

WOE.BEGONE
EPISODE 74
SYMBIOSIS

INTRO THEME PLAYS.

INT. FLINCHITE INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

We hear the reverberations of a conversation in a mostly empty concrete room, mid-conversation.

MIKEY

Can I at least talk to him?

TY

No.

MIKEY

Ty, you said I could talk to him. Did you lie to me?

TY

When did I say that?

MIKEY

When you first kidnapped me. When you made me play WOE.BEGONE. You said that if I cooperated I could talk to him and I've been cooperating.

TY

I don't believe that I said that. Regardless, that was a different situation. You escaped, remember? You are the one who altered the arrangement.

MIKEY

I didn't escape, someone put me back in O.V.E.R.

TY

Mike, the conditions are different now. This is a different situation.

MIKEY

I think that you did it. I don't know why. It seems like you are responsible for everything.

TY

Mike, I am not "responsible for everything." You don't even have the perspective to make such a claim. Let's deescalate. Can I get you some coffee? You look... terrible today. I was going to say "under the weather," but I respect you too much to sugarcoat things, Mike. You look positively awful. You have huge bags under your eyes. Have you not been sleeping?

MIKEY does not respond.

TY

Are you protesting me again? Because I won't let you talk to him?

MIKEY [UPSET]

I don't get it. You already won. What is the harm in letting me talk to him? He knows I'm here. He can't see me through the two-way mirror but he knows I'm here. He knows you're making me watch him.

TY

Mike, what you need to understand--

MIKEY [ANGRY]

Stop starting all of your sentences with my name! Calling me Mike does not calm me down. It doesn't work on me anymore. This calm reassuring tone shit. It doesn't work. I've been stuck in this compound for too long.

TY

Mike, what you need to understand is that we are doing important work in the field of time travel biology. Both of you are indispensable to the cause. Edgar is providing vital data and you are the only one able to bring an objective viewpoint to his subjective experiences. You know him. You know how he is and you can tell how he changes. You can read him. That's the only way we can hone this technology. We can't use a time duplicate because there is the chance that the process would alter their subjectivity. No amount of inventory that we take could rival the intuitive nature in which you know him. We need you, Mike.

MIKEY

I don't give a shit about your technology.

TY

Oh, of course you do. You actually do. I don't think that you even believe what you just said, as angry as you can get with me. You played WOE.BEGONE on your own. You went to O.V.E.R. on your own, or at least stayed there of your own accord. You and your pals founded a whole operation on your own, based around this sort of technology. Of course you care about it. Someone who hasn't been watching you as closely as I have might assume that it's *all* you care about.

MIKEY

Months of torture can change things, unsurprisingly.

TY

Torture? We give you everything we can. Confinement? Yes, of course. This is not a symmetrical relationship, as much as we both might want

it to be one. But we aren't torturing you. You've been tortured before, you should understand that that's not what is happening right now.

MIKEY

Agree to disagree.

TY

Besides, even if you've changed your mind on things, you need this progress. You need this technology. I said this isn't a symmetrical relationship, but there *is* a symbiosis involved. You participate in this and we... throw you a bone every now and then.

MIKEY

What's that supposed to mean?

TY

You get *some* of what you give, Mike. You're doing this research with us right now. This information distributes forward-- I think your group calls that Propagation-- and this distribution finds its way back to you. The people working a decade from now aren't using those handmade handheld devices that you are familiar with. They're using the information from this experiment and hundreds like it to conduct these operations in a safer, more reliable fashion. And if groups like mine didn't show some generosity to groups like yours-- groups who are not pushing the technology into more reliable forms-- Mike Walters would be dead a hundred times over. It's not altruism-- you are quite useful to us in return-- but you could find it in you to be a little thankful.

MIKEY

Pass.

TY

[sighs.] Oh, Mike. I fully understand why you feel how you do. It's based on some assumptions that I don't agree with about... personhood through time. But I understand how you could feel so tormented given what you believe. But... [slaps his knees as he stands up] I'm not going to convince you with argumentation, especially not right now. How about I get you some coffee? And you can get started on that comparison survey, huh?

We hear a stack of papers hit a table.

TY

While it's still fresh on your mind. Splash of milk and 3 sugars, right?

MIKEY [GRUMBLING]

Okay.

TY

The mug with the bear on it?

MIKEY [LOUDER, ANNOYED]

Okay.

TY

And if you attempt to throw it at my head again, it will go exactly as poorly as it did yesterday.

MIKEY

Yesterday? Did I?

TY

Yeah. My head would have needed stitches if we had left the situation unaltered.

MIKEY

I don't remember.

TY

That's on purpose. Don't worry. I don't hold it against you. I'll be right back with some coffee... for both of us.

We hear a door open and shut, then a brief silence. **MIKEY** groans, aggravated. We hear the crumpling and uncrumpling of paper.

MIKEY [READING]

Separation time: 12 hours. Name: Edgar Walters. That's wrong. Right handed. Wrong. Favorite color: yellow? I guess so. Yellow or green. [resigned.] Wrong, wrong, right, wrong. Wrong. Ugh. Edgar. You know I'm watching you. I can see how you glance over at me. You can see me through the mirror. I know you can.

There are several seconds of **MIKEY** sighing, breathing, and occasionally writing.

MIKEY

What...? "I prell the com...compost of otters?" What the hell, Edgar? His handwriting is getting worse, too. They're destroying him in there. They're destroying him in there. I can't read this at all.[deep breaths. A sudden change in disposition.] ...Could I? Edgar... I'm... here. [the sound of pen on paper.] There. It doesn't look out of place with the other chicken scratch. Just a little note. ...What am I doing? It's not gonna work. It's not gonna work. I'm an idiot for even hoping. Dammit. I feel my hopes getting up and I know that it's wrong. They're gonna see it. They're gonna catch me and

they're gonna reverse it. Why did I even think of doing that? But I did it. [the sound of **MIKEY** punching his open palm in frustration.]
Fuck, I did it. Can't erase it now. Fuck.

We hear foots

TY

Hot coffee, splash of milk with 3 sugars in your favorite mug, Mike. Not the lap of luxury, sure, but it's something. Maybe I can get you to perk up a bit? How is the comparison survey looking?

MIKEY

Awful. Worst that I can remember, though I imagine I can't remember them all. He wrote his name down as Edgar Walters.

TY

Well, he is married to you, just not yet.

MIKEY

Do you not read these surveys when I'm done correcting them? He didn't take Michael's name, legally or otherwise. We've talked about it before. No way in hell. Edgar kept his last name. He's written it on other comparison surveys, even. "Edgar Walters" doesn't really roll off the tongue. If you ask me, he forgot his name so he wrote down mine. This survey is all kinds of fucked up.

TY

That's unfortunate. What else is wrong?

MIKEY

Almost everything. He says he's right handed, wrong. He said his sister taught him how to drive, wrong. Not only did she not teach him how to drive, she doesn't exist. Look at this handwriting. I can't even tell if this is right or wrong. It looks like he's writing about composting otters? I assume you didn't ask him about that. You broke him. Something went wrong and his brain is pudding. I sort of get how this works. Consolidation. You didn't line him up right or you waited too long and you broke him. Fuckin' ghoul.

TY

I'm sorry, Mike. You look like you're about to cry. Are you about to cry?

MIKEY

I am about to do something to you that I regret.

TY

You won't regret it, because you won't remember it unless I tell you about it. And that's not really remembering, is it? No, if we could reverse incidents like the kind you are threatening me with and instill you with true regret in a way that didn't hurt you, we would be doing that right now. You should take solace in that we won't go so far as to hurt you under most circumstances, even if you hurt us.

MIKEY

I can't complete the evaluation until I know what he wrote here. I can't make heads or tails of it, can you?

TY

[pausing a second or two] No, I cannot. You're right, it really does look like "otters." That's not some sort of reference that you know about?

MIKEY

No.

TY

But he *does* call you his little panther?

MIKEY

No, I call *him* my little panther. I'm the bear.

TY

Right, because of the whole... look, I suppose. I understand the mug now.

MIKEY

I don't give a fuck about the mug.

TY

No need to flare up at me. I'll take this to Edgar and see if he can recall what he meant to write in that column.

MIKEY

Tell him his husband is here and is going to get him out of here or die trying.

TY

I'm not going to do that and I'm not going to even jest that I might, because I know that would make you worse and that's not what I want.

MIKEY

How fucking cordial of you.

TY

Drink some more of that coffee. It's going to get cold. I'll be right back with an answer regarding the... err... otters.

MIKEY

Cheers.

TY takes the papers. We hear the door open and shut again.

MIKEY

Well, I'm screwed. But, I guess I just get set back to before I snuck in the note. No harm, no foul. I wonder how many times I've done this. ...Edgar wasn't calling *me* an otter was he? I'm not an otter... am I? A cub by some definitions, sure, but not an otter. No, surely not. He wouldn't. Not the Edgar I know.

We hear the door open and shut again. **TY** drops the papers on the table.

TY

A ha! Got to the bottom of our mystery.

MIKEY

And?

TY

"Prefer the company of others." If you read it back in context, it makes perfect sense. I don't think I would have figured it out, though.

MIKEY

Yeah, me neither.

TY

Does that sound like him? Preferring the company of others to being alone?

MIKEY

He definitely likes being in public more than I do, but he also is more comfortable being alone with his own thoughts than I am. He gets energy from being around people and I have to spend energy to be around people. Classic extrovert vs introvert stuff, I guess? Not the whole story, but I could see him saying it.

TY

Great. That's good, right? I know you were worried.

MIKEY

It's better than it could have been.

TY

You understand that we're not leaving him like this, right? After your evaluation and the medical checkup, we stop the procedure before it can begin, using a failsafe. We aren't to the phase where we even consider leaving the procedure undone. By then he'll be acing these surveys every single time. We wouldn't proceed until he is able to do so.

MIKEY

That doesn't matter to me. It happened. You did this to him. Even if he forgets, you did it.

TY

If everyone forgets, then did it happen?

MIKEY

It's carved into the history of the universe. Or the universes. It happened. There is some cosmic record of it somewhere.

TY [LAUGHING POLITELY]

You can't possibly believe that. No offense. That seems like a perfectly legitimate thing to believe. Everyone has their religions and their superstitions and I know better than to say that any of them are false. But I know that you, Mike Walters, do not believe that. I know you. When you're upset you'll talk about the cosmic record of the universe and blackening your soul, but those are metaphors. They aren't the reality that you subscribe to. When this is made to have never happened, it will have never happened. The less metaphor you ascribe to it, the happier you will be. The metaphor does nothing except hurt you. So [chipper] don't do that to yourself. Life is hard enough without it. Yeah?

MIKEY [CONCEDING]

Yeah. It is. You're right. I'm wrong. When this moment is gone it will be gone. You're right.

TY

I know that you're placating me, but I'm glad we've made it that far. You have no way of knowing this, but you have caused zero resets today. That is far from always the case and I am proud that we have made this headway. We can cooperate, Mike. I just need you to bear with me. Can you do that, Bear? Bear with me? Huh? I know you like puns.

MIKEY

Do not fucking call me that, Ty Betteridge.

TY

Whoa there. My mistake. I do not intend to taint such a productive day of work. Let's call it right here, shall we? We'll escort you back to your quarters and you can enjoy some extra leisure for the rest of the afternoon, my treat. How's that?

MIKEY

Can I go now?

TY

Certainly. Felix is waiting outside to escort you back to your room.

MIKEY

How considerate of him.

We hear the door open and shut again.

The music finishes and indicates a scene transition.

INT. MIKEY'S QUARTERS - DAY

We hear some faint music playing through tinny earbuds. There is a knock on the door, then a louder knock when that one goes unanswered.

MIKEY

Fuck you. I'm not eating.

TY

I got your favorite. Biscuits and gravy from the Oldbrush Valley 24 Hour Diner.

MIKEY

I could get that any time that I want if you would let me go.

TY

We're not letting you go, so you can't. Eat up. We had a good day today. Are you really going to spoil that on a hunger strike that isn't going to work? If we try today over again, it might not go as smoothly.

MIKEY

[Huffs.] Ugh. Fine.

The music stops. We hear the sound of the door opening.

TY

Are you enjoying the MP3 player?

MIKEY

Worst headphones I've ever used in my life.

TY

Hey, it's better than nothing, right? Sorry we can't give you any better. Nothing with internet allowed. You understand. Felix had this lying around and brought it in just for you.

MIKEY

You need to understand that I am never going to be grateful for anything you monsters "do for me." You're holding me hostage and torturing my husband... boyfriend. Your biscuits and gravy tastes like freedom that I can't ever have. This MP3 player is almost entirely filled with Arctic Monkeys. I managed to find one out of like ten songs that aren't Arctic Monkeys and then you interrupted me.

TY

What's wrong with Arctic Monkeys?

MIKEY

Nothing, but it's been 3 days and I'm already tired of them. Not a band I would fill up such a small MP3 player with.

TY

Well it was just lying around and Fi is British.

MIKEY

I know. And so is Radiohead. It could have been filled with Radiohead if he had good taste.

TY

You know he can hear us, right? He's on the other side of the door.

MIKEY [LOUDER]

Felix! Your taste in music is fine, it's just boring. I've heard worse.

TY

You're being lighthearted. I like that. You can't stay upset all the time. Otherwise you'll never break out of this place. You'll shut down.

MIKEY

The fuck is that supposed to mean?

TY

Well, you don't live here forever, right? You turn into those older Mikes, the ones you met in Latvia. And they aren't living in the compound, are they? And they have their own Edgars. Something to look forward to.

MIKEY

Are you telling me to try to break out?

TY

No. I'm saying I know Mike Walters and what makes him tick. And breaking out of the compound is an idea that can give Mike Walters enough energy to make it through whatever funk he's in. I'm manipulating you.

MIKEY

Does it work as manipulation if you tell me that you're manipulating me?

TY

I don't know. Did it work?

MIKEY

Too soon to tell.

TY

Break out or don't, Mike. Both of them work for me. Most people make a huge mistake when dealing with you and I think it has affected how you think about yourself. People think of you as a destructive force or an impediment to what they are trying to accomplish. That is so shortsighted. You have so much utility, no matter what it is that you're doing. It's fascinating. You're like a power plant. You're always generating these different avenues and all of them have such interesting opportunities at the end of them. And that's why I want you and Edgar here. I want to witness that. And if you manage to break free, then I'll witness that however I can as well. It will likely turn out in my favor. But I won't open the cell door for you.

MIKEY

Cell door, so you admit that I'm a prisoner?

TY

That's what you got from all of that? [Laughs.] Alright, Mike. Good talk. Good day. Relatively painless. Let's do it again tomorrow, shall we? You enjoy the rest of your evening.

We hear MIKEY's door open and close, the music wraps up, and the scene transitions.

INT. FLINCHITE INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

We fade in mid-conversation, from a blurry haze into clarity.

TY [ANGRY]

--was a dangerous, reckless, *SELFISH* gambit and you should be glad that I discovered the truth before it was too late. You ingrate. You fool. What did you think that you were accomplishing?

MIKEY [DISORIENTED]

Huh?

TY

It's reversed now and I'll reset you again when I'm done giving you another piece of my mind. Consider that your punishment, Mike. You couldn't possibly think that you could get away with it.

MIKEY

Get away with what?

TY

You passed a note to Edgar. You tricked me. I'll admit, I had never seen that one before. You smuggled him a note somehow. Who knows how long he knew that you were watching him? It could have been months. We can't pinpoint the date and it ruins all of our data. We're going to have to go all the way back to another Mike to make sure we scrub the data of this imperfection. You've set us back months, you idiot. This is your technology, too. You're hurting your own organization.

MIKEY

Another Mike?

TY

Yes, another Mike. And another after you're gone. The project doesn't grind to a halt simply because you say it does. You're not in control, as long as you are here. That's not how it works.

MIKEY

You made iterations of me. When? While I was asleep?

TY

Whenever I wanted to. What do you care? They're all you. You persevere at the end of all of this. You get to be the cowboy and live happily ever after with Edgar and all of that. You get to expend your maximum utility. Who cares what part of you does it?

MIKEY

I do. As this part.

TY

Well, that's a shortcoming in how you see this whole thing. That's why you're at *my* compound and your little base of operations is struggling to keep its head above water.

MIKEY

What happened to the calm, professional Ty Betteridge? Did I finally defeat you?

TY

This is as professional as I am capable of being right now. If you think this means that you defeated me, it is a Pyrrhic victory, to be sure.

MIKEY

A Pyrrhic victory is more than anything I've done here.

TY

Sure. Anything else you want to say before this whole thing resets and you don't remember a thing?

MIKEY

Isn't that pointless? Isn't that what you said to me?

TY

That's what *I* believe. I know that isn't what you believe. I was extending you a kindness, even after all of this. I know it matters to you. So: anything you want to say?

MIKEY

I love you, Edgar.

TY

He can't hear you. He's not even in the other room.

MIKEY

Well, "I love you, Edgar" and "Fuck you, Ty Betteridge" are all that I have.

TY

I'm disappointed. You were such a nice Mike. I was sure that you were the one who makes it out of here.

MIKEY

I don't care about your evaluation of me. Whatever people say I am, that's what I'm not. Sorry. I've been listening almost exclusively to Arctic Monkeys.

TY

Excellent use of your remaining time. Felix, prepare for another reset. We're giving this one to the cowboy. Let him think that he is making some headway on us.

MIKEY

You're letting me go?

TY

In a sense.

MIKEY

Why would you let me go?

TY

[Sighs.] You're never going to understand. Sorry, Mike. Time is up.

There is a sound indicating time travel.

TY

Sorry, Mike, I know that you're still a tad woozy from the reset, but we're pressed for time. We're sending you on a field mission. You're finally going to get to stretch your legs.

MIKEY

What? To where?

TY

To Latvia. The Mike Walters apartment. You've been there before, yes?

MIKEY

Why would you send me there?

TY

Just to observe and report. Nothing too dangerous, I assure you.

MIKEY

And what do I tell them?

TY

Almost the entire truth. The only caveat being that you don't tell them that you're on a mission. Tell them that you escaped the compound. They've already taken in one escapee, I'm sure they'll welcome you into the fold. We'll extract you when we're ready. Until then, you're a free man.

MIKEY

There's a Mike that escaped?

TY

Clogged the toilet and made a run for it when maintenance showed up. You'll probably meet him. But that's all the time we have. Prepare for transport. Good luck, Mike Walters.

There is a sound indicating time travel. We hear **TY** leave this room and walk to another room in the same hallway.

TY

Hello, Mike. Are you ready for the comparison survey today? I do hope that you won't be too much trouble this time.

SCENE TRANSITION

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

We hear a knock on the door. It opens.

MICHAEL

Oh! Howdy, Mikey. I thought you was Mike. [Pause.] You look... different... You're... not Mikey.

MIKEY

Well, I am Mikey, just not the one you were expecting. I escaped from the Flinchite Compound.

MICHAEL

You were doing the experiments? On Edgar?

MIKEY

You know about that? The consolidation experiments?

MICHAEL

Course I do. You ain't the first Mikey to come out of the compound. Met one of 'em in Alaska, believe it or not. Long story. Maybe you'll get to meet him. Come in out of the doorway, pilgrim. We'll get ya cleaned up.

MIKEY

Oh, right. Is Mike here too?

MICHAEL

He's out walking Bruno- that's the landlord's dog. He'll be back in a little while. Sweet pup. You'll like him.

MIKEY

Oh, alright.

MICHAEL

It's funny. The other Mikey's been here dozens of times but you've only been here the one time, right?

MIKEY

Yeah, for the fourth challenge.

We hear the door close.

MICHAEL

We've done some decorating since the last time you were here. See that boar's head hanging on the wall? Shot it myself.

MIKEY

Oh, wow. It's just a pig, right? I *am* surprised that you wou-

We hear a gunshot and a thud on the ground.

MICHAEL

Sorry, Mikey. You're a terrible liar.

END THEME PLAYS.