

## WOE.BEGONE EPISODE 81: PARTNERS

[Warning: this episode contains depictions of dismemberment. Listener discretion is advised.]

[INTRO THEME]

Ty Betteridge: [Frustrated] I am about to stop asking so *nicely*. Give me your hand, Michael.

Michael: *No*. I ain't gonna do it.

Ty: Michael... Michael, this isn't the big scary thing that you've talked yourself into thinking it is. It's just a little snip! And when it's over I'll turn it all back and it'll be like it never happened. Even better, it will have never happened. Your hand will be *fine*. You can ask Mike if you want— any discomfort is merely temporary. I understand that you're scared but it'll get easier after a few experiments...I think. Mike's settled in quite well in my opinion.

Michael: I don't care. I ain't givin' you my hand, Ty Betteridge. This goes beyond what I was expectin'.

Ty: [Tsks] You shouldn't make promises that you don't intend to keep. You told me that you would cooperate and in return I agreed to help out your friends with their problem.

Michael: Have you done that yet? Have you found Mustardseed?

Ty: We are working on it around the clock. We have allocated as many resources as we can practically afford. Turns out that this Mustardseed person is extremely clever. You were right to come to us for help. I don't think there's another facility that is capable of hunting someone like this down. Not even O.V.E.R. We are making good on our deal, but it will take time. It's time for you to do the same.

Michael: [Shakey] I ain't givin' you my hand and that's final. I—I *cain't*. Gotta be some other way for y'all to figure this sorta stuff out.

Ty: Would you prefer that I do this to Mike instead? [Cowboy impression] I thought you was a big ol' tough guy protectin' your flock through hell or high water! Even if it means bleedin' for 'em now and then!

Michael: Please don't do that.

Ty: [Laughs] [Speaking normally] Mike will let me do it. He's a good Mike. We worked very hard to build that relationship. Broke down a lot of walls to get him to where he is now. So, do you want me to do it to *him*?

Michael: No, I don't want you to do it to Mike. Don't—don't hurt 'im. Don't hurt Mikey. You're right. I volunteered to come here to protect him. So, hurt me. Hurt me instead I'll do it.

Ty: [Hums, pleased] It's decided then. Thank you for your cooperation. As I mentioned previously, I am not going to hurt you. I am not going to allow *this* to stay the way that things happened. We've done these sorts of experiments dozens of times—hundreds at this point. There are fail-safes and even the fail-safes have fail-safes. I can say with one-hundred percent confidence that you are going to be alright. So, give me your hand.

Michael: [Sighs] [Begrudgingly] Fine. You're wrong though. It is gonna hurt.

Ty: Oh my, what a terrible scar. Is that the one you got from our field team?

Michael: Mm-hmm. Buncha Flinchite boots roughed me up and stabbed clean though it in my own cabin. All for nothin'. I didn't even have what they was lookin' for. Some sorta key. They went after a buncha my friends too. All for something none of us had.

Ty: I am sorry about that. I know that I've mentioned it to one of you before, but that was not a mission I was involved in. I would never have allowed that, especially since you didn't have anything useful to provide us. There was nothing about that mission that required violence. Not right from the start like that. No wonder you're so standoffish with us.

Michael: Yeah, you're squeaky outside of that ain't ya? Tell that to all the Mikeys that you got locked up in here.

Ty: Hm, you know we're looking into all sorts of medical uses for this technology. Someone has pitched a project to aid with recovery from injuries and surgeries and minimizing scars and the like. Is that something that you would be interested in?

Michael: I don't wanna be your guinea pig if that's what you're sayin'. I'm only here as part of the deal, and you're already messin' with me enough as it is.

Ty: It would count toward your debt to me, and it would heal your hand. There would be no pain, not even temporary pain like today's experiment. You wouldn't have to think about that

attack every time you look at your wedding ring. Hm, strange, Mike told me that he wasn't married to Edgar.

Michael: Mikey ain't married to Edgar. *I* am. We don't get married for years after the Mikey you got. Don't know why you can't keep that straight.

Ty: Hm, right, of course, and it's "*Mikey*". Cute. Mike, Michael, and Mikey. [Laughs] It likely helps keep track of who is who too. You seem rather invested in doing that.

Michael: Can we get this over with already? I ain't enjoying the chitchat, waitin' on you to cut my damn pinky finger off. If we're gonna do it then let's get this show on the road. I already agreed to do it so let's do it.

Ty: Absolutely, I would warn you about what this is going to feel like, but you've played WOE.BEGONE. You're much more of an authority on the subject than I am. I've never so much as—

Michael: [Interrupting] Do it already, Ty.

Ty: Alright, on the count of three. One, two— [Sound of Michael's finger being cut off]

[Michael gasps and cries out in agonized pain. His breathing becomes loud and erratic.]

Ty: [Talking over the sound of Michael in pain] Wait! Wait! Michael, stop—stop moving I know this hurts but we need to get you into the other room to combine you with the other Michael. The quicker we do that, the quicker the pain stops—come on! Come with me. It's just on the other side of that door.

[Footsteps. A door opens and closes. Michael continues to make sounds of pain all the while.]

Michael 2: What the fuck did you do to him?

Michael: He cut my goddamn finger off.

Ty: Quick, quick, quick! Take your places! As soon as you're both on your marks I can consolidate the two of you. Quickly now! Quickly! Come on! Yes, I'm headed to the control room. Don't move it will just take a second.

[Ty walks away. The door opens and shuts.]

Michael 2: What's gonna happen with the two of us with you being...like that.

Michael: [Shakey] I think we're about to find out. [Groans] I'm gonna be sick.

Michael 2: Just hold on a second longer, partner. Toughen up. We're doin' this for Mikey.

Michael: Did you know about me?

Michael 2: No, when did he iterate us?

Michael: I don't know. Maybe when we was sleepin'. I don't like that one bit.

Michael 2: Guess it don't matter anymore. He's puttin' us back together again.

Ty: [Said through intercom] Initiating consolidation in three, two, one. [TIME TRAVEL NOISE] Excellent! That appears to be a rousing success! Uh, from here it appears that you are safe and sound consolidated into one body. Can you tell me how you feel?

Michael: Uh, somethin's wrong.

Ty: [Said through intercom] Mentally or physically? Oh, hold on I'm heading back into the experiment room.

[Michael's breathing begins to level out.]

[The door opens.]

Ty: So, what appears to be the problem, Michael?

Michael: See for yourself. It uh, it ain't right.

Ty: Hm, does it hurt when I do this.

Michael: It don't hurt. Cain't feel it at all.

Ty: Can you move it?

Michael: Been tryin' to move it this whole time. Won't budge.

Ty: But everything else feels normal? You have all of your faculties? You feel like the same Michael that you were this morning? No brain fog or loss of capacity or anything?

Michael: Nah, I feel fine. Everything feels the way it usually does 'cept the finger, and that don't hurt anymore. It's just a mangled little useless numb now.

Ty: Well, it's not a perfect result, but it is better than a missing little finger and a gushing wound. Incremental progress is the point of these experiments.

Michael: I ain't a satisfied customer.

Ty: Oh, I think that it's great! Think of the possible use cases, Michael. There is enormous potential for this to be used in the medical industry. If we can perfect this someone who actually lost their little finger could have a new one without any sort of surgery, and that's only the superficial use. What about someone who needs a new liver? The possibilities are limitless! Time travel is nice to have, sure, but this tool is so much more powerful than that. And you are helping us discover just how powerful and helpful it is. Thank you, Michael.

Michael: I don't care about none of that. I'm sure it's nice, but that's not why I'm here. I'm here because Base needed help. I'm not here to explore the possibilities of medical technology or whatever you're doing.

Ty: Every time we improve, Base improves. In an emergency, you could probably do this with your rudimentary tools that you have.

Michael: I seen consolidation go wrong too many times with them Calculators to ever try that again. They're dangerous enough just moving stuff around. I been killed 'cause a digit got flipped more than once.

Ty: Let's talk upgrades when you're out of here. It might be time for a new setup.

Michael: You say that like you're gonna let me out of here one day.

Ty: Oh, I plan to. Your debt to me and my facility is large, sure, but it's not infinite. You're too volatile to be contained, really. Like a radioactive isotope. There's a lot of benefit to that radioactivity. The sheer energy of it all.

Michael: I'll believe it when I'm back home, safe and sound.

Ty: Eh, fair enough.

Michael: So, I'm cooperatin'. You got a chunk of meat out of me. Now I got some requests of my own.

Ty: Let's hear them.

Michael: First, I want proof that you are working on the Mustardseed case and that you're capable of gettin' the job done.

Ty: We will show you the operations center first thing in the morning. You can even help us with that project if you would like.

Michael: I would. Secondly, can I have my damn hat back?

Ty: Oh, but I think it looks so good on me. Don't you think?

Michael: It looks better on me. Plus, it's mine.

Ty: [Laughs] I'm just having some fun with you, Michael. [Cowboy voice] *Partner*.

Michael: Well, between you shavin' my beard and takin' my hat, I don't feel like myself. And this pinky finger situation ain't helping, either.

Ty: Let's make a deal. You are scheduled for an experiment tomorrow afternoon, not dissimilar in intensity to the one from today. So, if tomorrow you are willing to fully cooperate from the beginning, I will give you your hat back *and* I won't make you shave anymore. That's another thing that I'm sorry about. If I had known about the scar, I would have reconsidered.

Michael: Well, you coulda asked me. There's a story behind that one.

Ty: Lesson learned. Wouldn't want to give you too much control, though. I know that Mike Walters can turn an inch of leeway into a gaping hole.

Michael: Yeah, well I volunteered to be here. So, I ain't going nowhere 'til you find Mustardseed.

Ty: Glad to hear it. I think that this has been enough experimenting on the cowboy for the day, so why don't I initiate the fail-safe and we get you back to your quarters? You must feel odd, having one of your little fingers immobile like that.

Michael: It feels awful. Go on, correct it. So, I can go back to my room.

Ty: Sure thing. Wait right here and your hand will be back to normal before you know it.

[The door opens and closes.]

Michael: [Huffs] [Said under his breath] Swear to God, Ty Betteridge.

[TIME TRAVEL NOISE]

Ty: [Said through intercom] All good?

Michael: All good. Ten fingers, fully mobile.

Ty: [Speaking through intercom] Splendid. Take the door to your left. Felix is waiting to escort you back to your quarters. Have a great rest of your day, Michael.

Michael: [Sarcastically] Yup, I'm gonna have a great rest of my day.

[The door opens and closes.]

[SCENE TRANSITION.]

[Sound of knocking on the door.]

Ty: Knock, knock! Open up!

Michael: Ugh, what do you want, Ty? You told me that we were done for the day. It's gettin' late.

[The door opens.]

Ty: About that... I was in such a rush to grant you your freedom for the day, that I forgot all about the experiment evaluation you were to fill out. Here.

[Sound of rustling papers followed by them being smacked on a table.]

Ty: Shouldn't be too much of a hassle to complete. Basic stuff. Just some personal info to help calibrate things.

[Sound of writing.]

Michael: You know it's disrespectful, right? Takin' my hat from me and wearing it around. It's an insult.

Ty: You see, I don't see it that way at all. I'm starting to get why you like it so much, though. I'm understanding you better every day, Michael. I *feel* like a cowboy, just wearing it. [Cowboy impression] End of the line, pilgrim. Put 'em up! [Laughs] [Impression ends] Makes me feel in control of the situation.

Michael: You *are* in control of the situation.

Ty: All the better for me to wear the hat, then!

Michael: You're lucky that you're the one in charge. If I had my druthers, I'd gun ya down soon as look atcha.

Ty: [Laughs] Oh, Michael. I like you. The accent never comes off, does it? Or the attitude. I like that. You're... you're um, I don't quite have the word for it. You're um... Like stubborn but like in a fun way?

Michael: *Ornery*.

Ty: [Cowboy impression] Ornery. Ornery. [Laughs and then sighs] [Impression ends] I dare say that I like that about you.

Michael: I ain't doing it cause you like it.

Ty: That's fine with me. I just like it. We should catch a movie some time. I'm sure you know all kinds of amazing cowboy movies. Right, Michael?

Michael: You ain't gonna watch a movie with me. I'm gonna sit here in this bare room 'til I die, only being taken out to be tinkered with. I know how this goes.

Ty: Not at all the case! I'm not the monster you think I am. I'm not trying to torture you.

Michael: Then it must come naturally.



Ty: [Laughs] Silver tongue as always. You know what? Come on, come with me. I said that I was going to show you the Mustardseed command center tomorrow, but let's do it this evening. It'll be empty, just you and me. Come on, come on, up. Come on, yep, let's go.

Michael: [Sighs] If you say so.

[Sound of footsteps and the door opening and closing.]

Ty: It's really quite fortuitous that you came to us in your time of need. This Mustardseed investigation dovetails nicely with some research that we've been doing regarding surveillance. Specifically, how to track someone as tricky as Mustardseed, so when you called us up we knew we had our patient zero. [Door opens.] Here, step inside.

Michael: This is all for Mustardseed?

Ty: This is all for *you*, Michael. This is your project.

Michael: Okay then, so, what's all the equipment do?

Ty: Think of it as analogous to the internet. We tried tracking Mustardseed across the actual internet to no avail, as expected. Someone who has taken basic precautions can hide where they are fairly efficiently. With time travel, it is much more of... um, well... the wild west, so to speak. To our knowledge, nobody knows how to cover their tracks yet. And there are tracks. Something happens between the original location and the location traveled to. So, there's something connecting them, somehow. We are in the early stages of figuring out exactly what that interaction is and what it can tell us about the original location. In other words, if we know somewhere that Mustardseed traveled to, we can discover where Mustardseed traveled *from*. In theory.

Michael: Well, I know one place that Mustardseed traveled to. They traveled into the walls of my apartment and put a bug in there. When we went to correct it, they put Edgar in there instead. And things went... You know what? I don't like ya enough to tell ya what happened. But we corrected our correction, so as far as I know, Mustardseed was still in there.

Ty: So that's what spooked the grizzled old cowboy enough to show up here. Must have been tragic. You don't have to tell me; I can tell from your face.

Michael: Mustardseed was right in front of us and there weren't nothing that we could do about it.

Ty: [Sympathetic] Oh, that must have been aggravating. That does sound like something we might be able to investigate, though. If we can trace them without triggering whatever they used to put Edgar in the wall instead, it should lead us right to them, with them being none the wiser.

Michael: But if I understand correctly, if you get this technology up and runnin', we ain't ever safe from you ever again, are we? If you can do that, then you can watch our every move and we can't ever run away. You'd be able to trace us just like you trace Mustardseed. There'd be no escape.

Ty: You guys are clever. I'm sure you'll figure something out. Not that, though.

Michael: Not what?

Ty: Yanking that computer out of the wall and smashing it. That won't get you anywhere. The research on that computer is redundant. We have backups in several separate locations. All that would do is ensure that you never get this hat back. Sorry, partner. I won the duel.

Michael: [Confused] I weren't thinkin' 'bout smashing the computer. I'm worried about you spying on us, sure, but I'm most worried about Base being safe from Mustardseed. I wouldn't do that.

Ty: Well, that's an improvement, then. I knew you'd come around eventually. Not as fast as Mike... Mikey. Not as fast as Mikey, but eventually.

Michael: So, what are you gonna do to Mustardseed after you track 'em down?

Ty: Whatever you want, Michael. We are simply resolving some business between you and them. We could try to stop them from ever becoming Mustardseed. We could imprison them here. You could... unleash some cowboy justice on 'em if you really wanted to. I don't think anyone would judge you for that. Give it some thought.

Michael: I don't think I'm ready to think about that yet.

Ty: Understandable. It's getting late. I should bring the wild bear back to his enclosure. Let's head back, bear.

Michael: That talk's too damn friendly, Ty. Only Edgar gets to call me that.

Ty: Right. We're enemies. Gotcha. I should bring the prisoner back to his cage.

Michael: Now that's you tellin' it how it is.

Ty: Maybe movie night will convince you otherwise. Until then, back in your cage.

Michael: Yes sir.

[SCENE TRANSITION.]

[Sound of scrambling and panicked breathing.]

Ty: Michael! Michael! Michael, calm down. Please calm—calm down. Breathe, breathe, calm. I didn't know this would frighten you so. These are just the same tools as last time.

Michael: [Strained] I didn't know either. I can't do this, Ty. Not like last time—not refusin'. I can't do this. I'm gonna hyperventilate.

Ty: You're gonna be okay, big fella. Deep breaths, come on. Yeah, you can make it through this. You want your hat back, right? And everything that symbolizes?

Michael: I'm not doin' this on purpose. It's my body that's doin' it.

Ty: I understand. This is difficult. That difficulty is why what you are doing is valuable in the first place. And once you graduate to your full immersion in the program, we can progress to the experiments that only Michael the cowboy can do. But we need to get over some minor hurdles first.

Michael: Do it quick, Ty. I can't do this if you don't do it quick. Right now. C'mon.

Ty: I don't think that would be advisable. If you squirm while I'm performing the procedure, then it will only cause more pain. I need to be sure that you can sit still because this procedure will be longer than the previous one. I'm going to remove the little finger, then hold it back in its original place with medical glue and bandages. That will take a moment longer. Are you going to be ready soon? You seem to have calmed down quite a bit in just these few moments.

Michael: Yeah, I'm calmin' down. I'm sorry, this ain't me protestin' I saw the tools and then something came over me.

Ty: That could have happened to anyone. Are you ready? Okay, put your hand on the work surface, please. Yeah... This is going to be more involved than a simple snip, so how about we get your mind somewhere else as best we can. Tell me a story about Edgar. Any story. A favorite one might be best.

Michael: [Stuttering] Uh, o—okay um, a story, um. Okay, so me and Edgar went everywhere that we could think of on our honeymoon ‘cause why not? Gettin’ there was as simple as putting in where we wanted to go. So, I wanted to go to Svalbard. Something about people living that far north on some islands feels magical to me. That’s about as far north as anyone lives, and I’ve always wanted to go there. Edgar weren’t too keen on it at first. I’m bigger than him and he kept saying that he’d freeze out there while I was nice and warm. I told him that I’d keep him warm. He changed his tune when got up there though. We decided on— [Sound of Michael’s finger being cut off.] [Barely contained sounds of pain and heavy breathing.]

Ty: Keep going. Focus on the story. This is going to take a minute. What did you do in Svalbard?

Michael: [Pained] We did an overnight trip to an ice cave. It weren’t as demanding as that might sound. Once you get outside of Longyearbyen you can really take in the po—polar night. During the dark season it don’t get... it... [Heavy breathing increases.]

Ty: [Cowboy impression] It don’t get what, partner? Keep goin’!

Michael: It don’t get light out during the day. The sky overhead is breathakin’. Then they took us into the ice cave. I’d never seen anything like it. Tons of natural halls and corridors and spaces, all made by ice. [His breathing becomes shallower and his words more strained.] And we camped out there for the night, under the glacier. I didn’t even know that was possible. As I was laying there next to him, with all of this eerie, quiet beauty all around me. And I was just thinkin’ ‘bout how that’d be the most beauty I’d ever saw in my whole life. And I started cryin’— didn’t know why just senses m— [His breathing becomes even more erratic.] I’m sorry I think I’m—

Ty: Done! Hurry, to the consolidation room.

Michael: You don’t gotta tell me twice.

[Quick footsteps. The door opens and shuts.]

Michael 2: What the hell did they do to you?

Michael: You—you mean you don't know?

Michael 2: How the hell would I know?

Michael: You weren't iterated off of me between yesterday and today?

Michael 2: I didn't know that I was iterated off of someone.

Michael: How many of us are there?

Michael 2: I didn't even know there was two of us.

Ty: [Said through intercom] Stand still! Quickly.

Michael: Well, nice to meet you, Michael.

TY: [Said through intercom] Three, two, one.

[TIME TRAVEL NOISE.]

Ty: [Said through the intercom] Success. At least in putting the two of you together. I'll be back in a moment to check you out.

[Michael's breathing levels out.]

[The door opens as Ty enters the room.]

Ty: So, what's the damage, compared to last time?

Michael: I don't think there is any damage. Well, there's a dark line where my palm stops, and my pinky starts but look. I can move it. I can feel it. It feels the same as it ever does. Right back to normal.

Ty: Wonderful! And no pain?

Michael: No pain at all. It's like it never happened.

Ty: That's amazing news, Michael. We are getting somewhere with this, and it is all thanks to you... [Cowboy voice] *partner*. [Speaking normally] Here, I think this is long overdue. Your cowboy hat, Michael.

Michael: [Sound of Michael putting on his hat] I appreciate it, *pilgrim*.

Ty: I made a copy of it for myself, too. We could wear them together for movie night!

Michael: You're pushin' it. This experiment working don't make us friends. The Mustardseed work is a start, at best.

Ty: Maybe not friends, but maybe cowboys that see each other from opposite sides of the valley and respectfully nod while keeping their distance?

Michael: Think of it however you want, Ty.

Ty: I'll do that, thank you very much.

Michael: Alright, what's next?

Ty: Mustardseed.

Michael: Mustardseed.

[END THEME PLAYS.]

[The voice of Ty Betteridge was David Ault. You can check him out in *Shadows at the Door* for queer British horror and the gayest and best adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. A very special thanks for David for receiving a script from me that prompted him to do a cowboy impression and not rejecting it. Fun fact about this episode: this is the only episode of WOE.BEGONE where Mike or Mikey do not appear. Cowboys only.]

[THEME ENDS.]

[Episode Outtakes.]

David Ault: "What about someone who needs a new liver? The suppo—the suppositories are limitless [Laughs]."

David Ault: “Every time we improve, Base improves. In an emergency, you could probably do this with your rudimentary tools that you have.” Oh, I think that’s a Chekhov’s gun if ever I saw one.

David Ault: “I’m sure you know all kinds of amazing cowboy mowie—” [Over enunciating] Cowboy movies. [Speaking normally] Cowboy movies? Is that—why is that such a difficult phrase to say? Cowboy movie, cowboy movie, cowbo—[gibberish].

David Ault: “Come on, step inside. Mind the watermelon.”