

**The First Annual WOE.BEGONE Halloween Campfire Extravaganza**

We hear the sound of campfire ambiance: night air, fire crackling, maybe feet on dirt or gravel. We faintly begin to hear acoustic guitar.

MIKEY

I can't believe you brought that thing.

MIKE

Sly's going to kill you if you get it dirty. You know that, right?

MICHAEL

Relax. I made a time duplicate of it. The original's in the truck.

MIKE

Let me revise that, then. *I'm* going to kill you if you keep fiddling around with it.

MICHAEL

It's a campfire, partner. You gotta have someone playing guitar. It's the rules.

MIKEY

Is it also in the rules that the fire has to be enormous?

MICHAEL

Y'all don't wanna free out here, do ya?

MIKEY

It's not even that cold out, Michael.

MICHAEL

It's not that cold out because you're warm and cozy by the fire.

MIKEY

It keeps blowing smoke directly into my face. I hate it.

MICHAEL

Then move, pilgrim.

MIKEY

Every time I move, the wind changes and the smoke blows in my face all over again.

MICHAEL

Them's the rules, too. The wind rules. Otherwise, it wouldn't be a campfire. Now, if y'all will cooperate, it's finally dark enough that we can get around to why I brought you two chuckleheads out here.

MIKEY

You didn't bring us out here to go on the most grueling hike of our lives?

MIKE

He brought us out here to kill us. Put us through such a difficult hike that we're sore and can't get away. Fill us up with hot dogs so we're fattened up and slow. It's the perfect crime.

MIKEY

I don't care anymore. If he doesn't kill us, then he's going to make us sleep on the ground for, what, 3 days? Let him kill us.

MICHAEL clears his throat.

MICHAEL

I brought y'all out here so we could tell scary stories 'round the campfire. 'Tis the season and all that.

MIKE

Alright, Michael. I got one. You told us that we're going on an even longer hike tomorrow. That's the scariest story I can imagine.

MICHAEL

If y'all both tell a real campfire tale, we can go fishin' tomorrow, instead. How about that?

MIKEY

That's a good deal, Mike. We should consider.

MIKE

Consider what? I don't have a scary story. I don't sit around and memorize scary stories.

MIKEY

Just make one up.

MIKE

I can't just make one up!

MIKEY

[Groans.] Ugh, fine. I'll go first, then.

MICHAEL

Do you want me to provide the soundtrack?

We hear some faint guitar chords.

MIKEY

I don't.

The guitar stops.

MIKEY

See? Isn't that so much spookier? The quiet of the forest? The-

We hear rustling in the branches.

MIKEY

What was that!?! [Pause.] See? Scary, right?

MICHAEL

I weren't spooked. Tell your tale, pilgrim.

MIKEY

Ok... it was... a foggy autumn night, just like this one... except foggy.

MIKE  
Solid start.

MIKEY  
Shut up. It was a foggy autumn night, so foggy that you couldn't even see your hands in front of your face. A new moon. Pitch black. I was walking back to my cabin from Edgar's.

MIKE  
Oh, so this happened to *you* now?

MICHAEL  
Quit interruptin' him. It's a better story if it happened to you, right Mikey boy?

MIKEY [UNCONVINCING]  
No, this really happened... to me. Anyway, you two both know that there are woods all over the valley. The roads are pretty far from most of them, but certain parts go right up to the treeline. I was at one of those parts. And I was listening to a podcast so I couldn't hear very much. But I could hear this. It was a-

We hear a very loud snap of branches in the woods.

MIKEY  
Fuck, it was just like that. That's exactly what I was imagin-describing. Michael, I think someone is out there listening to us.

MICHAEL  
Nonsense. There's deer, bears, foxes, mountain lions, elk, all sorts of critters out there. They got just as much right to make noise out here all night as us. More, even. Keep going with your story, partner.

MIKEY  
Uh... okay. So, I hear this extremely loud sound, like a huge branch being snapped, in the woods right off the path. It was loud enough that it made me jump even though I was listening to something through my earbuds.

MICHAEL

Was you listenin' to Movies With Michael.

MIKEY

No. I'm trying to make this as realistic as possible. I wasn't listening to Movies With Michael. Anyway, the sound was loud enough that it felt like something was going on. Someone could be in trouble out there. I thought about calling Marissa, but she was on her route that night. So, I turned on the flashlight on my phone (which wasn't useful at all) and trudged into the woods alone.

MIKE

Why didn't you call Edgar?

MIKEY

Because it's a story, Mike.

MICHAEL

Because if there was somethin' out there, he didn't want Edgar gettin' hurt. Go on, Mikey.

MIKEY

Right. I wanted to protect Edgar, so I trudged off into the woods, alone. I made it about... 50 feet? 100 feet? Into the darkness. I turned back and shined my light and all I could see was trees and fog. I had to walk with my arms out so that I didn't run into a tree. Every now and then I would hear a sound and walk in that direction. The sounds were still loud. I still had my earbuds in. Up until... I didn't. All of a sudden, the left one fell out. Cheap pieces of crap never fit in my ear correctly. And because they were cheap pieces of crap, they didn't have a "find my earbuds" feature to find them with sound. And they were black, so I couldn't see it in the dark and the fog and the leaves on the ground. So, I get down on my hands and knees, still listening to I Am In Eskew in my left earbud, rustling around on the ground, getting dirty, trying to find this cheap earbud. Not worth the \$30, I'll tell you that much. I'm hunched over, searching. I end up scraping my hand against a

twig or something. Then, I finally see it. The earbud. It landed in a puddle. Just my luck. I reached out to pick it up... and..

MIKE Yells out in fear.

MIKEY

I felt a hand on my shoulder, trying to drag me backwards.

MIKE

Ah! Hey, you can't just grab me like that! That's cheating!

MIKEY

Cheating at telling a scary story?

MIKE

Yes!

MICHAEL

It ain't cheatin'. Point goes to Mikey.

MIKEY

You're interrupting the ambiance. I feel a hand on my shoulder grab me and pull me backward into the dirt. I scramble to my feet and look around. No one. The fog is so thick that someone could be right in front of me and I would never know it. I start running back as fast as I can, in the direction that I hoped I had come in. That's when the snapping sounds get closer and louder. It was like something enormous was chasing me through the woods, crushing anything that got in its way. I kept running and didn't look back. I could see the path coming up. There was a crack so loud it was like lightning struck right beside me. I kept running out of the woods and back to the path. It wasn't where I walked in, but it was close enough. I looked back to the woods. Nothing. I didn't stick around long enough to see if anything ever emerged. I walked back to Edgar's cabin and pretended that I thought I left my earbud there so that I wouldn't have to go to my empty cabin.

MIKE

Our brave protagonist.

MIKEY

I later heard a story about Oldbrush Valley, from the 20s, from around when the Oldbrush Valley song was written.

MICHAEL begins to play Ol' Brush Valley.

MIKE

Quit. That song is going to be stuck in my head all night.

MIKEY

It turns out that there was a man in the valley that the townsfolk accused of murder. They dragged him out into the woods and killed him. A witness described two men physically dragging him by the shoulders into those very woods. Someone later came forward and admitted to the murder. The man they killed was innocent.

MIKE

You're saying it was a ghost?

MIKEY

Be careful where you walk at night, Mike Walters.

MICHAEL

Good story, Mikey boy. See, we're havin' fun out here, ain't we? Mike, quit bein' sore that he spooked ya. It's your turn, pilgrim.

MIKE

Alright, you want a scary story? By god, you are going to get a scary story.

MIKEY

Can't wait.

MIKE

And it won't be some "it was a night just like this one" nonsense. It was a day. In the summer. Indoors. Still about me though. Me and Bruno.

MICHAEL

Where was I?

MIKE

You were out. I don't know. You go places all the time. You were wherever you normally go.

MICHAEL

Was I at Sly's place?

MIKE

Sure. You were at Sly's house. It was just me and Bruno in the apartment. You know that the apartment isn't quiet. It's not well insulated, it's close to the road, it creaks and croaks all the time, you can hear the downstairs neighbors and the upstairs neighbors. There is rarely any real peace and quiet. I was sitting on the sofa with Bruno. We were watching TV, some procedural crime drama show. Not something that rewards you for focusing on it. So, I was sitting there kinda zoned out, not paying attention to much, just scratching Bruno's head and watching TV. Zoning out made me sleepy, so I thought that I might go lie down for awhile. So, I turned off the TV with the intention of retiring to my bedroom. Once I turned off the TV, I realized that... everything was quiet. I couldn't hear the road, the neighbors, the building settling, the pipes, none of that. I wasn't the only one who noticed. Bruno's hackles went up and his ears went back. He knew that something was wrong. He leapt out of my lap and growled. He was looking toward the window.

MIKEY

What was outside?

MIKE

Nothing. That's the thing. Nothing was outside. It was day, but it was pitch black outside all of a sudden. Not the sort of dark that accompanies a solar eclipse. Nothing. Void. There was nothing out there. Pure darkness like you've never experienced before. Then, I heard a noise. A high pitched squeak, coming from the kitchen. Bruno rushed in there and started barking at the cabinet under the sink. Carefully, I approached the sink and slowly opened the door to the cabinet and... it was... a mouse. A tiny little mouse. Not the first time we have had a mouse

problem. Bruno tried to chase it but I made him sit and stay. I didn't want him to catch some disease from it.

MIKEY

That was anticlimactic.

MIKE

I'm not done yet. The squeaking was only the first sound I heard. Then I heard... even more squeaking. There were more mice, but I couldn't see them. I didn't realize where they were until they started crawling up out of the garbage disposal. They were in the pipes. Dozens of them, hundreds maybe. Covered in gunk and pouring out into the sink, then out into the room. Seeing how many there were, Bruno turned tail and ran. I did too but there were too many of them. I could feel them, crawling up onto me... I could feel them crawling up my... BACK! [Mike makes a scary noise.]

MIKEY

Ah! Jesus Mike.

MIKE

See? It's easy to get someone to jump if you touch them like that. So I was trying to shake the mice off of me when I realized that most of them were going somewhere. They were going to the living room, to the window. They stopped and stared at the window when they got there. The two things were related. Bruno was hiding in my bedroom. In a panic, I did the only thing that I could think of to do. I opened the window. I thought that I might get sucked out into the vacuum of space or something, but I didn't. Instead, the mice traveled up the wall to the window in a single-file line, filing out into the darkness, like they were programmed to do so, like an instinct. It took as long for them to file into the darkness as it did for them to crawl up through the pipes. Eventually, they were all gone. I shut the window. When I did, something fleshy replaced the dark void. Lips. It was a mouth. The being backed away from the window. Sunlight poured in and blinded me. I didn't see it fully as it moved along. It looked like an ancient god, knobby like some sort of sentient tree. It moved quickly and silently and was gone before I could see the whole of it. I tried to convince

myself that I had been dreaming. That I fell asleep on the couch. But I knew. I was awake and Bruno was on edge for a couple hours after that. I wasn't the only one who saw.

MIKEY

Well, I don't know if I'm spooked but I'm itchy now.

MICHAEL

You got the creepy crawlies.

MIKE

That counts.

MICHAEL

It's a good story, Mike. I thought I knew where it was goin' then it turned out you were takin' it somewhere else entirely. I like that. Ain't ya glad that I talked ya into telling a story?

MIKE

Thanks, Michael. I am glad. That was fun.

MICHAEL

And we saved the best for last, partner. Strap in, cause Big Bear Michael Walters is about to tell y'all the tale of Jedidiah Berriger.

MICHAEL plays a minor guitar chord.

MICHAEL

Now, Jedidiah Berriger was some surly folk, here in the valley in the 1890s. Oldbrush Valley was a famous destination for starting over and attracted all sorts of ornery types. Now, Jed here weren't born Jedidiah. He was born Reno Helt. Reno was a small time bank robber, occasional murderer. He made a good livin' off of it, even takin' on some kills for hire, until he got too famous for his escapades. He saw the writin' on the wall and headed west where no one would recognize his face. Start over, blend in. The good life was over, but he weren't hanged yet, so he could eek out a livin' in the west. He gets to town and finds a job with the Oldbrush Valley Logging Company as a lumberjack. The work is tough but no one pays him no mind, which

is all he cared about. It felt like honest work, which he came to appreciate. Some respite from his life of crime. Just a man, an axe, a saw.

We hear an axe chop into a nearby tree.

MIKEY

What was that?

MICHAEL

Critters rustlin'. Now, Jed ain't hard up for cash. He saved up plenty back east, but he needed to keep a job in order to not raise suspicion as to how he came into such wealth. He bought a house near town and kept to himself outside of work. His coworkers described him as intimidating. Someone who would get the work done without saying so much as a word to anyone else. Someone who kept his distance, physically. He always felt as though he was far away.

We hear another axe chop.

MIKEY

Michael, that isn't a "critter."

MICHAEL

Sure it is. Y'all need some more time outdoors. Jumpin' at every little thing. Heh. Back to Jed. He couldn't avoid everyone forever. Eventually, someone was going to get curious and approach him. It was early evening on a day of rest. Jed had just eaten dinner when he hears a knock on the door. Not expecting company, he grabs his six shooter and tucks it into his pants. He opens the door and it is another lumberjack, fella name of Harvey Broughton. Big fella. All of them were. You don't work as a lumberjack without putting some muscle on. Harvey explains that he don't live too damn far away and that his chickens laid more eggs than he could eat this week and wanted to know if Jed wanted 'em. Jed says sure, why not. He's not trying to be inhospitable. That would draw attention to him. Harvey asks if he can come in a spell and Jed hems and haws but he says yes, in the interest of not rockin' the boat.

We hear another axe chop.

MIKEY

I'm going to figure out what's making that noise.

MICHAEL

Sit down, pilgrim. Sometimes elk will smack their antlers into trees to keep 'em healthy and sharp.

MIKE

I don't think that's true...

MICHAEL

So Jed and Harvey are sittin' around the kitchen table, making small talk about work and chickens and the valley. After an hour or so, Jed says he better get headed to bed. Work is bright and early in the morning. Harvey says "yeah, guess you should. Gonna have some of those eggs for breakfast, Reno?" Jed looks at him, asks what he just said. Harvey says, "you remember my brother, Reno?" Before Jed can respond, Harvey leaps over the table at him with a knife that he had been concealing in his pocket. He tackles Jed to the ground, pins him down, draws the knife. And with one swift motion...

We hear the axe again.

MICHAEL

Right in the eyeball. Harvey thinks that it is all over, but only for a moment. Only until the knife actually strikes the eyeball. It glances off. Harvey looks again. It's a glass eye. Nobody had ever gotten close enough to realize that Jed had a glass eye. Jed capitalized on this moment of confusion, pushing him back, producing his six-shooter, and firing twice into Harvey's chest.

We hear two gunshots. MIKE and MIKEY exclaim.

MICHAEL

Sit your asses down. Harvey falls to the floor. Jed calmly pops out his fake eye, sets it in the kitchen sink, goes back over to the knife. Bends over to pick it up. And it just when he is

picking it up, that very moment, as his hand makes contact with  
the handle that-

We hear AUGUST yell out and grab Mike and Mikey in order to  
scare them. Mike and Mikey cry out in surprise.

MIKE  
Jesus!

MIKEY  
Ah! What the fuck, August?

MIKE  
Was that you the whole time?

AUGUST  
Got you boys! Haha! Michael, tell 'em how Jedidiah's story ends.

MICHAEL  
It was just as he was about to pick up the knife that Harvey  
launches onto him again, wrestles the knife away from him and in  
one last action... plunges it deep into Jed's open eyesocket,  
before dying beside him. The end. And *that's* how you spook your  
buddies around the campfire.

AUGUST  
We got 'em good, Big Bear.

MICHAEL  
We sure did, Badger.

MICHAEL and AUGUST laugh.

MIKE  
How long have you been out there?

AUGUST  
Only a couple hours. Me and Michael planned this out about a  
week ago. Went out here and picked a spot where y'all wouldn't  
see me. Drove up here this evening, then snuck out here while

y'all were busy with the fire. My truck's on the other side of them trees.

MICHAEL

I told y'all that I was savin' the best for last.

MIKE

I will admit to getting spooked.

MIKEY

Me, too, begrudgingly.

AUGUST

Michael wins this one, boys. Now, how about Michael plays us a tune while I dig out the marshmallows. We're makin' smores.

MICHAEL

This one's called Ol' Brush Valley.

MICHAEL begins to play Ol' Brush Valley. MIKE, MIKEY and AUGUST make small talk (walla) as the voices fade out. We are left with night ambiance again. There is a considerable pause of just night air noises and then, finally, we hear the sound of an axe chopping again from no known origin. The theme song (?) plays.