

WOE . BEGONE
EPISODE 98

We hear gas station ambiance: cars, background chatter, the bell ringing when the door opens, etc.

MARISSA

Didn't know what drink to get you so I got us both root beer.
Good choice?

AUGUST

You didn't have to do that, Marissa. But, yeah, root beer's fine. [Pause.] You bought a cowboy hat while you were in there?

MARISSA

I wanted to match! We better get to where we're going soon so that I can actually wear it. I feel like I've been in that motorcycle helmet for 100 years.

AUGUST

You get used to it. And it ain't too terribly far where we're going. A couple hours. [Sighs wistfully.]

MARISSA

How ya holding up, big guy? You look a little distant.

AUGUST

I'm hangin' in there. Got caught up in my own thoughts, is all. I messaged Big Bear and told 'im that I'm sorry for this whole mess and he told me to quit apologizin'. So I told him sorry for apologizin' and he copied and pasted the message he sent me the first time.

MARISSA

He'll never let you apologize to him. He's waaay too romantic for that. It's hard-coded into every Mike Walters. Mikey is the same way with Edgar. It's disgusting. He loves with his whole big mushy disgusting heart. I don't wanna see that. [Pause] So, are you going to tell me where we're going yet?

AUGUST

You'll see when we get there. It's a surprise.

MARISSA

Is it the good kind of surprise? Because you're starting to make me nervous. I thought we were going to the Grand Canyon, but we would have gone the other direction a long time ago if that's where we were going. In fact, if we're not going to the Gulf of Mexico, then I don't think you're taking me on a sightseeing trip at all.

AUGUST

Nope, that ain't it. You ain't gonna guess. Hell, I ain't even sure what's gonna be waitin' for us when we get there. It's a mystery I been puttin' together for awhile now. So, I don't even know if it's gonna be the good kind of surprise. It's gonna be a surprise for me, too.

MARISSA

Spill the beans, Sly. Enough of this beating around the bush. We've been riding for hours. It's time for some answers. Where the hell are we going!?

AUGUST

We should really get goin' if we're gonna get there by sunset...

MARISSA

Bullshit. I know what you're trying to pull here. Once we get on that motorcycle, it'll be too loud for you to explain. That's exactly what you want. C'mon. Tell me.

AUGUST

You're just like Michael said you were, you know that?

MARISSA

I assume that that's a compliment. Talk.

AUGUST

It is. He thinks the world of you, you know.

MARISSA

I'm immune to flattery. Talk.

AUGUST

Fine. [Pause.] I've been getting these strange letters recently. Actual letters, written on paper, in my mailbox, so whoever is doin' this knows where I live. And I don't give out my address if I can help it. No return address on the letters. And whoever's writin' the letters knows me. I think they know me? There's these stories about me in the letters, except none of the stories ever actually happened to me. I don't know what any of 'em mean. Why would someone make up stories about me?

MARISSA

So we're tracking down your pen pal? Are you sure that this is a good idea? Because, to me, that sounds not too dissimilar from Mustardseed. He sent us all kinds of anonymous messages trying to manipulate us into doing what he wanted us to do. Unless you're saying that you're ready for a confrontation with this bozo, in which case, I've got your back, Sly. I just didn't know that I was going to be shooting someone on this trip.

AUGUST

No, no! Nothin' like that. Ain't like Mustardseed at all. These are *happy* stories. Stories about me and Big Bear livin' our lives out on the ranch, stuff like that. Problem is, none of the stories are real. I'd remember 'em if they happened. Like, I'd remember if Michael rigged up fireworks for the 4th of July but he did it wrong and one of 'em almost hit him. There ain't even been a 4th of July since he started stayin' with me.

MARISSA

Could still be someone like Mustardseed. Wouldn't rule Mustardseed *himself* out, if I'm being honest. Maybe he's back and he's switched tactics? He *is* Edgar and Edgar *is* clever, after all. You win more flies with honey than vinegar. Maybe he's trying to butter you up for some reason.

AUGUST

Mustardseed is still in the compound, far as I know. I don't got much respect for Ty Betteridge, but I don't think he would let Mustardseed loose without telling us.

MARISSA

Think about it, Sly. Mustardseed knew about the Elder Hunter situation, these letters start showing up in your mailbox, and then the Hunters show up and turn Base upside down *because of the Elder Hunter situation*? You don't think there are any dots to connect there?

AUGUST

...I'm not sure.

MARISSA

And how do you know where to find this guy, anyway?

AUGUST

He didn't make it hard to track him down. He left some breadcrumbs in the letters. He sent me a postcard from the town he's stayin' in. Mentioned the name of the bar he frequents in the letters, said he sat down every week in a booth and wrote to me. So I reckon all we gotta do is go there.

MARISSA

And if we can't find him?

AUGUST

Don't matter. Weren't the point of this trip, anyway. Michael wanted me to get away from Base and the ranch for awhile and I was happy to oblige. They can't spy on me on the open road. Trust me, I checked the VMAX all over for bugs before we took off. Did you know they was spyin' on me, Marissa?

MARISSA

No, I didn't. Base doesn't consult me on that type of thing. That's more Edgar and Anne's deal. They're all jumpy and precautious and thinking 38 moves ahead. Not my style. I like to fight the battles that are directly in front of me. One move at a time.

AUGUST

Makes things easier that way, that's for sure.

MARISSA

[Sighs.] Well, while I do hope that you aren't leading us into a trap, I did bring my sidearm and using it to defend ourselves no-questions-asked is becoming more and more legal the further south we go. And we should keep an eye out for the tank, while we're at it. Ryan left it in the desert somewhere... and we're in the desert somewhere...

AUGUST

You gonna ride behind me in the tank? Sounds like slow goin'.

MARISSA

You'd be in the tank *with* me, duh. We'd just upgrade our ride.

AUGUST [DEFENSIVE]

I ain't leavin' my VMAX behind, Marissa. That's my pride and joy.

MARISSA

Suit yourself. I prefer the tank.

AUGUST

We'll deal with that if we actually find it. You about ready to hit the open road?

MARISSA

Yeah. Let's do it. But keep an eye out for the tank. I'm being serious. It really could be around here somewhere.

AUGUST

You got it, boss.

We hear motorcycle noises as it starts and they ride off. **WALLA FOR BOTH CHARACTERS: "WOO! WOOHOO! HELL YEAH! YEEHAW!" PRETEND YOU ARE RIDING A REALLY COOL MOTORCYCLE DOWN A DUSTY HIGHWAY IN TEXAS.**

INTRO THEME PLAYS

We hear bar ambiance: patrons talking, a musician playing in the background, pool, glasses etc.

AUGUST

Here it is. The Outpost Tavern. Right where the letters said it would be.

MARISSA

...Do you see him?

AUGUST

I don't know who I'm looking for. Someone in a booth writing a letter? But all I see is people enjoyin' their drinks. Let's just get settled in and see what catches our eye. Let him come to us.

MARISSA

I wish you had let me get that tank on the way here.

AUGUST

That wasn't your tank! That was on an Army base!

MARISSA [TEASING]

I coulda got it off the Army base no problem. Where do you think the first tank came from?

AUGUST

Very funny. This is just a dive bar. We ain't in any danger.

MARISSA [SARCASTIC]

Au contraire. Now that I've seen the inside of this place, I'm positive. Whoever sent you the letters was luring you in here to kill you and whoever you show up with. This is a place where old-timey bar brawls and western shootouts happen. It's been a pleasure knowing you, Sly. We're going out in a hail of gunfire together. If only we had a tank.

AUGUST

C'mon. It ain't that bad. They got a live band and everything. It's just a little dark and rustic, is all. It ain't *that* much dirtier than the Sidewinder. I ain't scareda no cowboy bar.

MARISSA

I haven't seen the Sidewinder, but you might want to do a deep clean of the place if this place is only a little dirtier. Oh, hey! Darts! You like darts, Sly?

AUGUST

Love darts. Big Bear's got a story about you and him playin' darts, you know.

MARISSA [CONFUSED]

No... I don't know. I've never played darts with him. And I don't think I've ever played darts with Mikey, either. You sure it was me?

AUGUST

I don't think it "happened" if that makes sense? Big Bear's got decades of memories about stuff that... used to have happened... but now they didn't happen or aren't going to happen or something like that. Like he's been around for a hundred years. I can't say I fully understand it.

MARISSA

Time travel bullshit. He's been back and forth through time so much that his brain turned to jelly. That's why I try to stay in the here-and-now if at all possible.

AUGUST

Yeah, me too. That stuff scares me. I love Big Bear but I'm scared that there's gonna be ten of me runnin' around, gettin' into who-knows-what, combining and splittin' apart. Michael don't lead the most peaceful life. He turned into a cowboy after enough of this. What would I turn into? A pirate?

MARISSA

Make it work, then. I'm caught up in this too, and there are no iterations of me. There's only one Marissa and that's all there ever will be. One of a kind.

AUGUST

The gen-u-ine article.

MARISSA

Yup. Did I beat Michael in the story where I played darts with him?

AUGUST

Y'all were on the same team but you whooped the other guys so bad that it didn't even matter how terrible Michael was at darts. Started a big fight right in the middle of your mission. Michael hates darts. I've been tryin' to teach him how to get better at it, but he gets frustrated and gives up after a few minutes of putting new holes in my wall. I think there's some kinda mental block there.

MARISSA

I knew it. Of course I could kick his ass at darts.

AUGUST

Sylvester August Baxter, on the other hand? You've got your work cut out for you tonight. Are you ready to get whooped, Marissa?

MARISSA

Bring it on, Sly!

THERE IS A MUSICAL INTERLUDE.

The music ends and there is some applause and whooping. **MICHAEL AND MARISSA cheer along out of politeness.**

MARISSA

Finally, some peace and quiet so that I can focus on finishing the job.

AUGUST

I'm rollin' over and beggin' for mercy, Marissa. I'm too far behind. I'll never catch up.

MARISSA

No mercy. Time to end this. Aaaannnd...

We hear a dart strike the dart board.

MARISSA

That's game. Next round of drinks is on you. I thought you said you were gonna whoop me, Sly.

AUGUST

I only knew you was better than Michael. I didn't know ya was good. There's a big distinction there. Ya tried harder and had more practice than me. That's cheatin'.

MARISSA [LAUGHING]

That sounds like something Michael would say.

AUGUST

Well, he is my Big Bear.

MARISSA

He's rubbing off on you. Maybe he made you worse at darts.

AUGUST

Ya know what? I want a rematch.

MARISSA

Gladly. You can buy drinks for me all night long if you want to.

AUGUST

Fat chance. You might have the advantage but I'm givin' it my all next go 'round. I'll be a whole new August. So, you go ahead and get everything set up again. I'll be back in a minute with our drinks.

We follow August to the bar.

AUGUST

Howdy. I'll have two Yellow Roses, thank ya very kindly.

There is a pause as August waits for his beers. **AUGUST whistles nonchalantly to himself.**

AUGUST [CONFUSED]

Huh? [Pause.] That's not... What is goin' on?

AUGUST walks hurriedly back to the darts.

MARISSA

Coming back empty handed? You owe me one, Sly-

AUGUST [INTERRUPTING]

Michael is here.

MARISSA

No, Michael is on a mission for Hunter-

AUGUST

MICHAEL IS HERE. I JUST SAW HIM.

MARISSA

No, that doesn't make any sense. I specifically remember him and MW receiving orders for a field mission. That's why he isn't here on the motorcycle trip with us. You were there for that conversation. You know that Michael can't be here. And he would have told us if he finished early and wanted to meet up with us.

AUGUST [HALF-WHISPER]

Look. [Pause] See? That's him. In that booth right there.

MARISSA

Are you sure he doesn't just have the same hat as Michael? All of you cowboys sorta look alike to me. And that one looks like he has a scar across his face. Michael didn't have that.

AUGUST

That's him. He coulda got that scar on the mission.

MARISSA

No, if he got it on the mission, then it would still be an open wound. That's a *big* scar, Sly. It would have taken weeks to fully heal up. He didn't get that *today*. That can't be Michael.

AUGUST

Marissa, I'm as sure as I've ever been that that's Big Bear. I know him when I see him. I say we go over there and confront him.

MARISSA

[Sighs.] You know him better than I do. And you'll need backup incase this turns into a gunfight with this stranger that mathematically cannot be Michael. I've got your back. And if this is all an elaborate ruse you're pulling to get out of losing at another round of darts then you owe me *two* drinks.

AUGUST

This ain't a game. That's really him. Now, follow my lead.

There is a pause as they approach the booth.

AUGUST

Mi-Michael?

MICHAEL jumps and is extremely startled.

MARISSA

Shit, it really is Michael. What the fuck are you doing here?

MICHAEL

Sly? Marissa!? You're not supposed to know I'm here.

MARISSA

And why is that, exactly!?

AUGUST

Did Base tell you to follow us, Big Bear? Not you too!

MICHAEL

Base? What? No. What are you doing? Why did you come find me?

AUGUST

You're not making any sense, Michael. *We're* here because *you* told us to take some time away from Base. You told *us* not to tell you where we was goin' so that information wouldn't propagate so we could have some private time. You followed *us* here.

MICHAEL

I didn't follow ya, Sly. Why'd ya pick a dingy bar in Texas?

AUGUST

Because *someone* has been leavin' letters in my mailbox.

MICHAEL [EMBARRASSED]

God dammit. I got sloppy, huh? Shit! The postcard. I didn't have anything to write on that day and I found it in the bar and I weren't even thinkin' about how it had the town name on it.

AUGUST

Those were from you? Why would you leave them in the mailbox, then? That's your place, too. You coulda just handed 'em to me.

MARISSA

...That's not your Michael.

AUGUST

...That's not my Michael. Damn. Sorry for bein' so slow on the uptake, it's just that I never even considered that there were other Michaels runnin' around out there. [Pause.] Does Base know about you?

MICHAEL

No. And they can't ever know or else Ty will get in a mess of trouble for lettin' me go.

MARISSA

Why the hell would we care if Ty gets in trouble? Fuck that guy.

MICHAEL

No, this Ty was different. He treated me right, even when the others wouldn't. There was a power outage at the compound and he risked his life to let me go free. He made me promise to never contact Base because if the compound found out about me they would kill him. I owe him my life. I made a huge mistake sendin' them letters. I never thought you'd hunt me down. I was just missin' my Badger somethin' fierce.

AUGUST [MOVED]

Aww... Big Bear...

MARISSA

So how'd you get the scar on your face? Drunken bar brawl?

MICHAEL

Flinchite Compound. It's a rough place to be. The plan was to wear me down until I was all the way used up.

MARISSA

That's awful, Michael.

MICHAEL

But Ty let me go and I'm gettin' settled here now. Findin' some peace and quiet.

PATRON [OBLIVIOUS TO INTERRUPTING]

Hey! Michael! Great job up there tonight! You sounded great!

MICHAEL

Thank ya very kindly, partner.

PATRON

And Paul's really takin' a shine to that mandolin, huh?

MICHAEL

Yessir. Taught him everything he knows.

PATRON

Hell yeah. You guys playin' against next weekend?

MICHAEL

You know it.

PATRON

Well, I'll let you get back to your business. Have a nice night.

MICHAEL

Thanks. You, too. Take care.

MARISSA

So that was you!

AUGUST

...I thought that sounded like you up there!

MARISSA

Leave it to Michael to play original songs in a dive bar. You know most people wanna hear covers, right?

AUGUST

You sounded *great*, Big Bear!

MARISSA

Don't let him gas you up. You sounded *alright* up there, Michael.

MICHAEL

Thanks. I've been gettin' a lot of practice in.

AUGUST

Now, when he said *Paul*, he didn't mean the Paul that you told me about... The one from Alaska that you threw overboard?

MICHAEL

Sure did. Can't contact Base, but I can try and put out a couple fires for 'em. I tracked him down and made things right with him. Told him to move down here with me where the weather would be easier on his joints, considering what Mike did to him. And the rest is history. He's thrivin' down here. I'm teachin' him to play the mandolin. He plays it a little too much like a guitar, but he's learnin'. So I let him play in the band. Who knows what he would have been up to up there in Alaska if I left him to his own devices. He was holdin' a lot of resentment when I found him and for good reason. I had to put the cowboy charm on him, to be sure.

MARISSA

That's... mighty kind of you, Michael.

MICHAEL

It's nothin'. Paul's a great guy. We were good buds before things went south out there, after all.

MARISSA

I guess you of all people can't write off someone just because they threatened to blackmail you.

MICHAEL

If I did, I wouldn't have no friends at all.

MARISSA

So what are you going to do, now that you're free?

MICHAEL

[Sighs.] Live my life. It ain't what I really wanted, but it's what I got. I'm gonna play the hand I was dealt. I miss y'all. I miss Edgar and Mike and Mikey. But if I have to say goodbye to keep everyone safe, I'll grin and bear it for y'all.

AUGUST [SAD]

...But you don't got a Badger out here... do ya?

MICHAEL

Sure don't.

AUGUST

Marissa, is there some way that we could use the Calculator to make another one of me? For Michael?

MARISSA

You were just talking to me this afternoon about how you wanted to avoid all of that iteration nonsense! Absolutely not, August. You see what a mess Michael's in. It's a slippery slope. Sorry, Michael.

MICHAEL

Nah, Marissa's right. Can't iterate your way outta this pickle. 'Sides, that wouldn't be the Sylverter August Baxter I fell in love with. It's you and your Michael that got all the stories together. I didn't even get to see it all play out. All my stories are from a time that never happened. We was still makin' eyes at each other when I had to leave.

AUGUST sniffles.

MICHAEL

C'mon, Badger. You ain't allowed to be sadder about this'n I am.
I'll keep writin' ya letters. Take all that love you feel and
give it to your Michael when ya get back, okay?

AUGUST [SAD]

Okay.

MARISSA

Hey let's change the subject- if you want to keep doing Base some
favors in the background, I've got a biiiig one you can do for
us.

MICHAEL

Anything. What is it?

MARISSA [RATTLING OFF]

So (and this is a very long story short) Ryan and CANNONBALL
captured me in the tank that I took to the meeting with Ed Man
and MDawg and when I was with them, Ryan said that Ravi was back
and causing problems with them. The Flinchites swooped in at the
last second before Ryan could kill us and sent them into
"storage"(?), but Ravi is still out there somewhere and we have
no idea what he's up to or what he wants with us, if anything at
all. So... could you track him down for us? Also thank you for
saving him and fuck you for not telling me (but I already gave
our Michael and earful about all that). Also, Cole's a traitor,
but that seems like it might be unrelated.

MICHAEL

I don't know who Cole is. Or Ed-Man and MDawg for that matter
but I can use my imagination. Ravi is doing... what?

MARISSA

Working with Flinch. Keep up, Michael.

MICHAEL

Sorry. It sounds like a lot has happened since I was there.

MARISSA

...And your boyfriend here is in the hot seat because the Hunters run the Base now and they know who killed Elder Hunter... Did you know that Sly kills Elder Hunter?

AUGUST

Marissa! You shouldn't have told him that!

MICHAEL

Mustardseed told me. We got to chat every once in awhile if the experiment involved both of us. But the Hunters know. Fuck.

AUGUST

I'm gonna be okay, Big Bear. Just leave all of that up to me and to... my... Michael. We've got it under control.

MARISSA

And if they try to lay a finger on Sly, they're going to have hell to pay from me.

MICHAEL

I knew you two'd get along great.

MARISSA

I gotta give it to you guys. I'm digging the cowboy lifestyle. At least the part where I get to ride around on a motorcycle and kick Sly's ass at darts.

MICHAEL

She beat you at darts, too, huh?

AUGUST

It weren't even close.

MICHAEL

Did he tell you the story about us playing darts on a mission, Marissa?

MARISSA

You mean how your inability to hit a dartboard almost jeopardized the whole thing? Yeah, he told me.

MICHAEL

You don't know the half of it. I hate darts.

MARISSA

You wanna head back over there so I can kick both of your asses
this time?

AUGUST

No ma'am.

MICHAEL

Hell no. There's a poker game in the back, if y'all wanna join
it with me. Get to meet the guys, see what I've been up to since
I been out here. It'll be fun.

MARISSA

A poker game? Is that... legal?

MICHAEL

Are you a cop?

MARISSA

Hell no. Let's do it.

AUGUST

Are all of your new buddies gonna be okay if I waltz in and take
all their cash? I don't wanna make a bad impression.

MARISSA

He said that he was going to beat me at darts, too.

AUGUST

This is different.

MARISSA

I'll believe you're good at poker when I see it. You better not
blow all of our money tonight. We still need money for snacks,
gas, the hotel room...

MICHAEL

Y'all ain't staying in no hotel tonight, Marissa. You're stayin' with me. Least I could do since y'all came all the way out here.

AUGUST

That's awful kind of ya, Michael.

MICHAEL

Not a problem.

We hear the door to the back room swing open.

MICHAEL

Howdy, y'all. This is Sly and this is Marissa. They're dear old friends of mine. Y'all got room for three more at the table?

AUGUST

Sylvester August Baxter. Pleased to make your acquaintances.

MARISSA

Hi! I'm Marissa.

BACKROOM WALLA: THIS IS IN A BACKROOM POKER GAME. MICHAEL HAS SHOWN UP AND IS INTRODUCING THE GANG TO HIS OLD FRIENDS SLY AND MARISS.

"HEY!" "MICHAEL!" "YOU MADE IT!" "You did great out there tonight," "Let me deal you in," "Hi there, fellas." "Have a seat, you three," "Hello Sly," "Hey Marissa," "Howdy," "Do you have a drink yet Michael?," "Great set tonight, you gotta teach me to sing like that," "I saw you two at Michael's table earlier, how's it going?" and ad-libs.

WALLA FOR AUGUST AND MARISSA: "Hey!," "Nice to meet you!" "Any of you seen an abandoned tank around here?" "Haha, he's a really good singer, ain't he?" and ad-libs.

Sounds of the poker room fade out.

END THEME PLAYS.