



Ben brought his truck to a screeching halt beside the ambulance he and Andy had been following, the blue police truck barely in park before he flung his door open and hurled himself up the path towards the entrance.

“Ben!” Andy screamed after him, “wait..”

But Ben didn’t wait, he didn’t even pause at the sound of his own name as he charged through the emergency entrance.

Two white double doors just ahead of him were closing, and ignoring the posted signs he slid through them seconds before they sealed. He continued his frantic search as he barrelled down the narrow walkway which was cluttered with patients and bustling medical staff, until he came to the busy trauma room where Ben found what he was looking for.

He stood in the doorway of the room helplessly watching the chaotic movement of the room being conducted by the attending doctor who shouted instructions to the staff, who scrambled to carry them out. The doctor glanced down at the small unconscious child on the

gurney and barked out another set of instructions.

The room reeked with the smell of blood, antiseptic, and fear. It made Ben's nose burn, but he took no notice. He was completely unaware that his own clothes were covered in the same blood and sweat, or that his face was smeared with oil and other remains of the accident he'd been attending. That the acrid, bitter smell of fear was coming from him.

"Is she alright?" he managed to choke out to anyone in the room who would listen, his eyes wild and desperate as he searched the faces of those examining the small child.

His spoken words alerted a nurse to his presence and she paused momentarily, thrusting the supplies in her hand at her nearest co-worker. She grabbed Ben's arm, "We'll know more once the doctors have fully accessed her injuries. Come with me, we'll go someplace a little less frantic," she told him.

Ben stood, hardly noticing the nurse as he watched the medical staff darting around the room intent to hook up various tubes and machines that filled the small space with beeps and hums as they whirled to life.

The nurse tightened her grip, and Ben turned only half-listening as he looked down into her kind brown eyes, "Is she.." he let his voice trail off as he struggled to put the fear that was nagging at his mind into words.

"Sir, please come with me," she pleaded.

Ben was jerked backwards as an arm grabbed the loop on the back of his police vest, and he was caught off guard causing him to take a step backwards and bring his attention to the people beside him.

"Ben," Andy called, his voice firm yet calm, "we need to wait outside."

Ben tried to pull himself out of Andy's grasp, "No!" he growled, "I can't.. I can't just leave her!" his voice now desperate as his eyes darted back to the activity unfolding around the

small patient.

“We’re not leaving her, we’re giving the medical staff room to do their job, to help her. I’m sure they will tell us something as soon as they can,” Andy coaxed.

Ben’s shoulder sagged in defeat and he stopped straining against the pull holding him where he was. The nurse tipped her head slightly to indicate they should follow her as she navigated them back through the busy corridor towards the double white doors again.

She hesitated at the doors before opening them, “Ben was it? She’s breathing on her own and that’s always a good sign. Do either of you know if her parents were brought here as well?”

Andy gave a slight shake of his head, “Her parents didn’t survive the crash, but,” he paused to glance at Ben who was staring back up the corridor in the direction they’d just come from. “Ben is Lucy’s older brother.”

Ben turned his bloodshot eyes to the nurse, “Please, I just need to know she’s okay,” he told her, his voice quavering.

“Oh,” she gasped, her eyes widening in surprise, “I’m sorry, I didn’t.. Working the scene of the accident,” her brow furrowed as the realisation of what the young police officer had endured washed over her. “Grab a seat and I’ll get the paperwork. The doctor is talking emergency surgery.”

“Thank you,” Andy mouthed to the nurse as he turned towards the triage doors and dragged Ben with him as they made their way towards the waiting area. Andy glanced at Ben noting the scrapes and blood that covered his clothes and arms, and quickly changed directions moving towards the exit, a firm arm still on Ben.

“I’m not leaving!” Ben snapped angrily, coming back to the present situation as he tried to jerk away, a fist clenched by his side.

“We’re not leaving,” Andy assured him, “but look at yourself, look at me! If we go into that waiting room looking like this and wearing these uniforms, people are going to want answers to questions about their own family members. I don’t have the answers, and you—,” his voice trailed off for a moment as he shook his head, his dirty blonde hair barely moving. “Ben, you can’t answer those questions either, especially right now. Come on, we can wait outside, call your family, breathe. Grab a spare shirt, and then come back inside, okay?”

Ben sighed, gave a slight nod as he succumbed to the idea, then followed Andy through the automatic glass doors. The warm, fresh night air washed over them as they exited the hospital, leaving the smell of antiseptic and the constant murmurs of worry behind them.

The sky was already a darkened shade of blue as the moon became more prominent lighting up the night sky. The first stars had only just begun to twinkle as though it was just another beautiful spring evening in Cedar Falls.

Andy motioned towards a metal bench not far from the entrance where they could keep an eye out for the nurse who had the needed paperwork, but they’d gone no more than a few steps when Ben hesitated momentarily as his knees buckled from the stress and fatigue.

“Come on,” Andy urged, helping Ben to the bench. “Sit here for a minute and breathe before you pass out.”

Ben sank on the bench like a rag doll, his head going limp and falling into his hands. A moment later he leaned over the back of the bench and was sick. He sat there gasping for a minute before throwing up a second time. He wiped at his mouth with the back of his hand and groaned audibly as he squeezed his eyes shut as if it would block him from the misery and pain of the child laying in the emergency room.

Andy’s hand was heavy on his shoulder, “You okay?” he questioned, knowing full well that his partner was anything but. Andy didn’t wait for an answer as he dug around in his pocket for a napkin or tissue. He pulled out a crumpled napkin from a hurried lunch earlier in the day, and shoved it into Ben’s hand.

They exchanged no words as Ben used it to wipe his mouth. When finished he turned around on the bench and lowered his head into his hands trying to bring more air into his lungs.

“Drink this,” a softer voice told him as a cold bottle of water was placed in his hands, “slowly though, you don’t want to get sick again.”

He raised his head up slightly and saw the nurse from earlier sitting beside him, she offered a smile that didn’t quite reach the worry in her own eyes. Ben opened the bottle and took a sip, swishing it around his mouth before spitting it out over the back of the bench. “Sorry,” he muttered.

She shook her head, “There’s nothing to be sorry for,” she reassured him, “I have no doubt that you witnessed some horrors out there today with that pile up on the highway.”

He attempted a smile, but it looked far more like a grimace, “And you’re helping deal with the fall out from that.”

She shrugged, “True, but none of those patients are my family members. Here,” she said, handing him a clipboard with papers on it, “We need you to sign this form for..” Her voice trailed off as she realised she didn’t know the patient’s name.

“Lucy,” he offered as he glanced down at the paperwork and handed her back the water so he could sign it. “Her name is Lucy,”

“My name is Annie,” she told him, “I’ll be the nurse looking after Lucy until they get her into surgery.”

He handed the clipboard back to her, “Can I see her now?”

“Not yet, I need you to finish filling out the remainder of this paperwork.” she told him as she removed the top form from the clipboard. She looked him in the eye, “I’ll be back as soon as I can. I’ll take you to a quieter waiting room where it’ll be easier for the doctor to find you so he can update you after surgery, okay?”

Annie didn't wait for an answer as she handed him back the water and raced up the path into the hospital leaving Ben with a million unspoken questions. Yet, he barely noticed her departure as his hand flew across the medical forms he was left with. He ticked boxes quickly as though his speed would, in some small way, help. He didn't like feeling helpless; he was a fixer by nature, a protector, and relying solely on someone else for that task was unnerving for him.

Andy sat down beside him, "Ben," he whispered, "we need to notify your brothers about your parents before they hear it on the news." He allowed the silence to grow between them for a minute, "Do you want me to make the call?"

Ben didn't answer for a minute as he clenched his jaw and felt his sweat break out on his face at the thought of what needed to be done. He'd told countless victims' loved ones news like this before, not once had it gotten easier, but telling his own family was not something he was mentally prepared for. He nervously ran his hands through his hair as he took a moment to consider the question. Then he gave a slight nod, "Call Eli, he's the oldest, he can notify the others," it came out in a hoarse whisper.

He slid his head back into his hands and stared down at the pavement under his feet, his eyes catching sight of his black boots which showed evidence of the horrors he'd witnessed. Bile rose in his throat and he closed his eyes for a moment as he tried to concentrate on other things. Things that were good and whole and undamaged. Things that spoke of life and happiness, not death and destruction. Then he reached into a pocket and fumbled to retrieve his phone.

Andy took it, pulled up Eli's details, and pushed the call button. It rang twice before someone answered.

He took a deep breath before saying, "Hey Eli, this is Andy. Yeah, " he turned to glance at Ben putting an assuring hand on his back, "Ben's okay, that's not really why I'm calling. Listen," Andy paused for a second, closing his eyes as he braced himself for what had to be said. This wasn't a message he wanted to deliver over the phone, but the roads were backed up everywhere due to the pile-up, and it was unlikely anyone could get to Eli in person before he

caught wind of the news. “Eli, there’s been an accident on the 120..” His voice trailed off as he listened intently to the voice on the other end.

He stood up, and thrust his hand nervously into his pocket. “Yes, that one, your parents were involved in the accident. Ben and I were on site helping with the recovery efforts. Lucy’s is being rushed into emergency surgery as we speak. And..” again, he paused, as the person on the other end interrupted him. “Ben’s here, he’s spoken with the available medical staff, but there isn’t much to report yet. Eli, before you say anything else, look I’m sorry to have to deliver this news over the phone, but your parents..” He closed his eyes at the noise on the other end of the line, “no, I’m sorry, they didn’t make it.”

Andy walked away from the metal bench Ben was sitting on as he waited for the emotions on the other end of the phone to slow, he turned to glance back towards Ben, “No, wait! Eli, the highway is still backed up, all the traffic that is moveable is being detoured on the side roads. Emergency vehicles and wreckers are trying to access the highway to help get people and wreckage out so the road can open up again. If you head out now you’ll likely be sitting in traffic all night. If you hang tight where you are, it’ll be easier to reach you and update you on Lucy’s condition when Ben knows more. I know man, I know. I’m sorry to ask, but if you want to help, Ben mentioned that you’d be able to notify your other siblings? Are you sure? Thanks, Eli. Will do as soon as we know more. Again, I’m sorry. I will. Bye.”

Andy made his way back to the bench as he hung up and slumped down on the bench beside Ben. They sat in silence, neither saying anything; both deep in thought. Andy wished desperately that he could fix the broken pieces of the day in order to ease the pain his partner’s family was enduring, and Ben, steeped in his own grief, was struggling to keep his mind off the earlier accident. He found himself walking the dangerous path of analysing it, reliving every minute of it. Wondering what he could have done differently.



Author's Note:

[Chapter 2 can be found here.](#)

If you've read the Wordy Welcome, or a few of the stories on this website you'll know that while I've always enjoyed writing I've had seasons of feast and seasons of famine due to life circumstances.

I mentioned that during 2018 the passion and joy for writing was reawakened within when I made the crazy move to join NaNoWriMo that year. I wasn't even convinced I'd make it to my goal of 50,000 words. Nor, to be honest, was I convinced that I would be able to finish it in the time required, but much to my own shock, I did.

When I needed a moment to regroup after a difficult moment in my day, I turned to my story. My family was gracious enough to pitch in with dinner, eat a lot of leftovers, and run interference a few times over with my mother-in-law when her dementia was giving her a rough day.

I continued to work on this story throughout the end of 2018, and then I put it away. Not just for a short period of time, but for a year. I'm not sure I have a solid reason for that, but I could pretend I was using the sage advice of other writers to put away your work for a time before turning to edit mode, but that wouldn't be entirely honest. While I did originally put it up for that very reason, I found the task of editing difficult knowing I had many things I needed to clean up, scenes to add, research to do, and more.

All year simply editing Chapter 1 was on my to-do list, but this month I decided it was time to round up some willing Beta Readers and commit myself to the task. I know that a couple of my Beta Readers are reading, so I'm gonna throw them a great big huge Thank You!! I am very grateful!!

For those of you who didn't get to see all the crazy edits and changes, I hope you enjoy your first trip through Chapter 1.

The Reluctant Author
