I’d do anything for you.”

She smiles at that. “Could you start talking to me about how you’re feeling more? I mean, I’m not suggesting you never talk to me, but if it’s getting to the point where you’re feeling like that, could you please let me know? I want to be there and to help you through anything, but you have to let me in first.”

He nods and leans forward to kiss her cheek before wrapping her up in his arms. He’s warm and solid, even though he’s trembling a bit. “Leslie, I already said I would never do that to you again. There won’t be any repeat performances.”

But she shakes her head sadly. “You can’t promise me that, and you know it. You just said you can’t control it. And I understand; sometimes things happen. But what you can do is talk to me. Even if you can’t say exactly what you want to say or what you’re thinking one hundred percent, you have to say something.”

“I know. And I will,” he tells her.

And they’re still securely in each other’s arms, and Leslie feels his heart rate begin to slow down against her own chest. She buries her face in his neck, inhaling his fresh, minty scent and taking in as much of this wonderful man as she possibly can.

Until her stomach growls

Loudly.

“Let’s go to JJ’s,” Ben quickly offers. “Those would be gross reheated anyway.”

He grabs her hand, and she pinches his wonderfully flat butt.
Leslie wants to take Ben out to celebrate his new job.

He's really quiet once he gets home.

And she knows deep in her gut she shouldn't be worried, but she is. Because, yeah, he's been himself, but there's something more soft spoken and reserved about him.

Or maybe this is just how he's always been, and she's never paid close attention.

After all, she's Leslie Knope. Loud and proud and passionate. Arguing with her is like arguing with the sun. She never takes no for an answer. And Ben's not a loud guy. Mostly low key until he utters a sarcastic comment that's not meant to be funny but really is. He's proud and passionate in a different way, without being overly abrasive like her.

But he just got offered Chris's soon to be old job as the City Manager, and he hasn't even mentioned it. Not once. Leslie wanted to take him out to celebrate, but it's seven PM, and he's been in his pajamas since he got back from quitting his job at the accounting firm, buried beneath a plaid quilt on their couch and watching The Empire Strikes Back.

And, honestly, she literally will explode if she doesn't do something for him. Because Ben has celebrated every single tiny thing that's ever happened to her, ranging from huge moments like her winning the City Council election to the small details like baking her a cake for every bill she had passed (and, yes, he's incredibly sweet and actually did that fifty-six times). He's always there to make her feel amazing, special.

So, she goes to sit down, and he moves his legs briefly only to place them on top of her own. She pats a socked foot, rubbing it gently. "Wanna go anywhere tonight?" she questions. "The movies or something?"

Ben doesn't pause the film he's clearly engrossed in, but he acknowledges her immediately by shaking his head. "I'm okay."

"Are you sure? You don't wanna go out and commemorate this occasion?"

He shrugs. "It's not really a big deal."

Not a big deal?

Not a big deal?!

This is the same guy who's freaked out over his failed mayoral stint in Partridge on a regular basis, despite it happening twenty-plus years ago. And now he's finally getting a dream job, one that can make people forget about his naive eighteen year old self's mistakes, but he doesn't want to celebrate that. He's not even acting like this is a life changer.

"That new Hobbit movie's out," she informs.
"I'm still not the biggest fan of Peter Jackson's interpretation."

Shoot. She forgot about that.

Sometimes his nerd stuff gets a little confusing, but she learns more and more each day.

"Is there anything you'd like to do?"

This time, he pauses the movie. "Do you wanna go out?" he asks.

"I kinda figured you'd want to do something special. I mean, you're the City Manager now. Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

He nods. "It does. My head and throat just kinda hurt, so I'm trying to take it easy."

Oh.

Ohhhhh.

Maybe that's why he's barely said a word since he got here. And why he got into his pajamas instantly. And why he doesn't feel like being extremely, ridiculously happy and proud of himself. Maybe she should stop looking into things so much. After all, he's been much more open and honest and communicative since whatever happened two weeks ago. He's trying and making an effort to not bottle everything up as much.

"I'm sorry, love." She doesn't mention that he could've told her that earlier because it wouldn't help. "Want some medicine? Or a back rub? Soda maybe?"

He shakes his head. "No thanks. But could... Could you lay with me?"

"Of course." She gets up and turns off the kitchen light before crawling over him and settling her front against his back. She cards her fingers through his hair, kissing his neck every now and then while they watch the movie.

~

It's one of her last days as a City Councilwoman for the great city of Pawnee. She's still coming to terms with the recall, but Ben leaving the house on a snowy morning to surprise her with JJ's before work more than made up for it. He's achy and a tad bit feverish with a stuffy nose, but he does this for her. Because he knows she needs the love and support, and she honestly has no idea how she got this lucky.

But this prompts her to do some thinking on what she could give Ben as a congratulations present (really, he opened those gifts literally minutes after Chris announced it; she always has presents for him for any occasion on hand). She's so incredibly thankful for all that he's done for her, and he's changing into sweatpants right in front of her, and, dammit, he can't do that and expect her not to lose her train of thought.

"Have a great day at work," he says nasally, kissing her forehead and avoiding her lips for a good reason. And she's torn between her job and him; she really really wants to stay home with him, but she also really really wants to go to work. Granted, she always wants to go to work, but this is one of her final days, and her goal is to get three more city bills signed and ready to rock.

She wraps her arms around his torso, pulling him close. "Get some rest. I love you."
He pecks the top of her head. "I love you too, Les."

~

Leslie picks up his favorite calzone from that little Italian restaurant three blocks from their house, along with an extra cheesy pizza for herself. She gets a cherry Slurpee and a Toblerone from a gas station, as well as a very overpriced carton of rocky road. It's not a lot considering he's amazing and wonderful and brilliant, but she ordered him something online earlier that's sure to make his stupid surprised face pop up again. For now, though, this will have to do.

Ben's asleep when she enters their bedroom, curled up on his side with only messy bits of his hair showing. She clicks on her bedside lamp, climbing beneath the covers to rub his back. He stirs right away, but, instead of rolling over like he usually does to kiss her hello, he sinks into the touch and lets her continue to gently massage the area until she hears the eruption of snores.

"Hey," she whispers, nudging him just a bit. "I got you a calzone from Mario's."

Thankfully, he moves at that; nothing can detour Ben Wyatt away from a calzone. A mini one almost killed him a few months before their wedding, but he never brings that up.

"How was your day?" he asks, swallowing thickly and facing her.

She shrugs. "Long. I missed you."

Ben kisses her cheek. "I missed you."

"I'm gonna go get the food, and then we're gonna spend the rest of the night in bed. Sound good?"

He nods, grinning softly. He's all adorable with the comforter still bundled up around his unshaven face. She would bone him hard, but she can just tell he's not feeling too hot, so she lets that slide.

She returns a few minutes later, and Ben eagerly sips the Slurpee, entangled in his blanket cocoon as she turns on Battlestar Galactica. He only picks at the calzone; she'll put it in the fridge for later once he's better. Soon, he's slumped back against the pillows once more, and she leans over to lay her head on his chest while he strokes her hair.

~

"You okay?" Ben inquires softly. It's 5:14 on this dreary November dawn, and she honestly can't believe he's still awake. But now he's nice and fogged up on DayQuil and has barely moved from the couch in an hour. His eyes are glassy, and his cheeks are flushed, and, seriously, he always manages to get worse before he gets any better.

She nods. "Yeah. Are you?"

He kisses the top of her head. "It's okay to be sad."

"I know. I just can't believe it's almost my last week of being a City Councilwoman. Ben, I had so many plans, and now I don't get to do any of them."

He wraps a very warm arm around her shoulders, tugging her closer to him. "Screw them. You're Leslie Knope, and you'll find another way."

She sighs. "I wish it were that easy."

"Well, hey," he says. "Starting next week, I'm the new City Manager, so I give you free range to do
whatever you want."

She smirks. "Whatever I want?"

He nods, grinning.

"Does this include boning my husband at work?"

"Why yes, m'dear, it most certainly does."
Second Chunce

Chapter Summary

Leslie comes to grips with the recall.

She's not here.

It's the first thing he notices when he rolls over, attempting to wrap her up in his arms and snuggle into her neck like usual. But she's not here. Her side of the bed is cold and empty, and he blinks blearily. The room's pitch black, and he wants nothing more than to cuddle around his wife and be lulled back to sleep by her comforting scent and touch.

Ben pushes himself up on his elbows to glance at the bedside table clock, but then he forgets that's he's forty and apparently blind now. Instead, he slowly gets off the mattress, wincing when his bare feet hit the freezing hardwood floor. He puts on his glasses, walking to the dresser to grab a pair of wool socks to block out the December temperatures. He struggles to get them on while jumping down the hallway awkwardly in search for Leslie.

He checks in their shared upstairs office and only finds an overflowing sea of binders and notebooks. He checks the bathroom and only finds his discarded suit jacket hanging on the doorknob. He stumbles down the steps, shivering in the frigid, freezing night air. His sweatpants and long sleeved shirt don't do much to help him here, and he just wants to go back to bed with his wife.

But he finds her huddled up on the sofa with an enormous quantity of junk food spread out on the coffee table and other half the couch. There's a fire burning in the fireplace, a warm feeling sweeping over him as he kisses the top of her head. She doesn't even flinch; it's like she knew he was coming. He checks the clock in the kitchen to discover it's 2:47 AM, and she needs to rest.

He places the bag of popcorn, three empty cans of Coke, and four Ding Dong wrappers on the table before snuggling down beside her. Instantly, Leslie places her head on his shoulder and grabs ahold of his hand, entangling their fingers together as Ben pecks her hair.

"You should be asleep," Leslie tells him, which throws him for a bit of a loop because it should definitely be the other way around. Because she totally wanted to run another City Council campaign today (or, rather, yesterday) after Dexhart's sex scandal, and he knows how difficult this is for her. Because in two days she'll be back in the Parks Department like nothing previous took place. "You need to rest."

His eyebrows furrow. "I'm fine, Les," he says honestly. "It's you I'm worried about."

She shrugs, and, okay, she's acting really despondent. "You're still sick."

He shakes his head. "No. That's not what this is about."

Because, yeah, he hasn't felt great this last week, but that doesn't matter. There is not a single thing that's more important to him than his wife. She's been functioning on a series of soaring highs and plummeting lows, and he figures she's hit her breaking point. Leslie Knope doesn't typically shatter for very long, but this seems to really be haunting her.
He doesn't blame her. Ice Town currently haunts his dreams two out of seven nights a week, and he's mortified of ruining Pawnee in light of his new City Manager position. He knows it's hard to walk away. He knows she's hurting and suffering, and all he wants to do is find a way to make it better, even if only for a second. Leslie's happiness is what he strives for on a daily basis. Most of the time, she's easy to please, but this is different.

This is something he can't fix. He can't fix it with a smile or a hug or with waffles. He can't fix it with nights upon nights of brainstorming and jotting down ideas on the huge whiteboard in their home office. He can't fix it with a simple "everything's going to be alright." Because he knows how it feels; that doesn't make it better, not when she's staring straight at it head on.

"I don't wanna talk about it," she says quietly.

He wraps an arm around her shoulders. "Okay," he whispers. "That's okay."

They must've fallen asleep.

All he remembers is that they were watching C-Span silently, Leslie tucked in close to him and not speaking. Now, it's morning, and she's slumbering seemingly peacefully. She's forever talking, but it's okay. Ben knows better than anyone that sometimes people just need a minute to sort through their own minds. While Leslie typically rambles and chatters nonstop, and he's terrified of her shutting down completely like he did a couple weeks ago, he's going to be supportive of this.

If she doesn't want to talk, she doesn't have to.

He has no idea if that's the "right" call, but it's what feels at least sort of right to him.

And her head's nuzzled on his chest, and she's curled up on the cushion. He feels tiny trembles ripple through her, so he attempts to grab one of their thousands of quilts draped over the back of the couch without disturbing her. The instant he reaches backwards, she stirs, moving from her cozy position. She leans her head back and sighs.

"This sucks," she mumbles.

Ben covers her up before responding. "I know, love."

"My own town betrayed me. I've done so much for Pawnee over the years, and this is how they repay me."

He nods. "They don't know what they're losing."

"But apparently they don't care. They're stupid and dumb and poopy heads, and I hate them."

"You don't hate Pawnee, Leslie," he tells her. "You're frustrated, and that makes complete and total sense."

"I do hate Pawnee, dearest Benjamin. I never thought I would say those words, but screw them. Ooh, good idea: Let's move to Hawaii or Costa Rica."

"You would hate living anywhere other than here," he points out. "You've lived here your whole life."

"We could move to Minnesota," she suggests.
And, at that, he grimaces. Because gross. "Um, no. That's just nuts."

"It's where your family is."

He shrugs. "I don't wanna go back there, though."

"See? You hate Partridge because of what they did to you, and now you never wanna go back. Now apply that to my scenario."

Ben shakes his head. "I know you think it's the same, but it isn't. I was thrown out of office at eighteen for being a dipshit. I had no idea what I was doing, and, in the end, I destroyed that town. It's still not the same," he says. "But you... You saved Pawnee. So many times. They may've voted you out of office because they suck ass, but leaving would be a mistake you'd always regret. You love it here, Les."

She shrugs, but he knows she heard him because she maneuvers herself to where she's lying on his lap. He tugs the blanket over her, and she settles down as he rubs her back and cards his fingers through her hair.

"Thanks, Ben," she says so quietly he barely hears her.

"You have nothing to thank me for. Get some rest, honey."

She falls fast asleep against his thigh while he wonders if it's possible for him to be anymore in love with this strange, passionate, goofball of a woman.
New Beginnings

Chapter Summary

Ben comforts Leslie after a rough day.

She definitely isn’t used to working in the Parks Department anymore. Everything’s weird and foreign and strange and scary, and she missed it so much, but she didn’t even realize that she loves being a City Councilwoman more. Honestly. Sitting at her old desk is odd, uncomfortable against her skin, and she isn’t overly fond of that sensation. She wants her private office and bathroom back. She wants to rewind to simpler times when the recall hadn’t ripped apart her dreams, and she came home to her exhausted, sticky, candy-coated husband in the evening.

Mmm... Somehow, he always had faint remnants caramel or nougat or chocolate on his lips, even though she knows he doesn’t necessarily enjoy sweets in general (he’s a strange husband, but she loves him to bits and pieces anyway). It’s like Jessica was making him her official taste tester. Damn. Now that’s a job she can get behind and is crazily jealous of. Maybe she should call her and get a hook up or something. Maybe Ben can help her with that.

It’s not that she hates this job in the slightest. She eagerly waits to create petitions and lead forum meetings and make impromptu phone calls to their patrons. She loves clerical work and duties and thoroughly takes delight in the aspects of being the Deputy Director of the Parks and Recreation Department for Pawnee. But she can’t help but feel...resentful? No. Angry? No. Disappointed.

Mostly in herself, but sort of also at Pawnee.

It’s definitely selfish, but it doesn’t help that Ben’s the new City Manager. Of course, it’s the greatest news in the history of the universe, and she’s extremely proud of him, but it only adds to bringing her down. And she acknowledges that it may make her sound inconsiderate or too involved with her own career to notice that his is finally launching. He’s amazing at absolutely everything he touches, and she’s only a little envious of that.

Okay. Scratch that. She’s very envious of that.

So it’s a little hard not to be bitter when she plops down with a sigh in one of the two chairs in front of his new desk. He’s on the phone and scribbling notes on a piece of paper that’s halfway drenched in coffee; she guesses he spilled it? Wait. Yeah. He did. Because his right hand leaves traces of liquid where he scrawls, and the tipped over paper cup is on the other half of the now messy surface. But, instead of helping him, she sits there and waits.

“What’s up?” he asks when he hangs up the phone. He immediately sheds his suit jacket, tie, and button up, leaving him clad in only a white t-shirt. Beneath his eyes are purple smudges, and he’s overly pale and trembling a bit. “This is officially the second time I’ve changed my clothes today. I think I might as well walk around naked.” He throws on a navy blue sweater he unearths from his messenger bag; it doesn’t make him look nearly as professional, but she would totally hit that if it weren’t for the raging disappointment coursing through her bones.
It’s her first day back, and she just doesn’t feel like being here.

“You okay?” He’s now wiping up the mess with a roll of paper towels, eyes focused on her and not on the spill.

She shrugs. “I wanna go home.”

At that, Ben instantly stops cleaning, rounding his desk and sitting beside her, holding her hand and doing that thumb-rubby-thingy she loves so much. Only there’s no amount of anything (literally anything) that can make this better. Because he’ll continue to move up the ladder, and she’ll be stuck at this job for all eternity. She wants more for herself. She wants, needs, crave Knope 2024 and for each of them to have their own designated wing in the White House.

“What’s wrong? Did something happen?”

Yeah. Something happened.

But she doesn’t want to talk about it.

“Can we just leave?” she asks, and she’s very serious.

He scrubs a hand down the side of his face. “Leslie, I can’t leave. This isn’t like any of the others jobs I’ve had that let me come and go. I have to stay here all day.”

She shakes her head. “I can’t do this, Ben. I just want to go home.”

“Honey,” he says, and he’s about to stand back up when she stops her. She climbs into his chair with him, straddling herself around him and positioning her legs on either side of his slender body. Ben rubs his hands up and down her spine, and she lies there against his chest. This isn’t their house. This isn’t their bed. But being close enough to hear his heartbeat soothes her in ways unimaginable, indescribable. He doesn’t say anything else; he only holds her tightly.

It doesn’t matter that his assistant comes in twice looking for a signature on expenditure papers. Or that he’s very clearly much busier than her. He makes no attempts to move. This is hard, so hard, but everything’s better when Ben’s by her side. It sucks, and she feels like a complete and total failure, but her husband somehow grounds that sensation before it manages to take off.

~

It isn’t normal for Leslie to get home before Ben. Since they moved in together a little over a year ago, he gets off work an hour or two before her, and she either finds him working in their home office, sprawled out on the couch, or curled up in bed. Today, though, she gets off at five on the nose and darts home after telling him goodbye, and he doesn’t unlock their front door until a little after eight PM. She’s sitting crisscross applesauce in a chair at the kitchen table with binders spread out in front of her, but she hasn’t done any actual work since she got here.

“Hey,” he whispers, coming up behind her and kissing the top of her head, rubbing her shoulders gently. He sets down his bag, and it’s then when she spots the familiar JJ’s takeout box, and, seriously, she has zero idea on what she did to deserve him. He’s thoughtful and caring and snuggly in all the right places, and, for the first time today, she focuses on the positives rather than the negatives. Sure, she’s sad, but her husband is here, and all he wants to do is help her feel better about a crappy situation. How can she not adore him for that?

She stands up, wrapping him in a giant hug and squeezing with all her might. Ben chuckles before opening the container for her. “Did you get anything?” she asks, already digging into the waffles
with a mountain of whipped cream spread on top of them.

He shakes his head. “No. I’m gonna re-heat the lasagna later.”

“You didn’t have to do this, you know?” she tells him. “But I’m really happy you did.”

He leans over to kiss her lips. “I’d do anything for you. I’m sorry you had a bad day.”

“It wasn’t that bad. Nothing’s that bad as long as I have you.”

Ben entwines their fingers together, and she lays her head on his shoulder as she munches on her love waffles.
Farmers Market

Chapter Summary

It's a double sick day for Leslie and Ben.

He hates arguing with Leslie.

Really hates it.

Because he’s dealt with unabashed, humiliating, deafening bickering and bantering ever since he actually became aware of what arguing was. And he doesn’t want to be the guy who always has to be right or the guy who’s a fucking douchebag to his wife. Because he loves Leslie to the moon and back (and then, like, quadruple that; it probably still wouldn’t be numerically correct to how much he adores her), and he doesn’t want to fight. Has no desire to.

Which is precisely why they hardcore made out for two hours once they got home after drinking those nasty ass chard shots (he has no idea why those are a thing, but mega-bleh). Of course, the making out transformed into couch sex, one of his favorite varieties of pleasure. And they ended the evening by showering together and cuddling up in the middle of their big bed, Leslie’s head on his chest as he wrapped an arm around her, rubbing her hipbone lightly.

Last night was great; it’s now that causes him troubles.

Because it's 3:12 in the morning, and he had to maneuver his way to the living room, head spinning and legs shaking. He holds a wad of tissues beneath his leaky nose, mumbling under his breath before collapsing on the couch. He tugs a quilt over his body and curls into a loose ball, muscles too sore to stay in a clear cut formation for long periods of time. Because, yeah, standing in a freezing fountain at the end of January was obviously not his best choice.

He doesn’t want to wake Leslie, who’s lying peacefully in bed and beyond passed out, snuggled into his own pillow, and crap. He swallows thickly and scrubs a hand down the side of his stubbly face. Shit. He’s in the beginnings of nursing a cold, and his wife’s been physically all over him. Usually, she's all over him anyway, but this already isn’t a good sign.

Ben sighs and tries to will his brain not to think about the impending doom. Why is his immune system so horrifyingly awful? Why is it so freaking cold in here? His limbs hurt, and it's the start of a magically long weekend filled with snot and coughing and general discomfort. And his only plan was to shovel their driveway, but that's so not happening now.

"You too?"

He jumps at the nasally, hoarse voice and flinches when he sees his wife swaying near the TV, a blanket draped over her shoulders. They must be twins or something because there's Kleenex under her nostrils too, and he immediately scoots over, allowing her to lie down on the couch with him. She hacks into his chest, and he carefully places an arm around her, wincing at the painful strain and movement.

"You taken anything?" he mumbles into her ear, eyes drooping as a warm, slightly less agonizing
feeling swoops over him. His voice sounds foreign and cloudy, and he tries to get back up when she shakes her head, but he's too sore, and even breathing hurts right now. They both need medicine, but he's relatively cozy for the first time in hours, and Leslie's already almost asleep, so he pulls the quilt over both their shoulders and lets his mind drift away.

~

"101.1," she says, handing the thermometer to him. "Your turn."

Instead, though, Ben kisses her cheek. "I'm sorry you feel so bad," he apologizes with what little of his voice he has left. His symptoms moved to his chest, while hers seemed to glide to her stomach. He found her barfing in their fake ficus, bent over and nearly in tears less than an hour ago. He sticks the device under his arm, and Leslie places her head on his shoulder. He winces at the touch; he's positive his skin is roasting.

The thermometer beeps, and, good lord, he needs sleep. He and Leslie napped from around 3:30 to 11:00 on the couch, solidly slumbering without any actual complaints other than their stuffy noses and aching bodies. But it's now a quarter past 4:00, and they're both miserable. Poor Leslie's eyes are bloodshot, and he wants nothing more than to cuddle her into oblivion until she feels better.

"Well?" she asks, removing it from his underarm. Why are her hands so cold? "102 even. Okay, honey, you need more meds and sleep."

He shakes his head. "I'm okay. It's you I'm worried about. How's your stomach?"

But Leslie only gets out of bed as a response. She's very sluggish in her Cookie Monster pajama pants and one of his long sleeved shirts, bare feet dragging on the hardwood floor, and he wishes he had the fortitude to stop her and throw her back on the mattress, proclaiming she gets some rest, but he doesn't. Can't maybe. He barely has enough energy to remain sitting up against the headboard.

She returns with a measured out amount of NyQuil, and he takes it without any complaints (mainly because his throat throbs each time he even thinks about opening his mouth). He sinks to where he's lying down, and she spoons up behind him. He's used to being the big spoon in pretty much every scenario, and he feels odd not doing this to her, but she's warm against his now freezing skin, and he finds himself cuddling into her pillows.

~

"You gave in really easily this time," he mumbles, eyes still closed.

She coughs. "What d'ya mean?"

"You just, like, laid here with me and stuff... Usually, you argue that you're not sick." He stops to sneeze, which explodes through his head and makes his angry headache even angrier. "But you haven't tried to today..."

Leslie nods. "Don't have it in me this time. But, trust me, I'm screaming and dying of boredom on the inside. I wanna go get my binders, but you're really comfortable, and I don't wanna move."

"Well, I'm glad my germiness is at least keeping you comfy." He lets that sit for a moment before he musters the strength to talk again. "Want something to eat?"

It's 7:45, and neither of them have eaten all day. In fact, they haven't done anything except sleep. He wishes he could say that it's been nice and relaxing, but nah. Leslie's still puking, and he still can't quit coughing, so it's been one hell of a double sick day for them.
She shakes her head and proceeds to sprawl over the top of him, her leg hooked around his thighs. She settles her face on his chest, sniffing and tugging the blanket up higher. Ben kisses the top of her head, and he guesses they're taking another nap.

~

"Am I not out of bed?" Leslie questions, her adorable nose scrunching cutely. "I could've sworn I was, like, in the bathroom 'ready."

He shakes his head from his pillow. "Thought I was in the shower a second ago. Realized it was sweat."

"Ew. 's disgusting," his wife mumbles, smushing her cheek into his neck regardless of his drenched situation. They should honestly, seriously take a bath or something, but Ben's throat is killing him, and Leslie's poor stomach is killing her. "Room's spinning, Ben..."

"Maybe that's jus' you doin' cartwheels..."

"Mmm... Don't think so. Can't move."

He grumbles and sneaks a shaky hand out from his blanket cocoon to grab at some tissues. They need to do something. Food might help them get well faster because he's pretty sure they're both getting worse rather than better. Doesn't help that it's one something in the morning, and they haven't had a dose of medicine in hours.

Days maybe.

Today Sunday?

Good lord.

There's no way they'll be up to working order by Monday. And he literally just started this new job...

"Why'd this have to happen to us both at the same time?" Ben whines. At this point, it doesn't matter how he sounds. They're miserable, and this is miserable, and... He doesn't even know anymore. It's just much easier to deal with when they don't feel like Hell vomited all over them. Yeah, Leslie's extremely stubborn, and he figures he's probably not the most cooperative at times too.

But this is terrible.

"Let's just go back to sleep..." Leslie says, entwining their fingers together.

He shakes his head weakly, but he's afraid whatever emotion he's trying to capture doesn't make him seem convincing. "We should eat," he murmurs. "And actually shower, not just make believe shower."

"Too much work..."

Ben coughs until his face feels red and pinched, and mucus haphazardly, grossly somehow gets on the same hoodie he's been wearing for a day and a half. And he puts his wool sock covered feet on the floor. Okay. He's up. Only each movement feels like lava's coursing through his veins, and are his bones breaking? He's pretty sure they're definitely breaking.

He painstakingly hobbles to the bathroom, only stopping to blow his nose. He draws an almost scalding hot bath, pausing to collapse on his knees briefly by the tub because his stupid head won't
stop spinning in circles. He gathers pajamas for both of them before hauling his disastrously, monstrously ill wife out of bed.

"Les, I can't carry you..." he mumbles, wrapping an arm around her shoulders and trying to steady her without much success. Thankfully, their bathroom is only a few steps away, and he, by the grace of all things holy and whipped creamy, gets her in the water.

And then he makes a beeline for the toilet.

~

"Soup?" Leslie asks tiredly as he re-enters their bedroom, trying really really really hard not to fall over and spill anything.

He nods, swallowing thickly and clearing his throat. "Yeah. 's not homemade though."

Ben places the tray over her lap and musters the courage to crawl into bed. He's not hungry at all, but made himself some because he knows he should try. Leslie's eyes light up at the first bite, and she slurps eagerly from then on out.

"You have to be a little hungry," she says after a few minutes. Her bowl's halfway gone, and she seems to be losing steam, but he can't exactly blame her for not finishing all the contents because he hasn't even started. Too busy coughing and gagging and playing around with the spoon. "Ben, please."

He nods and, very carefully, takes a bite.

At least it helps his throat a bit.

~

Leslie immediately calls in for them both on Monday. He isn't overly thrilled with this because he just became City Manager, but they're both still slightly feverish, and Ben feels like he's been hit hard by a monster truck. It's like ninety hangovers combined together, and he doesn't really much of a voice, and Leslie's nose pours with each movement she makes.

They still haven't even made it out of bed.

Sure, now it's easier to take medicine with a drastically lowered temperature. Some of their will and energy is back, and he can definitely say they both feel leaps and bounds better, but getting out of bed is a heroic effort. Like actually heroic. And they weakly play Rock-Paper-Scissors to decide on turns (Leslie's won the last three times, so hopefully she have some mercy on his battered body at some point).

"Great weekend, right?" his wife murmurs against his chest.

He nods, rubbing her hip. "The best."

"I'm sorry you've been sick," she apologizes.

Ben chuckles. "I'm sorry you've felt like crap and puked, like, a hundred times."

"Hey, I'm just happy I don't sound like you. My beautiful voice is perfectly in tact, thank you very much."

He leans down to kiss his hair. "I love you."
And she takes his hand and smooches his fingers. "I love you too, Benjamin."
Leslie's distraught over Ann leaving, and Ben tries to help.

Her beautiful manta ray Ann Meredith Perkins leaves tomorrow.
Actually for real tomorrow.
Wait.
Today.
No. No no no.

Tears stream down her face as she thumbs through May 2012’s scrapbook of the two of them. They attended their monthly Halloween celebration (they dressed up as salt and pepper shakers) and dolphin sitings in the Pawnee River (no questions please; she's not at liberty to discuss where they came from) and their Best Friends Forever Extravaganza (and, trust her, it was definitely hoppin').

Stupid Michigan.

Stupid Chris knocking her up.

Stupid family obligations.

And of course this happens after her recall. She's up to working order now in the Parks Department, no longer wallowing or sulking, but still. Why can't she catch a break? She sniffs and wipes her eyes with a tissue, and why is this happening? Why is Ann leaving? Will her life ever be the same?

She begged her for a sleepover, but her and Chris had a bunch of last minute packing to attend to after the party, even though no one left until approximately midnight. Now, it’s 3:53 in the morning, and her eyes longer behave like normal eyes, and she just wants to curl up and cry herself to sleep. Nothing could make this sinking pit of despair go away. Nothing could ever replace her gorgeous multi-ethnic friend.

"Babe?"

She turns around to see her husband stumbling over socked feet to the couch, wrapped in a plaid quilt and yawning. He plops down beside her and immediately lays his head on her shoulder, and
she instinctively kisses his hair. Shivers wrack his body on this frigid February night, so she spreads her own blanket over his legs and then entwines their fingers.

"She's leaving in a few hours," she whimpers, hiccuping and pressing Kleenex against her flushed cheeks. "I should go get ready..."

Leslie goes to stand, but Ben gently stops her. "No. Don't go. You should rest."

And, seriously, curse him for being so warm and adorable and very easily boneable this ridiculously early. He rubs his thumb over her knuckles, and how is he so comforting? He's barely even awake, but him being down here with her makes her feel unbelievably, undeniably better. Like she can breathe. Like her soul isn't being strangled to death, wondering why her best friend actually has to go.

"How am I supposed to sleep?" she asks. "Ann's leaving, and last night was a disaster, and she can't just go. That's not a thing, Ben!"

Ben plants tiny kisses on her neck. "Okay, last night definitely wasn't a disaster. And she has to go. You can't keep her here or lock her up or whatever you're planning on doing."

"You're friends with Chris; convince him to stay!"

He shakes his head. "They want to do this, Leslie. It'd unfair to stop them. Plus, you act like you guys won't be friends anymore, and that's not true at all. You love each other."

"I do love me some Ann Perkins, but that's besides point... She can't leave. Who am I supposed to talk to about Sandra Bullock's skirt length or if it's worth it for me to get Showtime? Because, no offense, babe, but it isn't you."

He frowns. "I'm sorry she's moving."

He says it so sincerely that, somehow, her lips end up crashing into his, and he's sweet and warm, and how lucky is she that she got to marry this lovable man? A man who goes above and beyond and is supremely skilled in making her happy behind her wildest dreams.

She pulls away, and he's grinning at her dopily before leaning in to kiss her forehead.

"I'm scared," she whispers, clutching on to his hoodie.

He nods. "I know, love. But this isn't the end of your relationship. Ann's going to have a baby, and she and Chris are very happy."

"Of course I'm happy that she's happy, but that doesn't mean I won't miss her. I miss her right now, and she hasn't even officially left yet."

But Ben wraps her up in his warm, solid arms and holds her close. And, really, it does make her feel leaps and bounds better.

~

Obvious, she doesn't sleep.

And Ben, even though he was only in bed for a grand total of two and a half hours (which is going to lead to a very loud snore-filled night for her) stayed up with her. He suggested they make cookies in order to keep her mind off of "you know what," so they did. Their kitchen's still a mess, but her
eyes are useless, and, while her belly is full of breakfast food, all she wants to do is sleep.

Or continue to cry.

Or eat their chocolate chip cookies and weep openly.

Or do all of that plus cuddle Ben to pieces.

Yeah. Let's do that.

Her husband, her wonderful, dutiful husband, grabs her fuzzy pajama pants and one of his t-shirts, while changing himself. She has practically zero energy, so she grumbles and sniffs, and he gets her out of her coat. "I'm sad..." she states, as if it weren't clear enough, and Ben pecks her forehead before helping her with the remainder of her clothes.

"What would make you feel better?" he questions softly.

But she automatically knows the answer.

"Nothing. Ann's gone."

"How about a movie and PJ day? It's not even noon yet. I can make mac 'n' cheese pizza, and we can watch Halloweentown or Finding Nemo or whatever you want."

Her eyes widen at first, but then she scrunches her nose. "Are you being serious about the mac 'n' cheese pizza?"

Ben nods. "Of course."

"Can you make it extra cheesy?"

Her husband kisses her gently. "I'll do my very best."


An hour later, they're hunkered down in the middle of their bed, piled high in blankets and homemade cookies and her favorite pizza. Finding Nemo plays on their flat screen, and Leslie finds her heart fluttering in her chest. Because Ben's here, and he's beyond perfect. The dull ache of missing Ann makes her throat knot up every time she thinks about her, but it's getting better.

"You okay?" the exhausted, pajama-clad version of her elfy husband inquires.

She nods and tangles their fingers together. "Thank you for always making me feel better. I love you."

He pecks her fingers. "I love you too, my Baby Smurf."
Anniversaries

Chapter Summary

Ben and Leslie celebrate their first anniversary.

Chapter Notes

The ending sequence's dialogue is pulled directly from the episode.

He tries not to be upset.

Leslie’s a busy woman.

A very very busy woman.

It’s hard not to be a teeny tiny smidgelet bitter, though. Because, yeah, he’s totally not the City Manager with a lot of responsibilities he still isn’t quite accustomed or used to. It was the day before his and his wife’s big day, and he didn’t want a single thing to come before her. So, he went to work and only accomplished pieces of what he actually need to here and there, in between the chaos bubbling and brewing in his chest and the panic rising in his throat.

He just wanted everything to be perfect.

But, like he’s already acknowledged, she honestly has a lot on her plate and is forever on the go. Since the recall, it’s been kind of hard to get her to relax; usually, they watch TV or go out to dinner or take a stroll around the neighborhood or at least something. It doesn’t have to be big, just a simple dinner together would be alright with him. But Leslie has other plans. He typically loves how passionate she is, but not so much today.

She didn’t even want to share a meal he prepared specifically for her.

Ben still doesn’t even know if he has a “right” to be upset, so he tries not to be.

He changes into his pajamas and watches Return of the Jedi on their iPad beneath the comforter, waiting eagerly for her to come to bed.

Only, obviously, that never happens.

Because it’s 1:46 AM when he reopens his eyes, and that’s only caused by the overhead light being flipped on. He tugs the blankets over his face and grumbles, rolling on to his stomach. But he yearns for Leslie to climb on the mattress and hug him. He’s not even searching for an explanation. All he wants is for Leslie to even understand the possibility that he’s bothered.

It was (the day before) their first wedding anniversary. He filled his office with lit, warm candles and pictures of them. He scheduled a couple’s massage to help her relieve some of her stress (and having
to share that with Gary was utterly horrifying; Ben likes the guy, but he now feels like he’s seen way way way too much). He got a beautiful horse-drawn carriage to escort them around Pawnee, dressed as the characters from Enchanted. There would’ve been a waffle buffet and a Hilary impersonator and dance lessons and all sorts of greatness, but she didn’t come.

She couldn’t make it to one single event.

Really, he guesses that’s honestly what he gets for doing everything a day early, but it kind of bothers him she couldn’t drop at least something for the celebration.

“Are you up?” Leslie asks. He hears her pad around to his side of the bed and groans when she pulls the covers down. “Did I wake you?”

“Kinda doesn’t matter now,” he mumbles, opening his eyes and scrubbing his hands down the sides of his face. “You comin’ to bed?”

She shakes her head, carding her fingers through his hair. “No. I’ve got some more work to do; I was just looking for binder 4388. It has all my information about upcoming festivals I thought I’d get a head start on.”

“Do you have to do that right now?” he questions tiredly, softly pulling on her arm and trying to coax her under the comforter with him. But Leslie holds strong, firm to the fact that she wants to continue to spin her wheels rather than relax with her husband. A husband she’s now officially been with for an entire year. It’s been such a wonderful, glorious year, but he can’t help but frown and burrow himself back into oblivion when she refuses to acknowledge that.

Leslie leans down to kiss his forehead. “I’ll be in soon.”

~

Only she doesn’t come in “soon.”

It’s 4:12 in the morning when Ben pulls himself off the mattress, cringing as his bare feet hit the icy floor. But, instead of going on a search for his wife, he pulls out the pictures he had a photographer take yesterday. They’re disturbing and a little comical to him, and he chuckles occasionally as he sprawls out on the messy bed to compile his “masterpiece.”

He digs through her scrapbook supplies, obnoxiously pink glitter and all, and gets to work. He knows it ridiculously early/late, but she deserves this. Yes, he’s still a little sore about everything that happened and her not showing up, but it doesn’t lessen how he feels about her. It’s a very very special occasion, and he needs to honor her. He shouldn’t have done their celebration a day early; now he knows for next year. He just wants Leslie to be happy, and that’s it.

~

Ben cleans up right before she shuffles in at 6:00 to grab her clothes for the day. He immediately jumps under the comforter and rolls on to his stomach, trying his best to imitate being asleep with his heart pounding. Wait. How does he usually sleep? Should he fake snore? He knows he at least does that because, every now and then, Leslie mentions it. But does he sleep on his side or stomach or back? Shouldn’t he know this? What if she knows he’s awake?

“Good morning,” she whispers, leaning down to kiss the back of his head. “You’re up early.”

Okay, so obviously he should’ve snored or something like that.
“Mornin’,” he mumbles, trying his best to sound hazy and tired, but all he knows is that he’s crazily, deeply in love with this woman.

“Did you sleep okay?” she questions, rubbing his back through his shirt. “You’re never up at six.”

He shrugs. “Couldn’t wait for the day.” He shifts to where he can see her beautiful, gorgeous eyes and props himself on his elbows to give her a proper, brief kiss. He wants to throw her down on the mattress and hardcore makeout for a few minutes, but he’s been chugging coffee and cans of Coke, so he doesn’t want her to taste that on his lips.

“Would you care to join me in the shower, dear sir?”

Ben nods, pecking her hand. “Certainly, m’lady.”

~

“Happy Anniversary,” he says, handing the perfected scrapbook to her. “So, I know we agreed on no gifts, but I did get you a gift. A bunch of them actually. I was gonna surprise you with them yesterday, but they never reached you.”

Leslie thumbs through it, surprise and delight glowing on her face, and Ben feels his stomach drop to his toes. “Oh, my eff-ing God... You planned all of this for me? An enchanted carriage? This is amazing. Oh, and your scrapbook instincts are really good. I mean, this is a little rough, but you have a lot of talent here.”

He smiles. “Oh, I can’t believe I actually defeated Leslie Knope in a gift exchange. Yes!” he basks in triumph. Because his wife’s been pulling this whole “I dominate at presents” charade for years now, and it’s time to show her who’s boss.

“Uh, yeah. About that.”

Chapter End Notes

Feel free to follow me on Tumblr: @supervanillabear31.
The Wall

Chapter Summary

Leslie and Ben are bruise buddies.

It’s snowing by the time he gets home. Fat, fluffy flakes fall around him, and he sighs; he’s ready for winter to be over. Part of the reason (a very very slight part) he moved away from Minnesota was to rid himself of the constant cold, but Indiana is nearly just as bad. He doesn’t particularly like shoveling the driveway or riding home on slick roads, but at least he can sort of appreciate the beauty and blissfulness that comes with the last week of February.

He braces himself for the chills about to erupt through his body, especially since he gave Leslie his coat before her outdoor announcement of the Unity Concert. She forgot to give it back, which is totally fine, but walking around without it, even just to their front door, taunts him. The second he swings open his car door, a massive gust of wind slams into him. Just fantastic. Snow splatters in his face, and he licks his lips as he wipes his flushed cheeks.

Of course, though, this prompts him to trip hard on the slippery pavement, sending him crashing to his knees. A sharp pain ripples through the area, and he hauls himself to his feet using Leslie’s car as a brace, huffing as even more inclement weather tosses itself into his eyes. What the hell? Seriously. What the actual hell? What is going on? Is he dying? No, right?

Thankfully, Ben makes it inside before anymore snow ghosts or demons or whatever that was threatens to shuttle him underground to where he’s never seen or heard from again. He exhales shakily, immediately ridding himself of his icy shoes and suit jacket, even though shivers wrack his confused body. He crosses his arms over his chest as he makes his way upstairs to their bedroom, only wincing every now and then at the discomfort in both knees.

He’s not exactly expecting to find his wife, the gorgeous and ever-enticing Leslie Knope, lying on the mattress holding an ice pack to her eye. He instantly rushes to her side, heart pounding relentlessly in his chest. “What happened? Are you okay?” he questions, not even bothering to hide the frantic tone in his voice. Because Leslie’s here, but she’s hurt, and that’s not okay.

Leslie nods and smiles brightly, which throws him off a little. “I’m fine. But I was thinking we should get Chinese for dinner.”

He does a double take, his eyebrows rising. “Um, let me go back to the first question: What happened?”

She shrugs, waving her hand nonchalantly. "It was an accident."

“Honey, you don’t just get a black eye on accident! Who did this to you?”

“Okay, calm down before you freak out. It honestly was an accident. And it was a girl who punched me, so you don’t have to worry.”

Ben rubs his forehead. “Don’t have to worry? Leslie, you could’ve gotten seriously hurt!”

True to her usual style, though, his wife tugs him on to the bed, and he places his head on her chest.
while she strokes his hair. But he manages to keep the ice pack on her eye because that swelling really needs to go down. Maybe she should switch to a warm compress instead. How long has she been icing it? There are so many thoughts swirling around in his mind, but Leslie holds him close, and, somehow, her magical touch manages to soothe him just a bit.

“What happened to your pants?” she questions after a few minutes of Ben trying to breathe peacefully. Because Leslie’s eye is black, and he feels the unsettling urge to kick whoever did this to her, even though she claims it was another woman, in the face.

He glances down briefly to find that both knees of his slacks are now slightly holey and covered with dirt from the snow. “Slipped on my way in.”

“It looks like you might need a Band-Aid or something there, Mr. Wyatt. Why don’t we go get you fixed up?”

He shakes his head. “I’m good here.” And he latches on to his wife even tighter.

“Uh uh. I don’t want blood on the comforter, Ben,” she states.

Which he can totally understand, so he nods and pushes himself up. Leslie pats his shoulder as he stands up, and, yep, maybe there definitely is blood dripping down his leg. Oops. It doesn’t even actually hurt, but he isn’t a fan of the red substance, especially his own. He grabs some pajamas, and he turns on the shower water as Leslie sets up a mini triage station in the bathroom.

~

“What’re you doing?” Ben questions as he sits down on the couch. Because his wife’s totally not wearing his glasses, squinting at the TV screen with a thick blanket wrapped around her shoulders. Yeah, no. She’s not doing that at all.

Leslie doesn’t bother glancing over at him. “Sitting here. Watching C-Span. Also, what do you think about Chinese for dinner? You ignored me earlier.”

“Babe, I really don’t think you use those,” he points out.

“Why?” she asks like the answer isn’t sort of already obvious.

“Um, they’re my prescription and will probably hurt your eyes even more. You’re straining them for no reason.”

She shakes her head. “Not true. I can totally see out of my black eye through these! They’re magic!”

“Yeah, I’m just gonna take these,” he says, slipping them off her nose only to fold them up and place them in his hoodie pouch.

Leslie sighs, tipping her head back dramatically to the cushions and sighing loudly. “I don’t wanna go to work like this.”

He nods, rubbing her thigh. “I know, sweetie. But the swelling should go down a lot more by tomorrow. Speaking of: It’s time to ice.”

But Leslie just maneuvers to where her face is hidden in his neck, and he wraps an arm around her, pulling her closer and kissing her hair.

~
“Wow, your knees look gross,” Leslie points out.

Ben grumbles, smushing his cheek back into the pillow. “What?”

It takes him a little bit through his sleepy, foggy haze to realize that she’s standing beside the bed. The comforter is left around his socked feet, exposing his bare legs to the world. He moans and tries to roll over, but his wife stops him. “It’s almost seven, babe. You need to get up.” But, still, she cards her fingers through his hair, leaning down to kiss his cheek before he pushes himself off the mattress.

His knees sort of ache today from his fall, and what? Why is Leslie wearing tie-dye? But it’s early, and he desperately needs caffeine, so all he does is point before rubbing at his own eyes with his fists like a cranky toddler. Shit. Eyes. Leslie’s eye. He moves closer because his visions always a little wrecked and crooked in the morning, and there it is. It does look considerably better, but it’s purple and a little black around the edges, but at least she’s smiling.

“You’ll be late if you don’t get in the shower, my wonderful bruise buddy.”

He yawns. “Bruise buddy?”

“It’s seven AM, babe. Not one in the morning. How do you not get what a bruise buddy is?”

Ben chuckles, wrapping his arms around his wife and rubbing her back through her obnoxiously tie-dyed shirt. “This looks really good on you.”

She giggles against his chest. “Liar.”

But he kisses her forehead. “You always look good to me, babydoll.”
Ben and his stupid appendix run into some trouble.

At first, she doesn’t think much of it.

He isn’t hungry, which isn’t exactly normal or abnormal because his appetite is finicky at best on certain days, but it gives her more reason to contemplate driving to get JJ’s for dinner. Only he mumbles something about the increasing inclement weather, how much snow they’re supposed to get tonight, saying it’s unsafe for her to go. Usually, he offers to do it himself in a heartbeat, but today he continues lying on the couch beneath a blanket with two pillows cradling his head and ridiculously amazing hair.

So Leslie warms up some leftover mac ‘n’ cheese pizza from two nights ago and munches on that instead. She hunkers down in their home office with a glass of Extra Sugar Cola Delight, intent and focused on getting some actual paperwork done tonight because Andy spilled coffee literally all over everything earlier. She gets lost in her own little world for hours, ignoring the fact that Ben hasn’t strung together more than a few words since they got home.

It takes six whole hours for her to finish what she needs to, and she’s in serious need of a break by then. She clenches and unclenches her right hand multiple times, damning whoever invented the idea of hand cramps; it’s not her fault she needs to write a lot down. Her stomach growls, and it’s past midnight, and their entire house is pitch black, and she figures Ben’s already in bed.

Except he’s not.

She finds him still on the sofa, resting quietly on his back. He isn’t snoring, which means he isn’t asleep, but his eyes are closed. The TV plays something from the Food Network in the background on mute, but she stops trying to figure out what it is as soon as she spies broccoli rather than cookies or chocolate (come on, Food Network. Seriously). Blech. She carefully sits on the edge, tangling their fingers together with one hand and carding her digits through his hair with the other.

"Why don't we go lay down in bed?" she whispers.

He shakes his head. "I'm good here."

Leslie frowns. Because he is slightly warm beneath her touch and hasn’t so much as moved in such a long stretch of time. Some nights are like this; he’s sluggish and a little cranky from a stressful day and isn’t very talkative. But she’s been married to him for over a year now, and she knows the differences between an overly exhausted Ben and a starting to get sick Ben. And he’s definitely heading in the wrong direction.

"I think a bed would give you a greater chance of waking up tomorrow feeling better," she says.

He shrugs. "I don't feel bad. Jus' my stomach."

"Do you want to try to eat something?"
"No... Can you... come here?" he asks, sounding too hoarse for her taste.

She bites her lower lip, but she sinks beside him regardless because he’s such an adorable, handsome, snuggly husband. He tries to shift to where he’s on his side, but he immediately cringes and winces, so Leslie curls up and places her head on his chest. Her heart flutters and skips several beats in a row because, somehow, she just got massively turned on and extremely concerned all at the same time, and, wow, that’s the most conflicted she’s felt in a long time.

But Ben seems to relax as she draws circles on his hoodie, so she tries to tune out her worries.

~

She’s asleep when it happens.

Really really asleep. So asleep that she almost doesn’t have the fortitude to get out of bed (especially after she practically dragged Ben into their bedroom around two AM). So asleep that she’s actually dreaming (it involved ducks and kangaroos become besties, but, hey, it’s a dream nonetheless). So asleep that pulling herself from the mattress is like ripping her soul out.

Okay, probably not that extreme, but still.

And it’s a good thing she does follow Ben to the bathroom because he’s on his knees in front of the toilet. Sweat drips into his eyes, and she immediately crouches behind him, rubbing his back as he heaves and shivers uncontrollably. Oh God. Her poor baby. He’s still not overly warm, but he’s puking and clearly not feeling well, and she can’t help but bite her lip.

Because her husband, her favorite person in the universe, has the shittiest immune system she’s ever encountered, but it’s okay. It’s okay. She has to repeat that mantra over and over again. He always gets over it. He’s only needed the hospital a handful of times. But there’s this uneasy sensation brewing in her gut. This isn’t normal. He isn’t acting like himself. Even when ill, he’s still relatively the same guy. He makes her dinner (very carefully and safely as to not get her sick too, of course). He’ll shovel the driveway (despite her insistence that he stays inside, but he proclaims he doesn’t want her to slip or get stuck). He still manages to find ways to make her unbelievably happy with a fever of 102 and coughing his lungs up.

But there’s something off this time around.

“Do you think you’re done, babe?” she asks softly, continuing to massage his drenched back in hopes that it brings some relief.

He nods, and she stops him before he cleans his mouth on his baggy sleeve. She wipes him off with a cold cloth, pressing a different one to the back of his neck while he brushes his teeth. He’s still on his knees and breathing rapidly, but there’s a bit more color to his cheeks, and he seems so wiped out. He spits the toothpaste into the murky water, and Leslie finds herself gagging a little as she flushes it with a socked foot before helping him off the floor.

Ben wobbles to their room, collapsing face first on to the mattress, only to instantly maneuver to his back, huffing and puffing as exertion and exhaustion grab ahold of him. He yawns, and Leslie covers him up. He’s asleep within seconds, while she worries the rest of the night.

~

“Don’t feel so good,” Ben murmurs into her shoulder, where he’s been residing for the past two hours. He refuses to move and has swallowed his nausea more times than Leslie can count, holding on to his stomach and sweating buckets. She’s still doping him up on DayQuil in hopes of the pain
going away, even if it’s just a tiny bit, because Ben’s miserable.

So miserable she thinks he needs to go to the hospital.

Leslie texts Ann about the situation, and her beautiful, gorgeous best friend tells her that she’ll be over in a few minutes. She’s the most brilliant nurse in all the land, so she figures they’ll have a diagnosis of some sort very soon, which they will both definitely appreciate. He hasn’t been able to sleep because of the agony rippling through his gut, and he needs to relax.

“I heard the doorbell,” she whispers, kissing his soaked hair and making her move to get up.

Ben grabs her hand with his clammy one. “Leslie...” he whines.

She swoops in to give his temple a peck. “I’ll be right back, baby.”

Leslie sprints to retrieve her Ann, dragging her inside as quickly as possible; she can’t stand the idea of Ben being alone for too long when he’s like this. She lies beside him, carding her fingers through his messy strands while Ann palpates his middle. The second she makes contact with his lower right side, a tear strolls down his flushed, feverish cheek.

“You guys need to come with me, okay?” Ann says, and Leslie still loves it when she gets authoritative because that’s her best friend, guys.


“It’s appendicitis, and I think yours is about to burst, so let’s get this show on the road.”

But all her husband does is gulp and then lean over the side of the bed, hurling all over Ann’s shoes.

~

“Your nose looks like a sea lion.” And he reaches out with shaky fingers, effectively “booping” her in the process. “Such a cute li’l lion... Named Marco.”

Oh, yeah. And he’s totally high from the anesthesia wearing off. But they made it here literally minutes before his appendix exploded, so that’s good. She has no idea how a relatively small incision to remove an inflamed organ ended with him being extremely loopy, but she’s okay with whatever as long as he’s happy, healthy, and stops getting sick all the time.

“How’re you feeling, honey?” she questions. She’s been sitting in this uncomfortable chair for a while now, waiting for him to come around and actually speak as opposed to blinking blearily for minutes at a time. She grabs the hand without the IV and squeezes gently. He’s worse for wear with dark smudges beneath his unfocused, glassy eyes, but it’s so obvious he really isn’t in pain anymore, and at least he’s not running a fever or vomiting.

Ben considers this for a moment. “Spinny... And like a giant snuggle fish is comin’ at me.”

She chuckles. “What does that mean?”

“It means you’re my fav’rite snuggle fish, an’ I want you to snuggle with me.”

Cute. This time he’s being cute as opposed to high as a kite. This time, unlike when he had kidney stones, he seems manageable.

“Do you want me to lay with you?”
He nods, rubbing at his left eye with his knuckles like a toddler, and Leslie finds herself falling even more in love with him. She makes sure to be extra careful as she climbs beneath the somewhat scratchy hospital blankets, allowing him to cuddle his face into her chest. “Like this boob,” he mumbles, kissing the clothed area sweetly. “And this one too.”

“They like you too, Ben.”

“Wanna Popsicle,” he murmurs next.

She smiles, running her fingers through his hair. “How about you take a nap first? Then we’ll get some Popsicles.”

Ben agrees to this, and it doesn’t take long before he’s asleep, drooling on her breast.
Galentine's Day

Chapter Summary

Leslie and Ben visit Ann, Chris, and Oliver in Michigan.

“It’s, like, negative twenty thousand degrees out here,” Leslie whines, shivering uncontrollably as snow pelts her face.

Ben eyes her. “That cold, huh?”

Okay, yeah, he’s trying to be cute and sarcastic, but she’s not having it. No, sir. Not right now. Her boobs are going to turn into boobsicles, and Ben will never be able to do that thing that really riles her up ever again, and, no, that seriously cannot happen. Her teeth chatter, and her purple bobble hat does nothing to protect her from the vicious weather. She almost (almost) stops her husband when he shrugs off his navy blue puffy coat and wraps it around her shoulders, bundling her inside his cinnamony warmth with equally trembling fingers.

“Thank you,” she says over the howling wind, and Ben shields his eyes as she tries her best to hide her face in his neck. He pulls out a pair of Ray Bans from his hoodie pouch that she didn’t even see or feel earlier, and why hasn’t a cabdriver picked them up yet? “You okay?” she questions, and his eyebrows raise, so she repeats the inquiry even louder.

He nods. “Yeah. Snow’s irritating my contacts, so I’m trying to block out some of it.”

“I’m very turned on right now,” Leslie tells him.

“What?”

She huffs. “I said I’m very turned on right now!”

Of course, he hears her that time, and so does the other couple standing a few feet away. They glare at her, and she sticks her tongue out, hooking her arm with her husband’s and effectively claiming him for herself. Because sunglasses in the snow is ridiculously sexy, and he so should not be allowed to make her feel these things right now. Because they’re in Michigan, and they’re going to visit her wonderful starfish Ann Meredith Perkins, Chris, and baby Oliver, who is, obviously and single handedly, the cutest and best baby in the universe.

It’s not a surprise to her that, as soon as they finally (finally!) get inside a toasty, slightly smelly cab, Ben’s lips crash into hers.

~

Michigan is a strange place.

It’s certainly no Pawnee, but it’s snowy and crisp and beautiful, and Leslie finds herself incredibly, insanely jealous of the view of the lake that Ann and Chris see every single day. The lakes in Pawnee are more like murky ponds, and they happen to be filled with cola or caramel 349 out of the average 365 days a year. Sure, that makes it interesting to swim in, and sometimes people will lie on their bellies and slurp up whichever substance it is with a straw, but it’s nothing like an actual lake.
Their house is warm and cozy, but it automatically makes her miss her and Ben’s home, where everything is somehow both extremely organized and chaotic at the same time. There’s the smell of cloves that follows them around, even in the middle of summer, and, wow, she’s getting misty-eyed just thinking about Pawnee. Don’t get her wrong; she hugged all over Ann for a good hour and a half when they first got here, leaving Ben and Chris to catch up by themselves, but she’s really in the mood to snuggle with her husband and actually take a nap.

Now, though, she’s sitting with Ben, head on his shoulder as all four of them talk about their jobs and the move, and it seems so weird and foreign to her. And seeing Ann and Chris interact with their new baby makes her want nothing more than for Ben to burrow inside her and create a life together. He’s great at sex, so she’s positive he could knock it out of the park on the first try. He’s such a sleek elf of a man, one who never fails to make her feel special.

Eventually, the conversation morphs into how Oliver’s a month old, and both Ann and Chris are desperate for some alone time together. They want to go out on a date, something Leslie thinks she and her husband take for granted. Because they’ve been married for over a year, don’t have any children, and are so head over heels and disgustingly in love with each other that they have date nights constantly, even if it’s just watching a movie and munching on popcorn together. But Ben always manages to turn something that simple into something romantic.

“We can watch him for you guys tonight!” Leslie offers, and she hears Ben agree.

Ann’s eyes widen. “Really? You’d do that? But you’re only here for the weekend...”

She feels Ben shrug. “You guys deserve some alone time. We’d love to get to know Oliver.”

~

Has Leslie mentioned that seeing Ben with a baby is the hottest thing she’s ever witnessed?

No? Well, it definitely is.

Because Oliver’s cuddled on his chest after an intense crying session, filled with a poopy diaper and two spit ups and three meltdowns for no reason. Leslie figures he probably misses his actual Mommy and Daddy, but, damn, they make pretty good replacements if she does say so herself. And she’s just so wildly revved up that it’s not even funny, and she needs Ben to cool her down, but her husband’s kissing the top of the baby’s head and grinning softly, and fuck.

She wants to start their family.

Ben’s always been gentle and lovable and sweet, but she’s never gotten to witness this side of him. She’s seen him play with his young niece one time (even though she knows he really wishes it were more, but his and Henry’s lives are both almost equally chaotic), and it was... unbelievable. She’s never had any doubts that he’d be a good father.

No, a great father.

No, the galaxy’s best father with a sexy butt and scruffy face.

Leslie sinks into the couch cushions, pulling her legs beneath her and lightly rubbing a sleeping Oliver’s back. And seriously, he’s an extremely adorable newborn, and she wants this for herself. She wants it all; the crying, the pooping, the explosions, the exhaustion, the smiles, the giggles, the warm feeling in her heart. And, when Ben pecks her temple, she knows she has to tell him.

But she glances over at him, and he just whispers, “I know. Me too.”
And she’s never ever been more in love with him than she is at this very moment.

~

He’s mostly asleep when Leslie lies down beside him in Ann and Chris’s guestroom. The baby monitor’s on the dresser, and they listen to Oliver coo quietly every now and then. Ben tugs the covers over her and snuggles his face into her neck. His breath’s hot and smells of spearmint, and he’s dangerously close to snoring; she can just feel it.

“I love you, Ben,” she says quietly, so quietly she barely hears herself.

He pecks her skin. “I love you too, Les.”
Prom

Chapter Summary

A.k.a. "To be honest, I really hate how this tastes," prompted by the wonderful fourthinobesity!

"Ooh, great! You're up!"

Ben rubs at a bleary eye with his knuckles, yawning before collapsing into bed. All he did was go to the bathroom. "Not 'wake..." he murmurs, tugging the comforter over his face and trying desperately to fall back to sleep. But, clearly, his wife has other plans. She full-on koalas him, latching her arms and legs around him, kissing his hair as she rubs his back. He can feel her smile against his neck. "'s goin' on?"

"I'm hungry," she announces like it's the most obvious thing in the world.

He grunts. "Don't know what time it is, but 'm sure 's not breakfast..."

"Beennnn," Leslie whines, hooking on to him harder.

"Babe, 'm tired. Can't it wait, like, a few more hours?"

He isn't coherent enough to do something as simple as reheat her a meal or even make popcorn in the microwave at the moment. Yesterday was so chaotic with all the people, lights, and dancing at the prom that he nearly had a panic attack come the end of the night. He doesn't even know what happened, but he eventually got tired of listening to his own awesome music blaring over those speakers and just wanted to go home.

Leslie uncurls herself enough to card her fingers through his hair, and, yeah, it definitely isn't helping matters much. She knows it makes him sleepier, so joke's on her. "Please, Ben? I'll come with you and everything."

He shakes his head, and, God, why are her fingers so magical? In fact, he soaks in deeper against her, and she can koala him all she wants. "Go sleep, baby. Feed you in morning." And, yeah, who cares if he forgets a few words here there? She gets the point, and the point is that he doesn't want to remotely move at the moment. He's warm and cozy, and he's pretty positive his monstrous headache is returning, so he wants to get some shut eye quickly.

"But I want waffles, and JJ's is closed, and there's still, like, three more hours before it opens!"

"'s only three AM?" he slurs.

He feels her shrug. "Well, more along the lines of 2:30, but who cares? Breakfast is breakfast!"

Ben rolls over, anxious to get back to sleep, and apparently that'll only happen if he whips his wife a batch of homemade waffles at 2:30 in the morning. He places his socked feet on the floor and shuffles downstairs, Leslie shrieking in excitement. He doesn't know what's gotten into her, but she's been hungry and hormonal and a mixed bag of emotions for the last few days. Ben almost asks her if she's okay, but his head hurts, and, as much as he loves her, he kind of wants to get this over with as
quickly as possible.

She continues hugging on him until he starts to get ingredients out before she decides now's a good
time to disappear. Ben clears his throat and begins to get to work, willing his brain to work like a
brain and function at least at half capacity. He's almost done with gathering everything in the mixing
bowl when Leslie returns with a wide grin on her face. She pecks his cheek before placing his
glasses on his face and two capsules in the palm of his messy hand.

"You kept squinting; I didn't know why."

He nods, smiling briefly. "Both of those reasons actually. Thank you."

But she just stands on her tip toes again to kiss him on the lips this time. "Can you add sprinkles into
the batter?"

He finds himself nodding as if this isn't strange.

Which he guesses it isn't.

After all, she's Leslie Knope, his passionate, goofball of a wife.

~

A little while later, she’s sitting at the kitchen island. Ben's places his homemade waffles in front of
his Super Woman of a wife, who's been giggling and cackling at her iPad for the last ten minutes
straight. She keeps watching a video of a grumpy hedgehog becoming extremely happy when he
eats food; he couldn't even muster a chuckle because he's positive he's running on fumes, and he has
to be at work in only a few hours.

Leslie takes an eager bite as Ben pillows his aching head in his arms. "Umm..." his wife gets out
tentatively. "To be honest, I really hate how this tastes..."

He's in an upright position immediately. "What? What do you mean? I used the same recipe and
ingredients as always."

She shrugs, putting his fork down with a disgruntled, disgusted look on her face. "I dunno. They
just... taste weird."

"But you love my waffles!" Ben says, and it's the most awake he's ever felt at 3:15 in the morning.
"You told me they're almost as good as JJ's!"

"They usually are!" she tells him. "But they're, like, ashy or something today..."

"Ashy?" he mumbles, rubbing his forehead.

Leslie sighs, rubbing his arm. "I'm sorry, babe. My taste buds have been acting up lately."

At that, he eyes her carefully. "Wait. Are you getting sick?" He places the back of his hand on her
forehead, and, for once, she allows it. "You feel okay."

She shrugs. "Ann bought me chicken tenders from Elmo's for lunch, and I barfed those up."

"Honey, I think you're catching the flu... Or maybe a cold."

"It's almost April!" she retorts. "That's impossible!"
He smooches her temple before standing up. "Okay, we're going to get some medicine in you, and then we're gonna go back to bed."

"I'm not tired," she pouts, sticking her bottom lip out and everything.

"You are, but you just don't know it yet. I'll turn on Halloweentown, and you can relax on me. You'll drift off in no time."

Leslie just shakes her head in response. “Let’s play laser tag instead!”

Okay, he has no idea what’s wrong with the gorgeous woman, but she needs medicine and sleep and cuddles, so Ben does the only thing he can properly think of at the moment. He lifts her bridal style, and she flails in his arms. Yeah, maybe he’ll have a few bruises later, but this will be more than worth it if it means Leslie will return back to normal. He gets it; his waffles aren’t JJ’s, but they’ve always been enough to calm her down and make her happy.

Is it weird that his feelings are strangely hurt?

Probably.

But oh well. All that matters now is getting her to bed.

Which he does with only a relatively minor bloody nose. His nose, to be exact. She accidentally kicked him when he laid her on the mattress, but that’s alright. He holds a wad of tissues beneath his right nostril as he covers her up, snickering slightly as she grumbles. She cuddles into his pillows after taking a dose of DayQuil and effectively doesn’t leave any room for him on his side of the bed, so he switches, and it feels strange and foreign, but Leslie’s pillows smell awesome.

Soon enough, her eyes are fluttering every few seconds even though her favorite movie plays quietly in the background. This time, he koalas Leslie, spooning behind her and planting tiny kisses on her neck. Sure, they may only get a few hours of sleep, and there’s a blinding headache nipping at the base of Ben’s skull, but, somehow, it’s so much more than worth it.
Ben makes a pleasant discovery.

She’s pregnant.

His wife’s pregnant.

There’s so much blueberry alcohol swirling his veins and coursing through his head that he’s positive he’s short-circuiting on multiple levels. Because he’s sitting here on their couch in his dingy, sweaty, disgusting suit, and his wife’s pregnant with their baby, and, super suddenly, everything in the universe makes sense, like it’s aligned once more. Because he’d spent the day drinking away his lake house related issues and came home to the best news of all.

He’s going to be a dad.

There’s part of him inside Leslie right now. And part of her. Part of them. Together. As a team.

And she’s already glowing. She’s absolutely and astonishingly stunning as always, but there’s a baby inside of her! He put a tiny human in her uterus, and now he or she is growing. And he’ll be a father very soon. Holy shit. Father. He’s going to be a father. But, instead of the nerves that usually pump up and produce low-functioning rambles from him, all he feels is happiness. He grins from ear to ear as he places his hands over Leslie’s belly.

His baby. Her baby.

Their baby.

And he immediately wraps her up in his arms, joyful tears stinging the corners of his eyes as he sniffs. He rubs her back and kisses her neck and ends up letting a few of those tears fall. He didn’t know it was possible to ever be this excited and terrified all at once, but it’s real. Very real. And he wouldn’t have it any other way. Leslie cards her fingers through his hair, and her touch will never fail to be the most comforting thing in the galaxy to him.

"You’re pregnant," he repeats against her skin, smiling brightly.

~

He’d like to say they celebrate hardcore, but they don’t. Because Leslie can’t have alcohol, and Ben can’t fathom consuming anything alcoholic ever again. His shower sobers him up completely, leaving him with a queasy stomach and throbbing head, but it’s so much more than worth it. He was so upset about his dad sending him his cut of the profits from the lake house that he basically gorged himself on extremely potent blueberry wine, but that’s all different now.

Everything’s different in the best way possible.

“I’m digging the pants, babe,” Leslie says as she lies down on the mattress beside him. But Ben instantly shifts to where he’s spooned up behind her, one hand protectively on top of her tummy. A
tummy with Baby Knope-Wyatt residing in his wife for the next nine months. A tummy that will grow along with their own tiny human they created. A tummy that he’ll kiss multiple times each and everyday.

He breaks out of his trance, glancing down at the bottoms with tiny pumpkins scattered all over them that she bought for him last October (even though Halloween was now over half a year ago). “Wore them just for you,” he whispers, pecking her neck and cuddling into her. Stupid alcohol. Stupid mind. His eyes feel wonky and like they’re going to bulge out of his skull. Bulge. That’s a weird word. He wonders what it would be like if he replaced the current alphabet with Klingon. Ooh, will they baby like Star Trek? Or Star Wars? Or Twin Peaks?

Okay, he has to so make sure the baby loves all of those things.

“Honey?” he hears Leslie say too quietly. And there’s a small person literally growing inside of her that came from his penis. And wow. Life. “Babe, you can go to sleep if you want. You’re being very squirmy.”

Ben shakes his head. “Stay ‘wake with you and the baby forever...”

His wife grabs his hand and kisses the back of it. “Rest, Benjamin. We’ll be here in the morning.”

“Wait!” he slurs out excitedly, sitting up and scooting down on the bed. He places a careful, gentle kiss on her belly before he moves to her lips. “I love you so much. Both of you.”

Tears swell in Leslie’s eyes. “We love you too.”

~

“Shh... You’re okay,” he whispers, holding her hair back as heaves wrack through her body. He feels like a giant douche for saying this, but he just barely had the energy to follow her in here. He’s treading in dangerous hangover territory here, and the sound of her dinner splashing into the toilet water makes his stomach go a little haywire.

Once she finishes, she collapses against him, and Ben wraps his arms around her, leaning against the bathroom wall and cradling his head on top of her as he massages her belly lightly. Morning sickness. It’ll be a common affair for the next couple of months, and it's bound to make Leslie miserable, to slow her down, but he can’t help but smile. Even in his exhausted state of mind, he can’t stop thinking about their baby.

Maybe she’ll love math and numbers like him. Maybe she’ll be passionate and enthusiastic like her. Maybe he’ll be a major movie and TV show nerd and peacekeeper like him. Maybe he’ll love waffles practically more than anything and be head-on like her. There are so many endless possibilities. This baby could be anyone or anything, and why do they have to wait nine months? Ben’s more than ready to meet him or her right now.

“How’re you feeling, love?” he questions softly, kissing her ear.

She shifts a bit in his gentle grasp. “Excited. Very excited. I mean, I’m not super excited about the idea of throwing up on a consistent basis, but I... want to see him. Or her.”

“You think it’s a boy?” he asks with a smirk.

She shrugs. “For all I know, it could be more than one.”

His eyebrows rise, and his heart immediately slams in his chest. “R-Really?”
“Maybe. You never know. I was once told I have a great triple-incubator.”

“Triplets?” he says, mind spinning nearly out of control as he begins to tremble. “Oh... Oh God...”

He hears his wife chuckle, and she rubs up and down his arm. “Relax, babe. I’m pretty sure there’s just one little Knope-Wyatt in there.”

“Just one?”

She nods, but she doesn’t respond for a few moments. He pictures her crinkling her nose. “I think.”
Ben panics about the triple cherries.

Ben takes a Xanax as soon as he gets home from announcing to their friends that they’re having triplets. That’s three whole entire babies he put inside his tiny, gorgeous wife. And he feels so raw and open and exposed, and he’s already getting a flood of “congratulations” from City Hall employees, Leslie’s mother, and his own slightly estranged family. His mother called and talked to him about knitting the babies’ clothes and wanted him to predict the genders.

He can’t, though. Doesn’t have the words. It’s precisely the reason why he begins cleaning out the guest room that will eventually morph into a triple bedroom with these humans solely dependent on him and his wife for love, care, support, nourishment. And he’s already made a big enough mess of his “Shamwow” charade, so he decides to block it out. He practically locks himself in there, starting to organize the piles of newspapers to Leslie’s liking. He throws belongings and miniature statues and pictures in boxes and doesn’t even stop when he sees blood seeping through the bandage he’s already had to change once.

But, no matter how hard he wants to distract his mind, nothing works. He keeps seeing that ultrasound with three healthy babies on the screen and internally screaming. He barely thought he was cut out enough to raise one kid. He barely thought he was cut out enough to raise one kid. He thinks he can handle one kid. Three? No way. And he envisions him screaming at their triple cherries like his own father did to him and his brother and sister. He imagines him and Leslie arguing at the top of their lungs while the three of them hid at the top of the stairs, too afraid to speak their mind and knowing the end is near.

He doesn’t want that for them. He doesn’t want it for any of them.

So he scrubs at his watery eyes even though he’s wearing contacts and ignores it. Pushes it in the back of his mind and feels it biting at the base of his skull, despite the numbing agent he’s still eagerly anticipating sinking in. Because he can sense that he’s steadily going into Ben Wyatt: Human Disaster mode, and he really doesn’t want Leslie to see him like this. He would just stress her out even more, and she absolutely, positively does not need to be stressed.

“Ben?” he hears her, as if right on cue, in the hallway. But he doesn’t answer, though, because he still can’t find a way to formulate words. She creaks open the door before popping her head all the way in. “There you are! What’re you doing?”

He shrugs, and his tongue feels like it’s glued to the roof of his mouth as his mind spins. “Cleaning,” he says shortly, quietly. And he returns his attention back to folding ridiculously old t-shirts he isn’t even sure Leslie knows exist at the moment because she just throws them in here so hastily because no one ever uses this room. But three people will sleep in this room in time.

“You do know I’m not due until February, right?”

Ben nods, licking his lips. “I know.”

“What’s wrong? You haven’t said anything to me since we got home,” she points out. She goes to sit
down on the bed he can actually see now that it’s not covered from top to bottom with books of the park and politics-related nature. Ben wants to take a seat beside her, but his heart’s about to explode, and his mind won’t stop racing, and is this what a heart attack feels like? Or a stroke? Is he having the world’s first ever heart-stroke? Or brain attack? Or... something?

Instead, he sinks to the floor, pulling his knees to his chest and wrapping his arms around his legs. She’s pregnant. With triplets. She’s pregnant with triplets, and that’s three babies all coming out of her uterus at once, and that’s way too many. Not that he doesn’t already love them, the three of them, to pieces, to the moon and back, to infinity and beyond, but he can’t do this. Who is he kidding? He isn’t cut out to be a father? He can barely take care of himself.

“Ohay,” Leslie says, placing both hands on his shoulders and beginning to knead her fingers into his flesh. “You’re freaking out, and that’s perfectly alright... I know you’re worried about the babies, but everything’s okay. You’re fine, I’m fine, and the babies are fine.”

He shakes his head and finds himself leaning the back of his head against her leg. “What if this was a mistake? What if I’m the universe’s shittiest father? What if they’re born, and I feel nothing for them? And, God... Leslie, you’re pregnant with triplets!” And, now, he gets back to his feet, pacing almost frantically around the room as he tries diligently not to toss his cookies because that’s the last thing either of them need right now.

After all, he’s the Shamwow; he’s the one who should be taking care of his wife.

Not the other way around. Why does it feel like it’s always the other way around?

How the fuck does she put up with him?

“Whena, babe,” Leslie says, and she’s mobile now too. She goes to grab his right hand, but she instantly stops, glancing at his palm. “Honey, I think you may’ve torn your stitches. Sit. Let me take a look at it. Maybe I should call Ann?”

“What? No. Please don’t. It doesn’t even hurt.” Which is true, but he’s relatively positive that’s only the case because the Xanax at least managed to block something from entering his mind. “Just... I don’t know, Les. I’m so fucking nervous. I’m afraid I’ll ruin their lives.”

There. He said it. He’s going to be a worthless father, and, while he can’t picture ever harming his kids in any capacity, he’s sure his own father didn’t think he would either. No one knows what’s going to happen in the future. He may be a “good guy” by general terms and stereotypes, but that doesn’t mean he’ll be a good father. It’s the unknown elements that have always panicked him. It’s the same reason why he practically had a meltdown on the night of his and Leslie’s wedding. It’s the same reason why he’s breaking apart at the seams now.

Leslie wraps her arms around him, and he hides his face in her neck. “That’s absolutely impossible, Ben. You are the kindest, sweetest, gentlest person I’ve ever met. I know you love our babies already. You’re over the moon for them, but you’re worried, and that’s okay. But don’t ever sell yourself that short again because I will punch you.”

He shakes his head, letting out a shaky breath against his skin. “But my dad –”

“Is kind of an asshole. I know deep down he didn’t mean to hurt you, but he did. But you’re not your father, Ben. You’re not.” She places both of his hands on her stomach without shifting from their embrace. “There are three sets of heartbeats in my uterus right now, pal, and that’s scary. Thirty fingers and thirty toes. And all the more babies we get to kiss and cuddle and hold. I’ve never had a single doubt in my mind that you were perfect for me, and I know you’re perfect for these babies too.
Please believe me.”

He nods, and tears wind up spilling over his cheeks. He tugs his wife closer to him and finally feels his heart rate begin to drop even if his lungs aren’t fully cooperating with the transition yet. He’s never been more unsure of anything in his entire life, but he supposes those fears are natural. But Leslie’s here, and his babies are here, and he’ll be okay. He’ll be okay, and he has to acknowledge that. Ben takes several more deep breaths that somehow don’t get caught in his throat.

“I love you,” he whispers, kissing her hair. “I love you all so much.”

It’s nerve-wracking as hell, but, as long as he has Leslie on his side, he can get through anything.
“Look at what I got the babies!” she screeches, jumping on to their big bed and accidentally kicking Ben in the process. Her husband grumbles and doesn’t even lift his head from the fluffy pillow. He’s already drooling slightly, which she’s not exactly surprised by. It’s been a long day, but the Unity Concert with off without a hitch, mostly thanks to Ben’s brilliant planning and making sure every single little thing was taken care of. She loves him so much.

But it’s almost midnight, which is way too early for her tastes, and poor Ben’s already stripped down to boxers and an oversized t-shirt, his bare feet poking out of a blanket that she draped over him when they got home less than an hour ago. His eyes still closed, he reaches out for her and rubs her hipbone lightly, gently. He’s clearly exhausted with trembly fingers, flushed cheeks, and smudges beneath his gorgeous, deep brown orbs, but she can’t wait until morning.

She’s pregnant with triplets. That’s three babies. In her uterus. Occupying not so much space now, but soon to be occupying a crap ton of space. She already has a very slight bump, a bump that Ben kissed a million times this morning before work, delicately and tenderly kissing her immediately afterword. He’s such a sweet, caring husband, so much so that he’s already created a pregnancy schedule that includes daily naps and frequent vegetable intake.

“How do you already have these?” Ben asks incredulously after he just barely creaks open his eyes. “It’s May!” He slowly rolls from his stomach to his side, taking the onesie from her. And it’s the absolute cutest freaking onesie in the world, and she has three of them for their triple cherries due near Valentine’s Day. They’re red with pink and white hearts all over the place, and she has bows in case the babies are girls and ties with suspenders if the babies are boys. She’s set and prepared and ready to go.

She just has to make it to her due date first.

He carefully rubs his fingers over the soft material as if one of their children is already securely bundled in the piece of clothing. “Do you like them?” she questions.

Ben nods, and there are tears glistening in his eyes, and everything feels so magically perfect. “I love them,” he tells her quietly. “But, seriously, where did you get ahold of these?”

“Oh, I sewed them last night!”
Ben eyes her. “Leslie, you’re supposed to be taking it easy. Besides, what if they’re born early?”

“Ridiculous. I birth full-term babies.”

He scrunches his eyebrows. “Have you given birth to other babies?”

“Maybe,” she says. “Once or twice. In a dream. Where you were replaced by Mr. Belvedere, but that’s not important.”

Ben takes this opportunity to wrap himself around her, entangling her in the blanket and nuzzling into her neck, the onesie now drooped over her tummy. “I put three babies inside you,” he whispers, kissing her skin. Goosebumps. Why the fuck is he so handsome and sexy and kind and wonderful? And how in the hell did he get a butt so fine it’d make an angel hang itself?

“Careful, Wyatt,” she warns. “You’re horning me up times four now instead of just one.”

But he doesn’t acknowledge her any further; he just pulls at the elastic of her (his) sweatpants.

~

Some things never change, triple pregnancy or not.

Ben still sleeps like the dead and viciously whines when Leslie shakes him awake, even though it’s past ten, and he should be thanking his lucky stars that his wife hasn’t died of starvation by now. But it’s hard to be irritated with him because he’s so adorable. His hair’s all messy and destroyed and his voice... God, his voice. It’s rough and sexy, even though all he’s doing is complaining as he tugs on a pair of flannel pants and grabs his glasses from the bedside table.

Which, really, is what does it in right there. Soon, her lips crash into his, and they end up back in bed, and, yeah, things never do change. Because every time he puts those stupid spectacles on his face, she needs to devour him. Right here. Right now. Because no man with such a taught, narrow frame and elfish body should ever have the right to look like that.

Eventually, though, he actually makes it off the mattress, grinning as he whips her up a batch of waffles. She’s a teeny bit zapped of energy at the moment if she’s being completely honest, her eyes sort of heavy and stomach behaving strangely. But she did wake up at her normal time of 4:30, despite the fact that it’s Saturday, so maybe that explains it. He offered to take her to JJ’s for lunch because, somehow, it’s already noon, but she says no.

She opts for a day in with her husband instead.

And, sure, some things never change, but this is one of them.

Because, in a few months time, this won’t be as frequent of an occurrence. Ben probably won’t be able to sleep in, and Leslie probably won’t be able to have JJ’s as often. They’ll lose a lot, but they’ll gain so much more than they ever dreamed possible. Because their triple cherries will be the best babies, best toddlers, best kids, best teenagers, best adults, and best parents themselves in the universe, and they’re going to do it all side by side, hand in hand.

Her husband sets a plate of waffles in front of her, and her stomach growls as if on cue. He chuckles and sits beside her, holding her hand as she stabs a piece of the deliciousness with a fork. “I really do love you, Leslie,” he says quietly, placing his head on her shoulder and reaching over slightly to place his opposite hand on her belly. “I really love all of you.”

Leslie kisses his forehead; she accidentally leaves behind a speck of whipped cream on his pale skin.
“We really do love you, Ben.”
Chapter Summary

Leslie realizes she ruined Ben's night.

Leslie doesn’t notice anything’s wrong until the next morning.

She’d been diligently washing out chunks of cake and icing from her knotty, messy hair until nearly two AM, refusing to stop muttering about “he who shall not be named” under her breath. It had been a ridiculously long, crazy, chaotic day, and those never sit well with her husband to begin with, but this was a different story. Ron “Stupid Face” Swanson had showed up and ruined literally everything, and that was just so not okay. Like not even a little bit okay.

But, now, it’s past ten in the morning, and she’s yet to hear a peep out of Ben, who collapsed on the mattress wordlessly in his ultra sexy conductor’s suit, hair slicked back and shoes still on, pretty much the minute they arrived home. She’d taken off his shoes and black socks and covered him with a quilt, but she hadn’t done anything else because she’d been so angry. She should’ve talked to him. Maybe cuddled him or brought him some Tylenol for the obvious headache he’d been nursing.

She didn’t do any of that, though. Hell, last night she didn’t act like his wife.

Leslie Knope was a monster who went too far.

And, now, she’s paying for it. Because her blond locks are clean, but her conscience most definitely isn’t. Guilt nibbles at her heart, which is swollen twice the size of what it should be at any given moment. Because last night had been what Ben was aiming for his entire career. He’s Man of the Year 2017, and she completely blew past it for her own selfish desire of humiliating “Doo Doo Head Magee,” a.k.a. Ron Swanson, a.k.a. “The Biggest Butthole on Earth.”

Their three year old triple cherries wound up spending the night at April and Andy’s, which should’ve allowed for them to spend some time together to properly celebrate his massive, major accomplishments, but that didn’t happen. Leslie frowns and gets off the couch, making her way upstairs on slightly shaky legs. She didn’t mean for everything to spiral out of control, but it did.

She peaks her inside their bedroom, opening the door quietly in case he’s still asleep. He’s buried beneath their comforter, rolled on to his side and watching something on the iPad. She spots his suit in a crumpled heap on the ground and steps around it carefully, sitting down on the edge of their mattress. He doesn’t move or flinch or even acknowledge her existence. But he does look super exhausted with dark bags beneath his eyes and his face void of all color.

“Hey,” she whispers. “Good morning.” She ends up tentatively climbing over him to slide her front against his back, effectively spooning herself around him. She cards her fingers through his hair and rubs his back, while he continues to view the first season of Fringe. She settles down and just lays here with him because she doesn’t even know where to begin to make this any better. She knows she really screwed the pooch this time, and it’s so not fair to him.

Ben’s always there for her. No matter what. No matter the consequences. He doesn’t try to fight her battles for her, but he does support her viciously. He’d never do anything like that on her big nights,
and he never has. He doesn’t step out of line. Doesn’t try to point the spotlight on himself over something actually pretty petty that she just can’t let go. Doesn’t try to make anything about him and doesn’t try to detour others away from what she’s achieved.

He’s so lovely and wonderful, and she’s... not.

“I’m sorry,” she says quietly, rubbing his hipbone. “Ben, I can’t even begin to tell you how awful I feel.”

She hears her husband exhale, but he doesn’t say anything. In fact, he curls in on himself tighter, and she immediately echoes back to that time where he completely and totally blocked her out for an entire day and a half. He didn’t speak, and he didn’t leave the bed. Did she really make this happen again? Did she really knock Ben into a place where he doesn’t feel comfortable talking to her about how terrible and horrible of a wife she was last night?

“It’s okay,” he tells her eventually, voice low and hoarse.

She shakes her head and squeezes him a little tighter. “No. It’s not okay. Why are you trying to make me feel better?”

Ben shrugs. “It wasn’t a big deal, Les... I didn’t... I-I don’t feel like I earned it anyway.”

Okay. No. Nope. She absolutely cannot let him think that about himself. “Babe, are you kidding me right now?” she asks in all seriousness, but then she pauses for a moment to reconsider. “Is this about Partridge?”

He doesn’t answer, so she pulls him closer, rubbing his back through his white t-shirt.

“You deserved last night and so much more, Ben.” Tears swell in her eyes, and, honestly, sometimes it’s hard for her to wrap her mind around how broken he still is, even after over twenty years. He occasionally has nightmares where he wakes up sweating and actually vomiting in the middle of the night, panicking over ruining Pawnee and Leslie’s hopes and dreams, and she has no idea how his self-confidence is this depleted with how brilliant and amazing he is.

Ben shakily sighs. “I don’t feel that way. I’m not sure I’ll ever feel that way. So, yes, I am a little mad that you and Ron ruined the cake, but you didn’t ruin the night.” Even though she knows he barely got to make a speech because of Tom’s horrible introduction. Even though she’d been bitter for most of the evening, scheming and hatching plans to mess with “he who shall not be named.” Even though she selfishly let him fall asleep without telling him she loves him.

“It’s okay to be mad at me, you know.”

He shakes his head. “I don’t wanna be mad at you, Leslie. I love you. And it’s okay. I mean, I can’t say I particularly feel the greatest right now, but I don’t want to be mad at anyone. I... I spent so much time and energy trying to make up for Ice Town, and I know I’ve made strides in the right direction. This is just another roadblock that I’ll have to get over.”


Her husband cuts her off with a long, gentle kiss, shushing her instantly. “I’m not mad,” he whispers. “Let’s just... forget about this.”

“But, Ben, I –”

Tears spill over her cheeks, but Ben just wipes them away with his thumb and kisses her again.
Leslie can't concentrate at work while Ben and Stephen are sick.

“Come on, sleepyhead,” she coaxes, shaking Ben’s back a little roughly even for her tastes. But it’s almost seven, and he’s been snoring his head off since around nine last night. Stephen had went to bed effortlessly, for once, but Sonia and Wesley needed to be cuddled and snuggled and read eight different stories a piece before settling down on their pint-sized person mattresses, leaving her husband thoroughly exhausted after a long, chaotic, over-scheduled day.

But today’s a new day that requires him to get up, put on a suit, and get to it. Yes, he’s not typically the liveliest guy in the morning, but that’s often fixed after a hot shower and two cups of black coffee (blech). He whines and tries his best to hide beneath the comforter, but Leslie yanks at his arm and flicks his neck repeatedly until he sits up. “Stop,” he mumbles, rubbing at his eyes with the heels of his hands and pushing himself out of his warm habitat.

“I already put your boxers and undershirt in the bathroom,” she tells him.

He nods as he scratches his head, nearly tripping over his bare feet before shutting the door. For good measure, especially since he seems to be moving slower this morning, she lays out his slacks and a button up. God, he’s so handsome, even with squinty eyes and stale mint breath, and he’s definitely much more than simply boneable. They haven’t had a lot of time for intimacy lately, between work and wrangling their three monsters, but that’s changing tonight.

Tonight, their three year old triple cherries are spending the night at her mom's house.

And she and Ben are bringing the house down.

She tries not to get too aroused because she’s now in the kitchen, buttering toast and pouring glasses of orange juice. Wesley munches happily on the bread while flipping through one of Ben’s accounting magazines, and it’s seriously one of the cutest things she’s ever witnessed; he’s absolutely his father’s son. Sonia sips at her drink while playing with her My Little Pony collection, mimicking voices; she’s all in just like Leslie is with anything and everything.

But Stephen... He’s poking at the toast like it’s poisoned and has barely spoken. He’s usually the rowdiest of the kids, but the house isn’t crazily and obnoxiously loud because the leader of that zaniness is no longer screaming and shouting. He’s on the go from the moment his feet touch the floor until either Ben or Leslie coaxes him into having some quiet time before bed. This ends with him needing five glasses of water, three back rubs, and twice as many stories as Sonia and Wesley before he finally manages to calm himself down enough to rest.

Leslie frowns and stops stirring the marshmallow flavored creamer into her coffee. “Stephen,” she says quietly, startling the little boy from his trance. “You okay?” The three year old seems so lost and almost disoriented, and, okay, yeah, these are definitely not normal traits. She places a careful hand on his forehead, internally sighing when she pulls away.

Because, most of the time, one sick triplet eventually equals three sick triplets.
Her husband enters the kitchen, and she stares a bit harder than she means to. His hair without product and shirt still untucked, he pads around the table to sit. He yawns, doesn’t even pick up his coffee cup, and crosses his arms over his chest. Ben tips his head to rest on the back of the chair, and it’s at that second when she reaches over to feel his forehead too.

“’m fine, Les,” Ben rasps, rubbing at his eyes, and of course he doesn’t have his contacts in right now. Instantly, she lifts Stephen into her arms and tries to ignore that sinking feeling building in the pit of her stomach for even having either of them get dressed and ready for the day. Stephen latches his tiny arms around her neck, and she rubs his overheated back. “Is he okay?” her husband inquires, and she swears his dark orbs are barely more than halfway open.

Thankfully, Wesley and Sonia are both quiet and engrossed in their own worlds; otherwise, this would be pure chaos. “I think you guys are sick,” she says, more for Ben than for Stephen. “Should I stay home with you?” It’s supposed to be a very busy day filled to the brim with meetings, but Ben’s obviously in no shape to go to work because he can’t even hold up his head at the moment, and Stephen absolutely cannot stay home alone. She can’t even imagine what kind of monstrosities could occur, even if her son’s feverish and doesn’t feel well. Stephen, her cheekiest monster, would probably still find a way to wreak havoc.

Ben shakes his head. “I’ll watch Stephen,” he slurs out.

“Are you sure you’re up for that? I can work from upstairs and –”

Her husband stands up on noticeably quivering legs and carefully takes their oldest son from her grasp. The little boy melts into his embrace, and she smiles sadly when Ben pecks the top of his head.

“I wanna stay home with Daddy!” Sonia shouts, obviously very aware of what’s going on now.

Wesley grins brightly. “Me too!”

“Sorry, my tiny fish,” Leslie tells them both. “Daddy and Stevie are feeling icky. But you guys will have a great day at preschool!”

Sonia rolls her eyes. “Mrs. Henderson’s breath smells like cooties.”

“And she dresses like a potato,” Wesley adds.

Leslie goes to exchange glances with Ben, but he’s not even in the kitchen anymore. Her heart skips several beats briefly before she finds her boys sprawled out on the couch, already fast asleep, Stephen nuzzled protectively against his chest. She carefully covers them with a plaid quilt, and Ben squeezes their son a little tighter at the movement.

She leans down to kiss their heated cheeks, reminding herself to leave baby aspirin and DayQuil on the coffee table.

~

Needless to say, Leslie spends the entire day worrying. No, she isn’t upset that her and Ben’s night together is “ruined” because it really isn’t. Sonia and Wesley are still spending the night at her mom’s, so it’ll be a triple cuddle with her ill husband and son. Don’t get her wrong; she wants nothing more than for Ben to bury himself deep within her, to rock her world and bring the house down with her, but it isn’t going to happen tonight, and that’s alright.

She ends up speeding home during lunch, telling April to cancel the rest of her meetings and
appointments. Because she absolutely and totally can’t focus when members of her family don’t feel well. She unlocks the front door, toes off her heels, and heads into the living room, expecting to see Ben and Stephen lying in the same spot. But they aren’t, and panic courses through her veins. What if Ben had to take Stephen to the hospital because his fever was too high? What if one or both of them has an upset stomach and had to rush to the bathroom? What if they both combusted into a million pieces because aliens attacked, and she’s without them for the rest of eternity?

No. She can’t survive without either of them.

So she sprints upstairs like a mad woman with a sugar rush (because maybe she kind of does have an actual sugar rush), checking in the triplets’ bedroom first. All of their beds are made, and there’s no sign of the toddler. She checks her and Ben’s bedroom, and her breathing instantly relaxes. Okay. They’re safe. They’re okay. In fact, they’re adorably okay. Ben is curled on his side, wrapped around tiny Stephen, who’s latched on to one of her own t-shirts for comfort.

Leslie tentatively crawls beneath the covers, pushing her front against Ben’s back. She cards her fingers through his slightly damp hair, but not before gauging that he’s very warm to the touch. She sighs and places her hand gently on Stephen’s cheek. Okay. She can work with that; he’s asleep, but not too feverish anymore. She hopes it stays that way.

But apparently her movements jarred the three year old because he squirms in his father’s embrace. “Momma?” he mumbles, breaking free from Ben and sitting up in bed. He rubs at his tired, droopy eyes and, instead of jumping up and down with rambunctious, hyperactive energy that Stephen always seems to have an abundance of, he rests his head against Ben’s.

“How’re you feeling, Stevie?” she questions softly.

The brown haired toddler yawns in response, and she rubs the back of his hand with her thumb softly. It’s so strange to see Stephen Knope-Wyatt, their oldest boy and the leader of their triple cherries, reserved and calm and quiet. He’s such a unique, remarkably strange little guy, but she feels nothing but love and adoration for him twenty-four seven.

“Hi,” she eventually hears her husband breathe out, and he moves on to his back. Stephen immediately clings to his hoodie and sprawls across his chest. Ben tucks his chin against his head as Leslie continues to run her fingers through the majestic-ness that is his hair. “What’re you doin’ home s’early?” And, yeah, he’s not exactly fully coherent, but that’s fine.

She shrugs. “Couldn’t concentrate. I just wanted to be here with you two.”

Ben’s eyes flutter closed, and Stephen coughs wetly against his covered skin. She watches Ben’s hand move to rub his back. “He feels cooler,” he says quietly.

She nods, grinning. “Have you taken anything?”

He shakes his head. “Forgot. Gave him two doses of aspirin, though. Seemed to help.”

“Okay, well, I think you need some medicine, mister,” she says, getting ready to hop out of bed.

But Ben gently grabs her wrist. “No. Stay. Please.”

She’s reluctant at first, but then Stephen echoes the “please,” and her heart melts a little.
Ben and the kids spend the night in his office.

“I brought your demon spawn,” April says, entering his office with his three toddlers in tow. Wesley immediately makes a break from the herd and runs around his desk, clinging on to his legs and begging to be hoisted up. Ben rubs his son’s pajama clad back. In fact, he’s just now noticing that the triplets are ready for bed, even though he doesn’t remember asking April and Andy to do that for him. “Andy also fed them seven bags of marshmallows a piece.”

Ben can tell by look on her face that she’s bullshitting him. “Thanks for watching them today.”

“Gross. Don’t thank me. Just pay me eight billion dollars in cash, or I’ll hold them all for ransom.”

Ben’s eyebrows furrow. “Yeah. I’m gonna go with ‘no’ on that one.”

April rolls her eyes before exiting the area, leaving him to listen to thousands of stories being shouted in his face all at once. His wife and Ron are currently in the midst of sorting out their issues in the Parks Department, and he’s here, planning on spending the night in his office with triple the chaotic nature that comes with having a three year old. Because he has three three year olds, and they’re messy, wonderful, sticky, charming creatures that he loves dearly.

Ben just wishes he brought comfier clothes for himself because sleeping in a suit on the floor is never a good idea. It makes his thoughts echo back to when he was constantly on the road, traveling from city to city and shuttling from motel to motel. He’s slept on the floor numerous times, but this is different. Now, he has kids and a wife and is City Manager for the great town of Pawnee. He doesn’t feel resentment or anger. Although, he is a little curious about why a sort of large chunk of Sonia’s hair is missing and why Stephen’s cheeks are purple.

“Are you guys ready for a sleepover?” he asks, tickling Wesley’s tummy, earning never ending giggles from the boy. He loves them all so much; they’re laughter and smiles are precious. April also brought over sleeping bags, pillows, and select stuffed animals a while ago. But now it’s well past seven o’clock, and the triplets should get to bed some time soon. Given that this is a new environment, he’s sure they’ll have roughly four meltdowns a piece before settling in.

Wesley pipes up from his lap. “Wanna lay in your bed!”

Sonia and Stephen agree instantly.

Ben shakes his head. “We’re staying the night in Daddy’s office instead. It’ll be fun.”

The triplets have recently taken a massive liking to Ben and Leslie’s bed at home, which hasn’t made for a fun time for either parent. He thinks this all started when both he and Stephen were pretty under the weather last week, and Ben had laid with the small boy all day on the big, comfy mattress. He probably told his siblings, and they promptly snuck out of their own beds the day after Stephen went back to pre-school. They’re terribly cute, and it’s honestly kind of hard to say no to their desperate pleas, so Ben and Leslie have spent the last several nights with feet in their faces and tiny hands
poking at their bodies while they try to rest.

“Do you have any crayons?” Sonia asks skeptically. “I need to let Santa know where I am.”

Ben doesn’t argue. Sure, it’s only very early October, but, hey, if Sonia needs to let Santa know she’s at his office tonight instead of their house, more power to her. He scrounges up a few Crayolas that are most likely Leslie’s in the first place and takes out a huge stack of paper from his desk.

“Okay,” he says to everyone. “There are only ten crayons, so you guys will have to share, alright? Do you think you can do that?”

Surprisingly, all three of them agree without any quarrels, and maybe, just maybe, this could be a night of snuggling and drawing and chatting before the triplets fall asleep. Wesley doesn’t seem very interested in his siblings’ activity, so he opts to rest against Ben’s chest instead. Huh. He has literally zero idea what’s going on, but, for once, Sonia and Stephen aren’t fighting relentlessly, and Stephen’s even sharing the crayons like he was asked.

Ben briefly backs up in his chair and creaks the blinds open slightly.

Nope. No full moon.

Maybe whatever’s going on with Leslie and Ron has something to do with it?

But, as much as he wants to overanalyze this, he doesn’t. He’s spent far too many nights wishing and praying for their kids to get along and play nicely. Their terrible twos were rough, and he’s pretty sure that transformed into even worse threes. Ben picks up a purple crayon and begins to doodle a robot, and Wesley laughs at his poor attempts, shifting in his lap and drawing on the same page as him. He pecks the side of his son’s head and smiles.

~

Soon enough, Ben’s relaxing in a sleeping bag on the floor of his office with his three kids piled around him. Wesley, true to his nature, is snug and secure right beside him, drooling on a portion of his quilt. Sonia has an arm extended out of the mound of assorted blankets, her tiny fingers latched around his undershirt. Stephen’s starfished out exactly like Leslie sleeps most nights, an arm draped around Sonia’s waist, and they’re all way too adorable for him to handle.

~

“PANCAKES!” Stephen demands upon hearing Ben mention breakfast before he goes to unlock Leslie and Ron from their night of fun.

Ben chuckles. “Mommy would not like that you suggested pancakes instead of waffles, Stevie.”

The little boy shrugs, and Ben places a bowl of Fruit Loops with skim milk in front of him. His babies are still wearing their pajamas, and Wesley’s got some wicked bedhead. They thankfully slept soundly throughout the night, and he only had to get up twice to walk all three of them to the bathroom; padding around City Hall in his socks, undershirt, and slacks is something he never planned on doing, but it was the only way to ensure Ron and Leslie made up.

Plus, honestly, it was nice spending so much time with his kids.

“Can you give my letters to Santa Claus?” Sonia asks.

“Eleven,” she says with a bright smile.

Okay, she absolutely is Leslie’s daughter.
Leslie and Ron

Chapter Summary

Ben spends the day with his hungover wife and their triple cherries.

“You’re drunk,” Ben points out. “And somehow hungover at the same time.”

Leslie nods into his chest, and he wraps around her tighter. April’s watching their kids for a few minutes while he gathers the supplies from their office sleepover. He’s going to take them home, give them a bath, and possibly hand them each twenty dollars for behaving so well. Actually, no. He probably shouldn’t do that. But they were really really great last night.


She shoots trigger fingers at Ron, who grins and waves back at her.

“Oh, this is scary,” he acknowledges. But he smiles and feels nothing but love for this goofball. His goofball. “I missed you too, Baby Smurf.”

She cackles at the nickname and high-fives him.

~

"Mommy's sad!" Stephen declares very loudly and very abruptly. So abruptly that Ben jolts, and his heart whacks uncontrollably in his chest. Jeez. What is with members of his family sneaking up on him? Stephen was literally upstairs, like, eight seconds ago, and wham. Now he's here in his pajamas with bears all over them, standing beside Ben. "Sonny tried to maked her feel better."

Oh no. Leslie's past the drunk stage and well into the "worst hangover in history" phase. And their kids? Well, they're probably jumping all over her in bed, where he got her to take a nap several hours ago. He'd kept their monsters occupied in the living room until he began to cook dinner, and that's when he lost them. He put on Toy Story, gave them Twizzlers (which two out of his three babies prefer over Red Vines; he'll win over Sonia eventually), and snuggled them in blankets, but, apparently, to no avail.

"Mommy's alright," he promises Stephen, hoisting the small boy up. His son wraps an arm around his neck as Ben makes his way upstairs. Sure enough, Sonia and Wesley are jumping on their big bed, and he immediately sets Stephen on the floor, wrangling the others off the mattress. Leslie's hidden completely beneath the comforter, no hair or anything sticking out. He swallows the lump growing in his throat, rubbing his forehead. "How about you guys go to your room and play?"

Sonia shakes her head, Stephen crosses his arms, and Wesley just latches to Ben's pajama pants in response.

Yeah. That seems about right.

"I'll give you each a dollar," he says.

Their eyes widen.
"We can buy ice cream!" Stephen exclaims.

"And remote controls!" Wesley pipes up.

Ben's eyebrows furrow. "Remote controls?" he mumbles to himself, retrieving his wallet from the dresser and shoveling out a crisp dollar bill to each triplet. They go running off with their newfound wealth shrieking. Good lord.

He hates bribing them, but he's up for it this time because Leslie doesn't feel well. In fact, is she even conscious? Ben slides beneath the covers, careful not to disturb her too much. She grumbles and groans and rolls over to curl into him, throwing a deadweight arm across his waist. She cutely smacks her lips and scrunches her nose before hiding her face in his neck.

"Do want anything to eat?" he asks softly. "I made waffles, eggs, and bacon."

Leslie shakes her head, and he swears he dies a little on the inside. It's extremely rare that she ever denies breakfast. She'll eat it when she has the flu or when she's sad or even when she's thrilled; she eats breakfast during each and every period of her life. This exact meal was the last one she had at home before she gave birth to their babies, but now she doesn't want it?

"I really think you should eat something," he tells her, rubbing her hipbone lightly.

She whines. "Sleeeeep, Benjamin."

He kisses her forehead. "Okay, love. Okay."

They stay tangled together until Ben hears something shatter in the distance, and Leslie sprints to the bathroom.

~

"Are you tired yet?" he asks Wesley. Because Ben's thoroughly exhausted after a ridiculously long day and then night and then another day and then another night. Sonia fell asleep easily; she typically does if he reads her at least three stories. Stephen, their Energizer Bunny, drifted off during his sixth story. And Wesley, who usually always passes out first, is still awake, even though it's past eleven.

Wesley shakes his head. It's not like he's being rambunctious or hyper either; he's calm and watching a Halloween bake off that's on Food Network, sprawled on his chest beneath a quilt. Ben's at least seventy percent asleep himself, and he's not sure how much longer he can hold on. Leslie's been out like a light since he convinced her to eat a few hours ago, and, as much as he loves Wesley Knope-Wyatt to death, he just wants to cuddle with his wife, his hungover and immensely cranky wife.

"Wanna sleep your bed," his son tells him tiredly.

He sighs, scrubbing a hand down the side of his face. At this point, it honestly either is sleep on the sofa all night or at least get some actual rest in an actual bed. “Okay, pal. Just this once.” He already knows he’s lying about that because, come on, they have triplets; they’re constantly wanting to lie in the big bed and snuggle with Mommy and Daddy. Ben gets to his feet with Wesley in his arms and climbs up the stairs, legs trembling while yawning viciously.

The bedroom is pitch black, but he absolutely isn’t going to turn on the light because Leslie might murder him with a spoon or something, so he feels his way around. He gets Wesley under the covers before climbing on to the mattress, internally relishing the softness of the comforter and the fluffiness of their several pillows. His son instantly cuddles into his side, and Ben kisses the top of his head, closing his eyes and already melting into unconsciousness.
“Ben?” he hears.

He doesn’t open his eyes. “Yeah, honey?”

And, holy cow, Leslie’s actually able to formulate a coherent thought.

“Do we have anymore waffles left?”

He grimaces. “Uh, they’re probably gross, but I saved them.”

“Can... Could you bring them to me?”

“Les, it’s almost midnight. Go back to sleep.”

“Want waffles too, Daddy!” Wesley exclaims, now up and awake and eager to engage in a feast.

Ben just rolls his eyes, but he finds himself getting back out of bed anyway, no matter how badly his entire body protests this action. But, first, he moves to Leslie’s side of the mattress, wrapping her up in his arms and kissing her neck. “I’m glad you’re okay,” he whispers because, for a while there, his wife was silent and sleepy, and those are two characteristics that absolutely don’t belong to her.

“I love you, Benjamin,” she whispers.

“I love you too, Lesliemin.”

Stephen giggles and runs away to most likely destroy the house, but, as long as he doesn't ruin his outfit, it'll be alright. Because today they're getting family pictures taken, and his sons look sharp in sweater vests and plaid shirts paired with black slacks. Ben coordinated the outfits himself, and he's pretty sure they're the most dapper three year olds on the planet. He finishes combing Wesley's brown hair, straightening out his vest one more time before allowing him to join his brother in whatever fantastic adventure they're on next.

"Alright, your turn, Sonny Bug," Ben says. He grabs her elegantly adorable blue dress and sits back down on the floor crisscross applesauce as his tiny daughter bounds toward him. He hugs and kisses her; Sonia's always been their most affectionate baby, and it continues into her toddlerhood, which Ben loves. "You're going to look so pretty today," he tells her.

Sonia beams as he gently pulls off her pajama top. "Mommy painted my nails to look like hers!"

And, when she shows him her sparkly pink nails, he kisses her little hand because, come on, how can't he? They're all so cute and small, and he's never felt this kind of overflowing love in his life. Of course, obviously he loves Leslie to pieces and would do anything and everything for her, but having kids is so surreal and amazing, and they're the loves of his life, like his reason for being is for Leslie and Sonia and Stephen and Wesley.

His daughter chatters excitedly about ponies and racecars and zebras and how she's going to be a chef when she grows up, and he's in awe of this three year old. She's so smart and wildly articulate and opinionated; they all are. Leslie thinks the three of them inherited his brains and her drive, so they're literally a perfect storm. But Sonia's definitely the most talkative, and Stephen's definitely the cheekiest, and Wesley's definitely the shyest.

"You look so beautiful, Soso!" Leslie exclaims, entering the triplets' bedroom. And she's absolutely drop-dead gorgeous in her dress that mimics Sonia's almost to a tee, except Leslie's is purple, which is exactly why they bought them on their Mommy-Daughter date in the first place. Ben smiles and zips Sonia's dress up, and the three year old bolts off, eager to show her brothers; he chuckles when she grabs a tiara on her way out.

Ben stands up and immediately wraps Leslie in his arms. "You look amazing," he whispers, nipping at her neck, his hands wandering down toward her magnificent ass. "I missed you."

"I missed you too, King Sexy Butt," Leslie says with a giant grin that makes him blush a tad bit. "You might wanna go get ready, though." She motions to his red long sleeved shirt and black sweatpants before rubbing up and down his arm. He sees her literally all the time, feels her bare skin pressed against his often, but, right now, he just wants to throw her down on the mattress and kiss the hell out of her face.
There's a series of shrieks and some shattering in the distance, and Leslie bolts off, patting his ass on her way out.

~

"Mmm... Those slacks are really working for you," Leslie comments as he enters the living room. His outfit matches Stephen and Wesley's, except the three of them are wearing different colored plaid button ups beneath the vests. She stands on her tip toes to kiss his cheek, and he pulls their lips together instead.

"Ew!" Stephen shouts. "Auntie April says kissin' is gross!"

"You're gross, Stevie!" Sonia yells in exchange, and, damn, Ben didn't know three year olds could even think like that to come up with such a clever-but-not-clever retort.

They stick their tongues out at each other, and Wesley plugs his ears as a screaming match starts. They're not even saying real words; they're just mocking and making faces, and Ben picks Stephen up off the couch, and the little boy instantly stops being his typical banshee self. He pouts and tries to wriggle away from his grasp, but Ben walks him into the playroom.

Sometimes, honestly, Sonia and Stephen in particular need breaks from each other, so he typically separates them when things get heated.

"Sorry, Daddy," Stephen says sincerely as Ben sets him down. "I'll be good."

"You weren't being bad, Stevie. Let's just relax and play for a few minutes, okay?"

He nods, and he and Ben begin to construct a building made of Legos.

~

"Ice cream!" Wesley exclaims from his comfy spot in Ben's arms. "I love ice cream!"

"I want chocolate!" Stephen says.

The triplets were ridiculously well behaved while they got their pictures taken, so they definitely deserve a treat. It's painfully hard to get them to all smile and sit still at the same time, so today itself was a serious miracle that shouldn't be taken advantage of, hence their unusual treat.

Leslie orders the ice creams while Ben helps situate their triple cherries. The boys have already lost their vests and have untucked and unbuttoned their flannels courtesy of him, while Sonia wanted nothing to do with changing her outfit. He and Leslie stayed in their attire too, especially since they're going home once they've eaten their afternoon snack. He puts napkin bibs on their babies while they babble excitedly about superheroes.

And, when his wife sits down at the table with them, Ben instantly kisses her, knowing he could never ever live without her.

~

"You look wiped out, Benjamin," Leslie says.

He glances up from the iPad and yawns. "I am pretty tired. It was a good day, though."

Their triplets already in bed, they're wildly tuckered out from an epic sugar crash. Oddly enough, it was Stephen who lost the battle with consciousness first, clinging to Leslie like a tiny blanket and
whining whenever she moved him. Wesley and Sonia both needed just a tad bit of storytelling before they zonked out buried beneath their Halloween comforters Leslie's insistent on them having during the month of October.

"It was a marvelous Saturday," Leslie agrees, straddling his lap on their big bed.

He buries his face in her gorgeous breasts. "You're marvelous."

"Hey, that's not why I'm on top of you tonight, Mr. Wyatt."

Ben nods, lifting his head up and pulling her lips to his. "I know," he whispers. "I was just teasing you."

And he flips her beneath him.
Save JJ's

Chapter Summary

JJ's will never stop being an important place to Leslie.

2011

“Long day?” Leslie questions, frowning as Ben slides in the booth across from her. She desperately wants to lean over the table and kiss those cute, pink lips because she misses him. Chris has been riding him pretty hard lately to get projects completed, so she’s barely spoken to him in days. He’s impossibly irresistible, and she must bone him; it’s a necessity. But, as she studies the disheveled, deflated hair and poor posture, she grabs his hand instead.

She totally grabs Ben Wyatt’s hand, rubbing over it gently with her thumb.

In public.

Because JJ always seats them in the very far back corner of his wonderful restaurant. It’s the only diner where Ben and Leslie can actually act somewhat like a couple in the open. She can’t even put into real words how much this place means to her. It’s cozy, quiet, home to the best waffles in the entire universe, and JJ himself is a stellar human being who she trusts wouldn’t try to hurt either of them in the newness that is their great relationship.

Her secret boyfriend sighs, shrugging his shoulders. “I kept trying to leave early so I could surprise you with these chocolate I found that practically begged for you to eat them, but he felt the need to just chat with me about how I needed to get back in the dating game,” he tells her.

Leslie’s eyes widen slightly. Shit. “D-Does he know?”

He shakes his head. “No. I told him I didn’t feel well, which is probably what I should’ve said in the first place, but I didn’t because I’m a moron.”

She continues rubbing his hand. “You’re not a moron. Are you okay?”

Ben nods. “Just a little shaken up. I... You mean so much to me. I don’t want to screw this up.”

Tears swell in her eyes, and she honestly, seriously has never felt this way about anyone else before. “Me either.”

~

2012

“I think you should fire me,” Ben says blatantly, causing Leslie to nearly choke and for her attention to shift from her delicious waffles to her distraught campaign manager. Last night was very rough and long, and he had a panic attack after punching that jerk Derek in the face. She cuddled and held him, trying to sooth him in whatever way possible as dark memories of the Partridge disaster took over, and she’s never seen him so vulnerable and emotional.
Her eyebrows furrow. “Okay, why would I ever do that?”

Ben exhales. “Leslie, I’m too big of a liability issue.”

“Honey, we talked about this already,” she says softly, gently. “Derek was being a giant bag of dicks, and you punched him while defending me. No one is going to think negatively of you for that. If anything, it’ll just make you look better than you already are.”

“But, Les, I –”

She takes his hand, the one with swollen and bruised knuckles, and kisses it. “Ben, we’re okay. Everything’s okay.”

He rubs his forehead, swallowing thickly. “You don’t know that.”

“Yes, I actually do. You take such good care of me, and other people will see that in you.”

Just as Ben’s opening his mouth, JJ comes to their table with a coffee pot in hand. “Good morning, guys. How’re the waffles today?”

“Perfect as usual,” Leslie says with a bright smile.

He refills Ben’s coffee, which seems to be just enough to derail the conversation, and the three of them, instead, talk about the gorilla that escaped from the Pawnee Zoo, and, honestly, Leslie couldn’t love this place (or Ben Wyatt) more.

~

2014

“How’s my favorite customer?” JJ questions politely.

Leslie grins. Because JJ’s is a great and wonderful establishment, and the waffles are extraordinary. “I’m okay. Very pregnant and tired.”

Which is very true. She’s nothing but a giant, bloated whale in her stretchy maternity clothes that barely even fit her anymore. It doesn’t exactly help that today was her last official day of work at City Hall; she’s going on bed rest, and Ben wasn’t even there, and it was all around awful. The food was absolutely great, and her friends are all amazing porpoises, but it felt weird without her husband.

“They kicking a lot?”

She nods. “A little too much actually. Sometimes, it’s like they never stop.”

Which her husband says is because Leslie herself never stops.

JJ glances down at the slightly crinkled ticket in his grasp. “No waffles today?”

She shakes her head. “Ben’s a little under the weather, so I just thought I’d pick him up something light on my way home.” He’d spent the previous night shivering and coughing, burrowed in blankets even though it’s the middle of September and not even technically autumn yet. This morning, her City Manager of a husband didn’t even bother getting out of bed, proclaiming that his bones hurt, and he’ll do his work from bed at some point.

So, here she is, alone and retrieving scrambled eggs, lightly buttered toast, and a to go cup of fresh squeezed orange juice for the love of her life.
Leslie goes to grab her wallet, but JJ holds up his hand. “It’s on the house.”

“Are you sure?” And damn these stupid pregnancy hormones that cause tears to swell in her eyes.

He nods. “Of course. Hope Ben feels better.”

Leslie smiles. “Thanks, JJ. You’re awesome sauce.”

~

2017

“Uncle Andy says this’s gettin’ torned away,” Stephen says, motioning wildly to their surroundings in JJ’s Diner. Her middle triplet has cute smudges of maple syrup on his cheeks that Ben carefully wipes off with a wet napkin they always bring here for obvious reasons.

Her heart sinks, and she frowns. JJ’s has been a staple in her life since she herself was a toddler. She remembers coming here with her dad before he passed away. She remembers having her high school graduation party occupying the entire capacity of the restaurant. She remembers getting to know her husband over waffles, bacon, and coffee. She remembers the bridal shower and the baby shower. She remembers the first time they took their four month olds here.

There are so many precious, priceless memories within these walls.

“Don’t worry about that, Stevie,” Ben says. “Mommy’s figuring it out.”

She smiles and grabs his hand. He’s just as much of a part of the solution as she is, and she loves him so so much. She loves them all so much. But Ben is her rock, the one person in the world who seems to perfectly understand her, her ways, and how she works. Neither of them slept last night, working the hours away diligently, trying to come up with a solution to this apparent, life-altering problem. JJ’s has to stay; it has to.

“I love you,” she whispers, leaning across their messy table to kiss his lips.

He grins crookedly. “I love you more.”
The Knope-Wyatt clan has a backyard campout; Ben contemplates his decision to run for Congress.

“Are you sure it’s not too cold for this?” Ben asks, zipping up their oldest triple cherry’s pink coat. It’s a mildly chilly mid October night, but the kids have been begging both of them for a backyard campout practically since they learned to formulate complete, coherent sentences. Sonia in particular is very interested in this adventure; she’s gathered every pillow and blanket in the house, managed to dig out lawn chairs Ben didn’t even know existed, and forced her brothers to help.

Leslie nods. “They’ll be okay. Every quilt we own is already outside anyway.”

“And the big blanket!” Sonia adds as he places her tiny hands in gloves. Yes, it may be a bit too early in the fall season for gloves, but, come on, they’re only three, and he doesn’t want any of them to get sick, especially since they’ll be running around, roasting marshmallows, and generally exerting themselves. “Pulled it off your bed!” she says proudly, and Ben can’t help but smile. Because Sonia’s their most resourceful, focused triplet, and she’s a lot like Leslie in the sense that she prefers her way or the highway and is extremely passionate about everything she loves.

“What’s for dinner?” Stephen asks loudly, sprinting into the bedroom with Wesley’s green glasses in his hand.

Ben’s eyebrows furrow. “Um, you guys had pizza earlier. And why do you have Wes’s glasses?”

Stephen shrugs, darting off into the distance, and Ben immediately chases him down, the three year old giggling uncontrollably as he lifts him into the air. He quickly snatches the spectacles, placing them in his own coat pocket before blowing a raspberry on Stephen’s surprisingly sticky cheek. He places him back on the ground before handing the glasses back to Wesley, who puts them on and excitedly chatters about their campout.

“We gonna see el’pants and dinosaurs and cookies!” Wesley tells Ben.

“We sure are, buddy.”

~

“Hot chocolate!” Stephen shouts excitedly, bouncing up and down on his knees in the chair Sonia unearthed earlier. He laughs when Leslie hands him the sippy cup because, while they don’t use them at the dinner table and are learning to come ask one of them when they’re thirsty, there isn’t a table tonight, and neither of them want their kids to burn themselves. “’s kinda cold,” he points out, and Ben chuckles because Leslie has been gone for a while.

It’s getting dark out, but their babies are more wound up than ever, obviously having a marvelous time at their campout session. Wesley, they’re shyest and most conservative child, has been screeching in delight for almost three entire hours, giddily proclaiming that this is the best thing that’s ever happened to him ever. Sonia’s eaten more than her tiny body weight in s’mores; Ben had to cut
her off and everything. And Stephen’s been darting back and forth in a massive sugar rush, wearing
a Superman cape and spinning happily in circles.

Leslie’s snapped about a million pictures, and this is perfect. Too perfect. It’s perfect enough to cause
Ben to bite his lower lip every now and then. Because he’s officially running for Congress, and his
life is almost nothing but a stuffed zebra emergency every four to five minutes. What will he miss
with this campaign? When Leslie ran for City Council, it was just the two of them. It didn’t really
take a toll on their relationship, but Ben can’t imagine anything (and he means absolutely anything)
come in between his absolutely stunning, amazing family.

They’re all too important.

Is this even the right call? But they both got a bit too drunk last night (which they’re still recovering
from, by the way), and Ben called Jen four times, and now he’s running. He’s actually running. He
hasn’t done this in twenty-plus years, and the only other time he did was a complete and total disaster
that left him unable to return to his hometown. He’s doing this, and it’s as if there’s no way out.
There’s even a presser event tomorrow.

And he has to be there.

How many bedtime stories and goodnight kisses will he miss? How many times will he not be able
to comfort his crying, sick, or tired babies? How many cuddles and “I love you, Daddy’s” will he not
hear? There’s a ton of uncertainties that come with this, and he can’t help but wonder if sloshing
himself last night, while it was fun, was a completely wrong, horrible move.

Don’t get him wrong; he wants to run.

He’s been waiting for his chance to climb the political ladder since he was a teenager.

Now, he’s responsible and proven himself to be a very capable candidate. He’s getting over his stage
fright with the help of his wife and kids. He has a family that will love him no matter what, and he
knows this. He knows they’ll be here for him throughout the entirety of his campaign, but he can’t
help but wonder if this is some form of a mistake. Ben wants to do this. He wants to finally step out
of that Ice Town shadow and step into something bigger, better.

So, he’s trying hard not to panic. His kids are sprinting and screaming and having fun with the glow
sticks Leslie gave them, using them as wands and playing Harry Potter. He grins, but ends up staring
down at the grass, biting his lower lip. He can’t imagine not being there for his babies. He doesn’t
want to be that absent father, and what if becoming a Congressman launches him into that category?
Ben knows he isn’t good at a lot of things, but having these happy, healthy, talkative, sticky triplets is
one of the only things he can effectively pride himself on.

“You okay?” his wife questions from beside him, rubbing his arm.

He shrugs his shoulders, gulping. “You don’t think I made a mistake, do you?”

Leslie instantly takes his hand. “Absolutely not, Ben. You would be the most perfect Congressman
with the most perfect butt in America.”

He gestures to their triplets. “But what about them? What… What if I’m not there for them? This is a
huge job with lots of demands and hours, and I don’t want to miss moments like these.”

“You’re the best father in the galaxy, honey. You’ve never let your career come in between us or the
kids before, and I highly highly doubt it’ll start when you win.”
“If I win,” he points out.

“Which you will,” she says. “We’ll be right beside you the whole time.”

He leans over and gently kisses her warm lips. “I love you,” he whispers.

“I love you too, Benjamin,” she says. And he can’t help but chuckle when she stands up, plopping into his lap and allowing him to wrap his arms around her tiny waist. He snuggles his face into her back and smiles as he watches their three year olds run around the backyard.

Nothing could ever come between them.
Ms. Ludgate-Dwyer Goes to Washington

Chapter Summary

Leslie copes with April's decision.

It’s a little past midnight when she arrives home from Washington D.C. with tears still stinging the corners of her eyes. She understands everything that April told her, how she wants to move on to discover her true passions, and Leslie’s in the beginning stages of acceptance. It’s hard. She’s known April for years, helped mold her into a genuinely well-rounded woman. She’s grown up a lot in the time since she entered the Parks Department as an intern, and this feels... weird.

Because first she lost Ann, and now she’s losing April. But she’s seriously honestly trying not to make this about herself. She knows she does that. She blew past the biggest night of Ben’s career while she was fighting with Ron, and that can’t happen again. Leslie wants to be there for her friends and for them to know that she stands by their decisions because that’s what they’ve always done for her. But, God, she broke down at least a dozen times just on the plane ride here.

And it’s difficult for her to walk away from anything. Not that she’s letting April go. She knows she isn’t her mother, but she feels this undeniable responsibility for her success. But she also wants April to follow her dreams because that’s what she herself has done all her life. Chasing those dreams is so powerful and enlightening, and she has a great team behind her, so how could she not be supportive? No. She’s going to stand behind April 150,000 percent.

Or possibly more than that, if she’s honest with herself.

“Hey,” she hears the moment she places her purse on the kitchen table. She can’t but grin when she sees her husband walking very groggily into the room, arms crossed over his chest. His hair’s a complete disaster zone, and his grey sweatpants hang loosely on his hips. She immediately wraps her arms around his slender frame, tugging him close and smiling as she grabs his gorgeous, perfect butt with one hand while he leans down to kiss her neck.

“How’re my babies?” Leslie questions, almost positive Ben’s fallen back to sleep cozied against her. But he pecks her skin once more. “My babies too,” he points out. “And they’re good.”

“How about you, Mr. Wyatt?” she asks playfully, hoping to get some much needed interaction with her husband. Because she’s been gone for two whole days, and that’s basically forever. It honestly is. That’s forty-eight hours worth of not seeing Benjamin Franklin Wyatt’s handsome face. And it’s also forty-eight hours without the best triple cherries in the world. “Did you guys do anything fun while I was gone?”

Ben shakes his head and cuddles into her. “Missed you,” he breathes out. “So much.”

She rubs his warm back through his long sleeved shirt. “I missed you too, Benji. Why don’t we get you to bed, huh?”

He nods, and she figures he’ll pull away, but he doesn’t. They practically snuggle as they ascend the steps, but Leslie can’t help but stop by the triplets’ bedroom on her way their. Ben grumbles, but he
follows her in regardless, encircling her and pressing his front against her back as she stares in the
awe that is three toddlers sleeping soundly in their own beds. They’ve been struggling with that
recently, especially with Wesley.

“They’re so cute,” she whispers. “How did we create such adorable monsters?”

“Well, they are half you,” he nudges.

“And half you,” she points out. “Wesley’s like your identical, much younger twin or something.”

He chuckles. “And Stephen acts more and more like you every single time he opens his mouth. He
refused to eat broccoli and began carefully persuading me to give him chocolate chip cookies
instead.”

“Did you give them to him?”

He nods. “It was kinda hard not to; he learned from the best, after all,” he says sleepily.

“We should get out of here before they wake up,” she says, and he follows her to their own room
hand in hand until he collapses on to their mattress. Their comforter is strewn all over the place, and
there are two extra blankets in the heap, and she grins. She pats his sexy calf before covering him up
and brushing back the hair from his forehead, placing a small kiss there instead. She changes into
pajamas that just so happen to be Ben’s, and, the instant she lies down, he curls into her, hooking his
leg around her own and snoring against her skin.

~

“You knew?” Leslie asks, and, yes, Ben’s still mostly asleep, but it is only four in the morning. He
woke up to go to the bathroom, which, of course, sprung her from her slumber, and he wound up,
somehow, admitting that he was trying to get April a job at his old accounting firm with Barney.
Really, she doesn’t know how that information leaked from his cute mouth, but it did, and she isn’t
quite sure how to feel about it at the moment. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Ben exhales and cuddles harder. “Didn’t think you’d like the news.”

She huffs. “Of course I wouldn’t like the news, Ben! April wants to leave!”

“I think she was just nervous about your reaction,” he says, exhaustion riding his every word. “And
she wanted to find other options before coming to you.”

“Why would she be nervous about my reaction? I’m super chill all the time!”

“Honey,” Ben says, and, this time, his eyes open to look at her. “It’s okay. April’s growing up. She
just wants to do what she’s passionate about, and I think she’s found it.”

Leslie shakes her head, and her husband tugs her until her head’s on his chest, and he’s lying on his
back beneath his mound of covers. “I don’t like this,” she tells him. “Maybe I should make her a fifth
binder explaining how she’s making the worst decision in the history of decisions?”


“I don’t know what I’m supposed to do then! I can’t... I can’t just let her go. I raised her as my own,
Ben!”

“First off, I don’t think I’d classify this as raising her. Secondly, April’s gonna go, Les. Do you want
her to be miserable for the rest of her life?”

She sighs and burrows her entire body beneath the blankets, tears streaming down her cheeks. Come on, Knope. Pull it together. But it’s weird and foreign, and how could April ever want to leave the best city in America (probably the world)? It will never make any sense to her, and she’s choking back a sob as her husband sinks beneath the comforter with her until their foreheads touch. He rubs gently up and down her arm as she clutches at his shirtsleeve.

“I’m gonna miss her,” she says hoarsely.

“I know, babydoll. I will too.” He wipes her tears with his thumb, and she instantly melts into the touch, allowing him to snuggle around her as much as possible.

“Never leave me,” she whispers to him.

“I never will.”

“Never ever?”

“You’re stuck with me for life, Knope,” he says, and she grins. “Get some rest.”

She nods, and he wraps her up in his strong, solid arms.
Pie-Mary

Chapter Summary

A Halloween-related mini fic because I totally didn't write one back in October.

“Tomorrow’s Halloween, and we don’t have any candy, Ben!” Leslie screeches, plopping down on the mattress beside her husband.

Said husband is also kind of, sort of in a very deep sleep, but still. This is too urgent. There has never been anything, past or present, that is more important than acquiring some delicious, tasty, mouthwatering chocolates and gummies for small children. And for herself. She’s not going to lie about that. But Ben continues lying there, hugging a pillow to his chest as he snores loudly in that patented ball on his side. How can he just be so careless about this? This is absolutely a matter of life or death!

“Benjamin!” she shrieks. “Wake up!”

Her husband grumbles. “Les, ‘m pretty sure ‘s not even five AM yet.”

“So?!” Leslie says. “We need to get going!”

“Have literally all day t’shop for candy,” he murmurs, flinching slightly when she rubs his hip.

“But Beeeeeemnnn,” she whines. “This is a pressing matter.”

“So’s sleep...”

Well, she guesses that’s true. Ben did have that campaign event earlier, stood alongside her during the event when a large portion of the crowd were being major turds, won Woman of the Year in the process (she’s not bitter about that at all), and wrangled their kissable monster babies until he finally gave in and collapsed in a heap around two AM. She’s sure he’s actually exhausted, but this is a crisis. No. It’s a mega crisis. A mega freaking crisis that’s going to cause her to shrivel up and die and explode and die and then explode and die all over again.

A die-splosion times three.

That’s twice as many die-splosions as normal.

But they’ve just been so busy. Ben’s running for Congress and double dipping as City Manager, Leslie’s still going strong at her full time career, and they have these triple cherries that depend on them for everything. She forgot about Halloween completely until about half an hour ago. She has a selection of seventeen costumes a piece for Sonia, Stephen, and Wesley to choose from on any given day, so that’s not an issue, but not having the proper Halloween candy is a nightmare.

“Can we at least wait til seven?” her husband questions.

She sighs. “You’re lucky I love you.”

He’s back to snoring within seconds.
“Is that poop or chocolate?” Ben asks, staring very carefully at their son, adorable Stephen, who’s sitting on the big boy potty. Leslie’s fixing her hair, and Stephen’s doing his business as Ben walks in, barefoot with hair everywhere, crossing his arms over his chest. “No, seriously. Is that poop or chocolate? It’s confusing because he’s kinda, y’know, pooping...”

Leslie glances over at Stephen. “Chocolate. The kids had Hershey bars for breakfast.”

“Thought we didn’t have any candy?” Ben questions with a crooked grin as he squeezes toothpaste on to his toothbrush.

“We need more than that!”

Ben smiles and shrugs his shoulders, and she pats his perfect butt for good luck.

“I don’t like Butterfingers!” Sonia shouts, clinging on to Leslie’s jeans in the Halloween themed aisle of a local grocery store.

And she notes that her sons are currently fighting with plastic swords as Sonia begs to be picked up, which Ben graciously does for her.

“What’s wrong with Butterfingers, Soso?” Ben asks, and, God, Leslie could doink him right here, right now in this place. Are there cameras? Probably, right? There shouldn’t be. Her and Ben haven’t had much alone time lately, but that’s okay. She’s excited for Halloween, and her mom is taking the triplets the day after one of her all-time favorite holidays, and Leslie knows for certain what’s on their agenda: Never ending amounts of sex and tons of cuddles.

She buries her face in Ben’s neck. “Icky. Like mayonnaise.”

Leslie and Ben exchange glances before shrugging their shoulders.

“Ben, we need to go back to the store!”

Her husband instantly shakes his head. “No. No way. Leslie, we were there for five hours! I had to hold my pee that entire time! Do you know what kind of bladder damage that could’ve caused?”

“Why didn’t you just go while we were there?”

He gestures crazily. “Grocery store bathrooms are gross!”

“No,” Leslie says, slumping against the couch cushions. “What’s gross, dear sir, is not going back to the store to get more candy.”

“Why did we even get so much candy? We’re going Trick or Treating!”

“Dearest Benjamin, my mom’s going to hand it out.”

He shrugs. “Well, then she can get more candy.”

“We didn’t grab any candy corn, though! Everyone loves candy corn!”
Ben shudders. “Um, no. Everyone hates candy corn, Les.”

“They’re so adorable,” she blubbers, weeping openly into Ben’s neck.

Because Sonia is Hermione, and Stephen is Ron, and Wesley is Harry. They’re her triple Gryffindors, and she loves them so dearly.

“But why do I have to wear these?” Ben asks, briefly gesturing to the glasses sitting on his gorgeous, handsome face.

“You’re James!” she says incredulously. “We’ve gone through this!”

“Why can’t I be Snape or Dumbledore?”

He’s pouting.

Ben knows she can’t resist it when he pouts. Because she knows he doesn’t want to wear his glasses since he never ever wants to wear them, but tonight’s Halloween. And, seriously, she doesn’t understand how in the fuck someone could look so good. It should be outlawed.

“You don’t have a beard or long hair, but you do have glasses, so James it is.”

He exhales, but he does smile when Wesley runs over to him. “You look like me, Daddy!” he says happily.

“I sure do, pal.”

“To Halloween 2017,” Leslie says, clinking their wine glasses together.

And, yes, their triple cherries are scattered in various locations of the living room, sleeping soundly through their sugar crash. Sonia’s lying underneath the coffee table, her wizard wardrobe slathered in Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups. Stephen’s snoozing in a laundry basket filled with previously clean clothes, his red wig clumped together with green and blue M&Ms. And Wesley’s starfished out on the floor, the scar on his forehead smudged and his own actual glasses smeared with remnants of a Snickers bar Ben opened and had him curiously try earlier.

“To Halloween 2017,” Ben repeats.

They lean back against the couch, placing their socked feet on the coffee table as her husband wraps an arm around her shoulders.

“I love you and like you,” she whispers, laying her head on his shoulder.

He kisses her hair. “I love you and like you.”
Chapter Summary

Ben's birthday doesn't go as planned.

"Where's my rooster?" Stephen cries, latching on to Ben's hoodie as he blubbers against his neck. He rubs his son's back as the three year old sobs, hoping that maybe a comforting touch will soothe his frazzled nerves. Because their triple cherries are currently running off of only two and a half hours of sleep, and it's only 11:42 AM, and Stephen's at his wits end. "You guys got rid of him!"

"Shh, Stevie. Shh... It's okay..." Ben tries, even though he has absolutely no idea what in the hell the boy's talking about. "How about I make us some chicken nuggets and we watch a movie?" Stephen's currently their most avid, interested film buff, and stories such as Monsters Inc. and Toy Story really captivate him, so he figures he'll make a quick lunch, throw on The Lion King, and make it a point to get their cranky toddlers to take a nap.

"Hey," Leslie says, coming into the kitchen with Sonia and Wesley in her arms. Wesley immediately reaches out for him, and Ben carefully takes his second son, snuggling them both together, each hiding his face on different sides of Ben's neck. "What's the plan? Because the upstairs is trashed, and they won't stop crying, and I feel horrible..." And, now, there are tears in his wife's eyes, and, honestly, they all just need to go to bed.

"Honey, everything's okay," he promises, leaning over to kiss her cheek.

She shakes her head. "No, it's not. It's your birthday, Ben, and I tried to make you a cake, but I ruined it! Your gifts are still at the post office because of all the snow, and I..." she trails off for a moment. "I just wanted you to have a great birthday."

"Baby, I'm having a great birthday," he tells her. And he super wishes he could wrap his arms around her, to comfort and reassure her that everything's alright because it is. It's more than okay, actually. He always has a wonderful time whenever he's with his family, whether they're exhausted monsters or happy, fun loving monsters. "Leslie, hey, please don't cry." The sound of his voice is apparently not what his boys want to hear, though, and he hears a few growing sniffles.

She sighs, and a few tears stream down her cheeks, and he watches Sonia cling to Leslie a bit harder. Okay. They're all so sleepy and tired, and he needs to do something. And that something is get his wife and babies settled for an afternoon of snuggles and movies.

~

It takes a lot of effort, but it gets done.

Leslie, Sonia, Stephen, and Wesley are huddled up in his and Leslie's big bed, buried beneath the comforter and chattering about what they want to watch while Ben makes a super simple lunch consisting of chicken nuggets and fries. It's not the healthiest option out there, but it's quick and fast and exactly what they need. He was going to go for macaroni and cheese or maybe that in pizza form, but he doesn't want them spilling that stuff on their newly washed sheets.
He makes four different trips to the kitchen, grabbing drinks and napkins and popping popcorn in the microwave because, as his monster kiddos proclaimed, they absolutely can't have a movie night without popcorn. At least they all are in a bit higher spirits and not crying in exhaustion so much anymore; Wesley had a brief whimpering stint for about twenty minutes, but he was calmed down by lying against Ben's chest while munching on a miniature chocolate bar Leslie unearthed from her bedside table.

By the time he re-enters the bedroom for the final time, Sonia's in his spot.

"Don't I get to watch the movie with you guys?" he questions with a smile.

His daughter giggles. "No, Daddy. Mr. Snowflake sits here," she tells him, motioning to the stuffed dragon he got her while he was in D.C. a few months ago; she's been obsessed with it since she first laid her eyes on the lime green fuzz.

"So there's no room for me then?" he asks, placing a tray of snacks at the foot of the bed so no knocks it over. He tickles Sonia's belly, which causes an eruption of laughter from her. These are the little moments he treasures. He loves his babies to the moon and back, and they're not really babies anymore, but he just always wants to be around them. They're all so perfect and wonderfully insightful and wise beyond their years.

He sits on the mattress, and Wesley instantly situates himself against his side, effectively shoving Sonia out of the way. Ben expects tears; the kids have barely slept and are, as previously mentioned, insanely cranky today. But nothing. Sonia moves over wordlessly, eating the popcorn and sipping apple juice from her Mickey Mouse cup. Stephen's nested practically on top of Leslie, his head on her chest.

"Okay, who's ready to watch The Lion King?" his wife inquiries.

Three little hands shoot up in the air, and Ben smiles.

~

"I feel like I let you down," Leslie says a few hours later, shortly after they put the triplets to bed. He's lying behind her, scooping her against his body as he plants tiny kisses on her neck. He rubs her hip bone and relishes in the fact that they're finally alone together; he's been waiting for this moment all day. Because he loves his babies so much, but sometimes it's like he doesn't even get to see Leslie, to hear her cackle at the TV or his lame puns. To hold her hand without being interrupted. To snuggle with her, just the two of them.

He shakes his head. "Well, I don't feel that way. This was a great birthday."

"But we didn't do anything! I usually have so many ideas and gifts and parties, but I've just been so tired lately..."

He wraps her up in his arms even more. "Les, I had the best birthday in the universe. It doesn't have to be anything extravagant; I love spending time with you guys."

"Even me?" she questions quietly.

He kisses her warm, pretty skin. "Especially you, babydoll. I love you so much."

She pecks the back of his left hand. "I love you so much too, Benjamin."
Leslie's incredibly grateful to have Ben in her life.

It’s already 7:13 by the time she gets home.

She toes off her flats and places her purse on the ground as a mass of tiny children race to the door to greet her. Leslie instantly picks up Stephen, who’s tugging relentlessly at her pantsuit, kissing the boy on his sticky, slightly green cheek. “Did you guys behave for Daddy?” she questions as Stephen latches himself firmly around her neck. She rubs his back beneath his dinosaur sweater, and he blows raspberries on her skin while cackling and wiggling at the same time.

These kids are too adorable for words.

And, yes, that even includes when they’re running around, breaking everything in sight, and smearing poop on their flat screen.

Yeah, that last one is pretty unfortunate; she’s pretty sure she’s never seen Ben that grossed out before, and he was once forced to kill a huge spider for her because there was no way in hell she was going to do it when they first moved into this house. She’s an advocate of women’s rights and all, but spiders aren’t her thing. Coincidentally, though, spiders aren’t her husband’s thing either, but they both got through it by screaming and shouting and sprinting before he eventually squashed it with his shoe (which he then promptly threw away in a separate trashcan outside).

“We made you a waffle cake!” Sonia exclaims excitedly.

“Without veggie-tables this time,” Wesley confirms.

A waffle cake without vegetables? That definitely has Ben written all over it.

She should find him and give him a proper thank you.

“We’re hungry!” Stephen announces, and Sonia and Wesley immediately nod their heads.

Okay, so she’ll feed their monsters before finding her husband.

She’s just getting Wesley into a chair when Ben shuffles into the kitchen, his hair everywhere and eyes very droopy. His hair. Good lord. His hair. It’s wild and tousled, and she, oddly enough, wants to sooth it back into place, which doesn’t mean much because, hello, it’s Ben Wyatt’s hair, and it’s
very rarely ever tamed. But it’s a great look on him, and she finds herself biting her lower lip as she
daydreams about boning his perfect, naked butt once the triplets go to bed.

“I missed you,” he breathes against her skin as he wraps her up in his arms, kissing the top of her
head. Because this was his day off as City Manager, but he’s exhausted from campaign events
everyday for the past two weeks, and he looks fifty shades of extremely tired. Poor guy. “Did you
see your waffle cake? These kiddos worked really hard on it.” And she knows that by “these
kiddos,” he means him because, come on, they’re three and end up arguing more than helping.

He at least looks relaxed in his loose fitting jeans with rips in the knees and grey hoodie with bare
feet. But he hasn’t gotten a chance to actually sit down for more than a few minutes at a time in
literally weeks, and she needs to make that up to him. Because he’s running for Congress and staying
up viciously late (sometimes pulling a “Leslie” and just never going to sleep in the first place) and
maintaining the city of Pawnee and taking care of her and their monster babies; he’s just been so
extremely busy.

Ben needs a break. Deserves a break.

“Why don’t you go take a nap?” she suggests. “I’ll feed the kids and give them a bath tonight.”

He shakes his head. “It’s almost 7:30. I’ll just wait until we lay down.”

“And pffffff,” she whines, rubbing his shoulder. “At least go sit on the couch.”

“Why?” he pouts, stuffing his hands in his hoodie pouch. “I want to stay with you guys.”

And, with that, he plops down in a seat next to Stephen, who promptly decides this is the perfect
moment to pull Sonia’s hair, who pinches Stephen back over and over again, who begins to cry
constant until Ben lifts him into his arms. This, of course, springs an unexpected sobbing fit from
Wesley, whose whimpers don’t stop until Ben gently picks him up too.

He cleans the kitchen after dinner, even though Leslie practically begs for him to stay off his feet.

But Ben sweeps and then mops because their triplets are definitely the messy variety of triplets. He
hand washes the dishes because their dishwasher is broken, and he contains the leftovers as she
wipes off the three faces of cranky toddlers. Wesley clings persistently to Ben’s jeans, but her
husband takes it all in stride. He’s cool, calm, and levelheaded, but particularly more so tonight than
she’s seen him in the past. And then she gets a good, solid look at the dark purple, slightly puffy
smudges beneath his eyes and decides it’s his apparent exhaustion talking.

He cuddles Wesley on the couch, letting the boy sprawl out against him while the triplets watch Paw
Patrol. By the time Leslie picks out their pajamas for bath time, her husband’s drifted off with his
head on top of Wesley’s, his mouth opened slightly, and she can’t help but giggle at the soft snores
that she knows will turn into earth shattering snores within a matter of minutes.

She carefully removes the three year old from his soft grasp, but the movements jar Ben, and, instead
of staying there like a normal person, he carries two of their three babies upstairs to the restroom. He
yawns several thousand times while they bathe the abundance of energy that is their triplets, and he
kisses her sleepily whenever he has the chance during this event.

And she loves him for it. She loves him so much. Because he’s made sacrifice after sacrifice for her
career and wellbeing, while he takes on a hectic, chaotic workload that’s caused a damn near mental
down more than once. Because he’s running for Congress and still helps no matter what with
their kids. Because he’s sweet and caring and kind and considerate, and she wants to make out with his tired bones while stroking his hair until he falls fast asleep.

But then Stephen accidentally does his business in the bathtub without any warning, and both of his siblings scream.

She watches Ben rub his forehead with shaking fingers, trying to hide his smile before helping Wesley and Sonia escape the nastiness.

“Stephen’s a poopy head!” Wesley yells, and she dies inside when Ben stifles his laughs by pretending to cough into his hoodie.

“Poopy head! Poopy head!” Sonia mimics, pointing right at Stephen.

Which ignites the 4,582nd crying fit of the day.

~

It’s 9:54 by the time Stephen falls asleep.

And Leslie also has the job of dragging Ben from the toddler’s bed into their own big bed for the night. He trips and stumbles, using the walls to guide him down the hall. He collapses on the mattress wordlessly, and Leslie takes the opportunity to reach beneath him, unbutton his jeans, and shimmy them off without him even noticing. She rubs his tight, sexy calves, and he’s lying on top of their comforter, so she covers him with two quilts instead.

She’s settling next to him, her lamp still on in the room when he whispers, “You’re amazing.”

He’s clearly much more than half asleep, but he says it anyway. It’s low and slurred, and she smiles brightly when she spies that signature crooked grin before it fades away. She tugs the quilts around his chin and brushes his unbelievably soft, messy hair from his forehead, kissing his cheek. “You’re so wonderful to me,” she tells him quietly. “Thank you for everything, Ben. Thank you for our cute, snuggly monster babies and for always taking care of us.”

“Anything for you,” he mumbles. “Anything.”
One Last Ride

Chapter Summary

Leslie and Ben comfort each other over their impending move to Washington DC.

Chapter Notes

I honestly can't believe it's over! I don't even know how to feel, but I do know that I am incredibly grateful for all of the support I've gotten during this little adventure I took. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for reading, bookmarking, commenting, and leaving kudos! It truly means so much to me, and I love you guys to the moon and back!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Are you okay?" she hears Ben whisper in the darkness.

Crap on a crawfish. She thought he was dead asleep. He’s definitely not supposed to be awake; that’s for sure. It's 2:45 in the morning, and he should be cuddled up in their big bed with the comforter wrapped tightly around him because her husband’s the biggest blanket hog in the history of blanket hogs. She will never understand why someone as tiny and elfish and sexy as him needs an entire king sized comforter for himself, but it’s annoying, and she must find a way to super glue her half of it to the mattress.

Ooh, more super glue! Another brilliant item to add to her expanding shopping list.

Ben plops down on the couch beside her, immediately placing his head on her shoulder and yawning quietly against her skin. He settles his socked feet on the coffee table, effectively sprawling out as she plays with the fingers on his left hand. He's warm and toasty from his slumber, and he never ever fails to bring her loads of tranquility. Ben’s notorious for shutting down her nerves just enough to make her realize panicking isn’t the right answer.

Plus, she very much loves looking at and making out with his handsome face.

"I can't believe it's my last day at City Hall," she says brokenly, holding back a sob as tears swell in her eyes. She smiles sadly when Ben instantly rubs her knee. "I just feel like there's so much left to do, and I’m leaving a lot behind. I’m leaving everything and everyone I love, and it’s so scary. What if I hate my new job? What if I hate living in DC? What if the triplets hate their new school? What if a tsunami hits and destroys all of Earth? What if an alien-moose hybrid –"

“Okay, I’m gonna go ahead and stop you right there,” Ben says, sitting up. “You, Leslie Knope, are going to be fine. You’re so smart and beautiful and amazing. Me and our little monsters will be right behind you the whole time, every step of the way. You’ve got this, babe.”

She shakes her head. Now, tears stream openly down her cheeks, but Ben doesn’t let that happen either. He never lets anything remotely negative happen to her; he’s her ray of sunshine. He grabs tissues from the coffee table and carefully, gently dabs beneath her eyes. Leslie collapses against him,
and he wraps his strong arms around her. She cries as she listens to his heartbeat.

"What if we're making the wrong decision?" she questions.

And it's a very real possibility that they are. Sure, they've thought this through; Leslie’s made twenty-one binders, and Ben’s covered three enormous whiteboards of pros and cons with his tiny, precise handwriting. He’s always so articulate, so neat and tidy versus her jumbled disorganization. She often thinks about how lucky she is to have Ben Wyatt as her husband, best friend in the universe, and father of her children, but she’s even luckier than usual today.

Because today is their last day at work.

And they move to Washington DC this weekend.

"We're not," Ben reassures, his breath hot and cinnamony on her neck. "We're making the right decision for us."

~

"Are you okay?" he hears Leslie whisper in the darkness.

Huh. He thought she was asleep. After the viciously long day they had, he wasn’t even surprised when she curled up on the mattress after they finally somehow managed to get their precious triple cherries to fall asleep.

Tonight, Stephen thought it was hilarious to drag their oversized bag of popsicles out of the garage freezer, chewing them open and sharing them with Sonia and Wesley while dripping and spilling the sticky, melted liquid everywhere (Leslie was very upset because it was her summer supply of popsicles). Their tiny, adorable, lunatic toddlers were happier and more hyper than Ben thinks he’s ever seen them. They jumped around on their beds like crazy people and even screamed obscenities they learned from their parents at one another.

It was chaos. Pure, unaltered chaos.

And they want to move? What the hell are they thinking?

They can't move.

Cue the sweating and silent panicking and his heart beating uncontrollably because that’s totally what’s happening right now. He rolls from his side to his back, staring at the ceiling as he clutches the comforter closer to him. The ceiling. It’s the same ceiling he’s been glancing up at for over six years. Six years. He’s married. They have three year old triplets.

They’re moving to Washington DC.

And everything is going to change.

"Ben, hey," Leslie says, reaching out to grab his hand. "What's going on?"

He shrugs. "What if you're right? What if this is a huge mistake?"

And he knows he literally spent this morning, afternoon, and evening trying to calm her down about the move; he doesn’t want to even remotely destroy the idea that they’ll be alright in her mind. She doesn’t deserve that. But his pulse thumps relentlessly in his ears, and he looks at that ceiling. He’s made love to her so many times in this room, got her pregnant in this room. He’s stayed up with her
all night when she’s sick or needs to do a four AM impromptu brainstorm session in this room. They’ve had movie nights and thirty minute mandatory make out sessions after the babies were born and ate waffles drowning in whipped cream in bed in this room.

There are so many memories here.

Ben spent twelve years of his life moving around to town after town, city after city. He slashed budgets, avoided having things chucked at his head, and got the hell out. But then he met Leslie, and literally every single idea he had about where he was going changed for the better. He married his soulmate, and now they have three kids together, and they can’t just leave.

This house reeks of them, the Knope-Wyatt family, and he’s pretty sure there’s no way to scrub that clean, to erase what they’ve built here. In Pawnee.

The town where he fell in love with this strange, passionate, goofball of a woman.

“This,” Leslie says, motioning to the world in front of them. Because that’s what they have. They have the whole world. “This is not a mistake. We’re not leaving anything behind. Pawnee will always be a part of us, but now we’re changing the chapter, and that’s okay.”

He nods and grabs her hand, rubbing his thumb over her smooth knuckles.

Ben loves her. He loves her and Sonia and Stephen and Wesley so much.

And this is what’s right.

“You ready?” he finds himself whispering, moving slightly to kiss her cheek.

And she presses their lips together. “Not at all,” she says quietly. “But that’s never stopped us before.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much again for reading! I hope you enjoyed the last chapter! :)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!