

You think about a story idea... there's a man who lives his whole life looking for the answer... but you don't know how to finish the story... but you think about how we're all trying to look for some kind of answer. Maybe "looking for an answer" is the foundation of narrative. We're looking for some kind of meaning which connects to a deep question inside of us. There's something we want to hear.

You think of this as you sit at the little table which serves as "kitchen" table in your little apartment that doesn't really have a kitchen, while you eat a kiwifruit and some peanuts that came in their shells. You're having an afternoon snack, on the weekend. Thinking about this, you wonder if your friends might be at Mitzi's. Yes, you need to go to Mitzi's to see if you can talk to them.

So you go there.

MITZI'S CAFE

Exactly the way you remember it, except there are different people inside.

You open the door and enter.

You get your drink and find that both Julia and Brian are already here, playing a game of Scrabble.

YOU: Hey.

BRIAN: Hey, Beth.

JULIA: Hey, look at what I played.

The word "uxorious".

YOU: Where did you learn that word? Were you in a spelling bee in a previous life?

JULIA: No, but I had been a kid in a small town in the 1960s and all I had was an encyclopedia set and dictionaries to pass the time, so I read a lot of random words.

YOU: Okay, what does it mean?

JULIA: I don't know. Brian?

BRIAN: I don't know, either.

YOU: So we don't know if we're having a uxorious day or not.

JULIA: No.

BRIAN: No.

YOU: How is the game going?

JULIA: We're losing interest.

BRIAN: Yeah.

YOU: Maybe we should have a spelling bee instead.

JULIA: No, I think we're just running out of interest in playing games.

BRIAN: Yeah.

YOU: It's one of those afternoons?

JULIA: We were playing Jenga before.

YOU: Okay, so you've had your fill.

BRIAN: Yeah.

YOU: So other than getting this green tea, the reason I came here was to talk about writing.

BRIAN: Anything in particular?

YOU: I was trying to write a story. All I have so far is that I know it has to be about a man who lives his whole life trying to find the answer. Whatever "the answer" could mean. I think "the answer" could be, just looking for the meaning which speaks to a question in us, some way we want to be meant to. So it's what we're always looking for.

BRIAN: Right, that sounds right.

JULIA: So what happens next in your story?

YOU: I don't know. That's all I know.

BRIAN: Yeah, I think that's every story. So it makes it hard to think of anything. Do you know anything about the man?

YOU: No.

JULIA: Could it actually be a woman?

YOU: Maybe, but I think it's really a man. I mean, that's what I thought it was at first.

JULIA: It's a man.

BRIAN: Yeah.

YOU: Huh...

A pause.

YOU: Well, I guess we're all stumped. Anything you guys want to tell me?

BRIAN: Yeah. I had an interesting experience while trying to write my book. I was trying to get work done but it got harder and harder. And it's still hard. But now I feel like I can do it. I broke through something and I know I can keep going, although it will be harder from now on.

JULIA: Is it painful?

BRIAN: Yeah, it's kind of painful.

YOU: But you keep going.

BRIAN: Yeah, it's my grace to keep going. All these years, I enjoyed work, the process. I still enjoy it, but it's not pure joy. Now it's joy mixed with pain. But not the worst kind of pain.

JULIA: So this is how things are for now.

BRIAN: Yeah, that's all I can ever see.

JULIA: That's true. What's here is all there is, until it is not.

BRIAN: So now, instead of having to give up, I can keep going, for a long time.

YOU: Why didn't you give up?

BRIAN: I guess I've gotten used to keeping-going. And one thing I remember right now, too, is the story of Raïssa Maritain. She was Jacques Maritain's wife, and she led him in some ways. She got into experiencing the presence of God. And at first it was glorious. But for more than ten years, it was painful. But she kept doing it because what's love if you don't suffer for it sometimes?

JULIA: That's how I feel about life.

BRIAN: You must really love life.

YOU: What does the pain feel like?

BRIAN: It's not very strong but enough that I feel it. I feel like I'm forcing myself to do something, kind of unnatural. I can feel it in my gut and in my brain, kind of a locking up.

JULIA: Brian, you should never force yourself to do something.

YOU: Are you being sarcastic, Julia?

JULIA: I don't know. I don't know why I said that. I was just saying words. I will say that if people forced themselves to do unnatural things in certain circumstances, the world would be a better place.

BRIAN: Yeah, but I think you need to do the thing that really suits you.

YOU: But you're keeping-going.

BRIAN: Yeah.

YOU: How about you, Julia, any news?

JULIA: Yeah... I've had a lot of trouble finding my first dates. So I'm thinking I have to change my lifestyle a little bit.

BRIAN: You're giving us bad news.

JULIA: Yeah, it's bad news. I'm going to have to hang out with some of my other friends more, see if my man can be accessed through them. So I won't be with you all for a while.

BRIAN: I guess this is the answer you're looking for.

JULIA: Yeah. I'm also looking for the answer to why this is the answer I'm looking for.

BRIAN: Beth, maybe this is the story you can write.

YOU: I can't. I can't make Julia into a man.

JULIA: That has never happened to me in all my transformations.

BRIAN: So how long will your separation last?

JULIA: I don't know. As long as it takes, I guess. But I'll be around sometimes. Just not very often.

YOU: Julia, this is too bad. But you have to do what you have to do.

JULIA: Maybe I could try feeling bad all the time, like Brian.

YOU: Is that how your story is supposed to go?

JULIA: No, you're right. It is what it is. For now.

BRIAN: And then you're going to die.

JULIA: Yeah...

YOU: I think sometimes, you don't understand a person's life until they die.

JULIA: I never understand my phases until I'm done with them.

BRIAN: It's like you can't know. If you understood, for real, you would change. And then you wouldn't be yourself anymore.

JULIA: Yeah, so maybe we can never really know ourselves and be ourselves at the same time. Like Heisenberg ["high zen burg"].

BRIAN: So... what if we were answers? We're spending our lives looking for the answer, and maybe sometimes we're the answer. But we can never get ourselves. We can never get our own selves as answers to any of our questions.

JULIA: And we never know ourselves until the day we die.

BRIAN: Maybe not even then. But we had the answer the whole time. It wasn't up to us to understand the answer, but just to have it.

YOU: That would be an interesting thing to do with my story.

BRIAN: Yeah, it would be.

YOU: But then, maybe it's too universal to help me

too much. Maybe everyone is that way.

BRIAN: Not everyone is that way. Some people aren't looking hard for an answer. They don't make it to become an answer.

JULIA: Do they go to hell?

BRIAN: I don't know, maybe some of them.

JULIA: I'm going to miss your theisticness, Brian.

BRIAN: I'll miss you, too. What are these friends of yours?

JULIA: They're friends.

BRIAN: Are they safe?

JULIA: They're okay.

BRIAN: Do they do drugs?

JULIA: No.

BRIAN: Do they steal things?

JULIA: No.

BRIAN: Commit other crimes?

JULIA: Are you worried about me, Brian?

BRIAN: No. Definitely not. You'll be fine.

JULIA: Thank you. I think what you're really worried about is whether I'm going to drift away from you. From your truth.

YOU: Isn't it your truth, too, Julia?

JULIA: Yes, a lot of it is my truth.

YOU: Do you think you'll be able to stay true to your truth, to the parts that you share with us, when you're far away?

JULIA: I think I will be able to.

BRIAN: But it will be hard. You'll have to be in pain and be unnatural.

JULIA: If you want one part of your life to be natural, another part has to be unnatural. You just have to choose.

BRIAN: Yeah.

Joe the barista comes by.

JOE: Hey fellow human beings. We had a mishap in our cookie-baking process and we have some complimentary burnt cookies. Are you guys interested?

YOU: How burnt are they?

JOE: Take a look.

He produces some cookies.

BRIAN: Wow, that's pretty burnt. I don't know about that.

JOE: Okay, suit yourself. But remember, there's no "I" in "complimentary".

BRIAN: There is. It's spelled c-o-m-p-l-i-m-e-n-t-a-r-

y.

JOE: But is that an uppercase I?

BRIAN: You're right, it's not.

JOE: How about it? Burnt cookie from our award-winning bakery department. This opportunity isn't ever going to come your way again, I assure you.

BRIAN: It's tempting, but I'll pass.

JOE: Either of you?

JULIA: No.

YOU: No thanks.

JOE: Okay. Well, I guess I'll have to eat them myself.

Joe walks away, munching on a cookie.

YOU: So in the story... Wait, if I write a story about a man who's looking for the answer... I still don't know what kind of story to write.

BRIAN: Maybe you could do something autobiographical. What's the answer you're looking for in your own life?

YOU: You mean, what's my question?

BRIAN: What's your question?

YOU: I don't know. I don't really know.

BRIAN: Are you looking for forgiveness?

YOU: No, I don't think so.

BRIAN: Are you looking for reality?

YOU: No.

BRIAN: Are you sure?

YOU: Maybe sometimes I am. I don't know. I don't know if that's what my question really is.

BRIAN: Maybe if you're passionate but you don't know, it's because you want reality.

YOU: I'm not sure if I'm passionate. Do I have to be passionate?

BRIAN: Some people operate in a quiet register. Did you take math in college?

YOU: No. I was pretty sure I was going to be a writer. I only took one class when I was a freshman.

BRIAN: Somewhere in college math there's the idea of parameterizing. When you parameterize, you take one variable and substitute it for other variables. One variable drives two or more other variables. So let's say you're looking at the equation of a ball moving forward and bouncing at the same time. There's something that makes the ball move forward, and something that makes it move up and down. If you want, you can express things in terms of the relationship between the ball moving forward and the ball moving up and down.

YOU: That's like $y = mx + b$.

BRIAN: Right. But you can also express things in terms of, there's something which moves the ball forward, like the inertia it has after someone threw it, and there's something that moves it up and down, which is the initial potential energy turning into kinetic energy through gravity and then experiencing the normal force when it hits the ground and it goes up again. These two components are each a function of, as though driven by, time. So you can turn the $y = mx + b$ type equation into something like $y = t$ and $t / m = x$ -- something like that. Don't quote me on how to do a parameterization. But it's just a case where an underlying reality drives two more apparent realities.

YOU: So how does that relate?

BRIAN: Your passion plugs into other equations, but they're not necessarily loud equations. A person can have a big passion and it comes out quiet.

YOU: But my passion is quiet on the inside.

BRIAN: Maybe you aren't passionate then.

YOU: I think I might be a little bit passionate.

BRIAN: People don't always know when they're passionate.

YOU: I'm old enough to know who I am by now.

BRIAN: Do you know who you are?

YOU: No. But I don't feel passionate.

BRIAN: Maybe you still have a question, though.

But you aren't asking it very hard.

YOU: That could be.

JULIA: Maybe your question is "who am I?"

YOU: Yeah, maybe it is. Maybe my question is "what is my question?" Yeah. I think that's what it is.

BRIAN: Are you sure?

YOU: Brian, don't mess with me. I just figured out that my question is "what is my question" and then you undermined me. Don't do that.

BRIAN: I'm sorry.

YOU: Are you going to be different in the future?

BRIAN: I don't think so, but I don't think this kind of thing will happen very often.

YOU: You're right. This doesn't happen very often. Okay, I'll just forget this happened in a few days. Consider yourself forgiven. But don't do it again. But yeah, I'm not really sure that that's my question.

BRIAN: But that's what you would say if it was your question.

YOU: But I might say it if something else was my question.

BRIAN: Like what?

YOU: Anything else. Any other question, maybe I wouldn't be aware of it.

BRIAN: So you have to find that other question.

YOU: But I don't know how.

BRIAN: So it's like when I'm waiting for God.

YOU: I'm waiting for something but I can't make it come. It just comes when it comes. That's the nature of things.

BRIAN: So when you wait for God, that's what you're waiting for?

YOU: I think it's for that, and maybe for God, too.

BRIAN: You're waiting for something.

YOU: Yeah. That's a fact.

BRIAN: What is it like for you to wait?

YOU: I don't think about it most of the time. I just do my routine.

BRIAN: So are you really waiting?

YOU: I think in a way I am, and in a way I'm not. You were telling me about Simone Weil one time, about how in French "waiting" is the same word as "attention" or something like that. So that's a different kind of waiting than what I normally do.

BRIAN: She would probably say that you have to go through your routine as though you were waiting on God.

YOU: Yeah. She was an intense person.

BRIAN: Are you tired?

YOU: I'm tired tonight. But I'm happy because maybe I'm a little closer to figuring out my story with the man. Or maybe I'll forget about the story like I forget about everything.

JULIA: It's okay, Beth. You'll do okay without me.

YOU: Thanks. How do you know?

JULIA: I have an intuition.

BRIAN: Is that really knowledge?

JULIA: Yes. Everything you know is founded in intuition. You said so yourself.

BRIAN: You're right.

JULIA: Beth is going to be just fine. I'm the one who has problems.

YOU: No, you'll be fine.

JULIA: If I'm fine, then you're the one who can have problems. Only one of us can have problems.

YOU: Okay, you can have the problems, I guess.

JULIA: Thank you.

You all lapse into silence and then Julia and Brian resume their game of Scrabble. You get up and walk around the cafe, and see a man working on his laptop. You don't want to talk to him, so you keep walking around. Then you come back to the table.

JULIA: You don't want to be here but you don't

know where to go.

YOU: I guess I'm having a weird afternoon.

JULIA: Maybe "uxorious" is just another word for "weird".

YOU: You can replace every adjective you don't understand with "weird".

BRIAN: We're getting into Mad Libs territory here.

JULIA: You guys are both writers. I bet you got a big kick out of Mad Libs when you were younger.

BRIAN: I did.

YOU: Yeah, they were pretty funny. I used to play them with my cousins. They liked them a lot. But I never had them at my house.

BRIAN: Did you wish you had them?

YOU: No, it was fine not having them. I forgot about them. And then I remembered them again when I was at my cousins' house.

JULIA: Did you like poetry?

YOU: Yeah, I did.

JULIA: I haven't read a poem in years.

YOU: You should write poetry. You don't need to read it if you don't want to.

JULIA: Why would I want to write poetry?

YOU: You could express yourself that way.

JULIA: You don't like the ways I normally express myself?

You laugh with her.

JULIA: Just kidding. I'm going to miss you guys but first for a while I'll anti-miss you guys.

BRIAN: After this long afternoon, maybe I'm starting to anti-miss you guys.

JULIA: Okay, we should say our until-laters then.

YOU: Do you want to walk up and down Washington Avenue with me, Julia?

JULIA: Okay.

You leave Brian to the Scrabble board, which he's putting away. Out on Washington Ave., a fine dry warm breeze is blowing, but not a Santa Ana.

JULIA: Well, you've got a question, and I've got a question.

YOU: I don't think I really have a question.

JULIA: You have a question.

YOU: Maybe I do. I'm not completely happy.

JULIA: You're vague.

YOU: Yeah.

JULIA: Well, I'm incomplete. Every day without my

man, is like when Brian tries to write things.

YOU: It's hard being single.

JULIA: Are you thinking of going out with Robert?

YOU: I think about it.

JULIA: But you don't do anything.

YOU: No.

JULIA: Is that okay?

YOU: Yeah, I think it's okay.

JULIA: But you're not happy about something else.

YOU: Yeah.

JULIA: Okay, well, maybe it's okay to not be happy.

YOU: I don't think it is. I think it's okay to be unhappy if you're on the right track. And if you're not, being unhappy gets you on the right track. And you wouldn't get on the right track if it was too okay.

JULIA: Do you think I'm doing the right thing by searching for first dates out there through my other friends?

YOU: Maybe it's not the right question.

JULIA: Yeah, but it's always on my mind.

YOU: I've figured things out, finally got what I wanted, and I barely remembered that I wanted it,

and I had all-new problems.

JULIA: Yeah. But I'm tired. And I just want to settle down.

YOU: You want to get old? You're still young.

JULIA: I just want to get old, and *comfortable*.

YOU: Maybe you want something else.

JULIA: Yeah. Maybe when I get my needs taken care of.

YOU: Okay.

JULIA: Yeah, I remember that waiting for God thing. You know what I'm talking about.

YOU: Yeah.

JULIA: But I have to live my life now.

YOU: You have to do what you have to do.

JULIA: Look at this shop window. Look what they did with the display.

You inspect the display with her. It's tastefully done, and you see how it works as she explains how each piece of it works together to bring about its tastefulness.

You walk in silence. It's nice to be with her, walking down the street. And then you make it back to your apartment.

JULIA: Oh, we should go back to my car.

YOU: Do you want some food?

JULIA: Sure.

You enter your apartment and have some leftovers.

JULIA: I feel like I'm going on a long trip on an airplane.

YOU: You're going to be gone for a year?

JULIA: Yeah. But I'm not going anywhere. And I'll be back sometimes.

YOU: So it's not that big a deal.

JULIA: No, it's not that big a deal.

You finish your food.

JULIA: I like your art. Maybe I can make some art for your wall while I'm "gone".

YOU: I bet you're a good artist.

JULIA: I have really good images but I'm not trained.

YOU: Yeah, that's a good look for my wall.

JULIA: Okay.

YOU: Let's go?

You go out the door, and make your way back to her car. She gets in the car and starts it and goes.

It's getting a little less bright, the sun is sailing, floating, flying, sitting its way toward its visible decline. You walk back to your apartment and enter and close the door, and say goodbye to the outside world.

[closing theme]

WAITING FOR MARGOT
Episode 21 "Farewell"
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COMMENTS

1. This is the last episode of season one of *Waiting for Margot*. In 2019 I had some intentions of continuing, and in principle, I have not ruled out going on, but I think it is best to think of this as a completed work.

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