

EPISODE 219 - THE WAY HE KEPT THINGS QUIET
Original transcript edited by Spider and reviewed by Jenah

[BEGIN Episode 219.]

INTRO: Hey guys, quick plugs. I'm still streaming on Twitch over at twitch.tv/woebegonepod, where every Sunday I write that week's episode soundtrack and then we hang out and play a video game. I almost beat *Peggle Deluxe* during Sunday's stream, and next time I will, and then we will move on to probably spookier things because it is the spooky month. So that is twitch.tv/woebegonepod, I hope you're ready to get spooky. Last spooky season, I believe I set off my smoke alarm with a fog machine and then sprained my thumb trying to turn off the smoke alarm, so I hope you're ready for that level of excitement.

And if you'd like to support the show, you can do so on Patreon over at patreon.com/woe_begone, where you can get early access to ad-free episodes, instrumentals, soundtrack albums, Q&As, director's commentaries, Movies with Michael, cork boards and Mork boards. Mork boards like behind-the-scenes! The behind-the-scenes video for the script of Episode 216 "The Fish," the Season 18 finale, just came out for all paying patrons, that's \$1-and-up patrons. So if you'd like to see how that episode was made and you'd like to see me make some YouTube Poop *Bee Movie* jokes along the way, that is patreon.com/woe_begone.

Special thanks to my ten newest patrons: [REDACTED] for supporting the show. Enjoy.

[Warning: This episode contains discussions about death and anxieties about dying. Listener discretion is advised.]

[Opening theme plays.]

MIKE *[narrating]*: It's too loud. Too loud is better than too quiet for the moment because when it's too quiet I start to fall into myself, but it is definitely too loud. I realize that my head is down on the dining room table, eyes shut. I haven't slept since *it* happened, and that was days ago. I'm in the long future that I couldn't see for myself, and I still can't see it, and it's too loud to see anything. I still have the bodily expectation of Edgar walking in, announcing that this has been fun but it's time for everyone to go home now please, and everyone merrily going back to where they came from and leaving us alone together in a quiet house. I raise my head off the table, if only to prevent anyone from thinking anything about it. I don't want anyone thinking about me at all.

[Cowboy voice when narrating as Michael.] "You got any bread, pard?"

I close my eyes and slow blink, hoping to find some meaning to that sentence in the darkness. Why is Michael in my dining room, and why is he asking me if we have any bread? The food is out on the kitchen island, it's already been picked over. Why me, Michael? Why bread?

"Oh, it ain't to eat. I was in the kitchen with Boris and Marissa, and Boris was tellin' this story about how he kilt—" He suddenly looks down at his cowboy boots. I can read his thoughts. I'm such a good mind reader today, because everyone is having the same set of thoughts, cycled through at different intervals. "The story he was tellin' ain't important. He smashed a glass. I was lookin' for some bread to pick the pieces up. See, you're s'posed to use bread 'cause the surface area can pick up all the little pieces ya can't see."

It's so loud in our house that I didn't even hear the glass shatter, or maybe I was asleep with my head on the dining room table.

"I-Is Boris okay, is he hurt?" I ask. "There's a first aid kit in one of the bathrooms."

Michael shakes his head. "Nah, Boris is fine. He threw the glass on purpose. Uh— Don't worry about it. I'll get it all cleaned up. I got this all under control, pilgrim."

Michael usually calls me "pilgrim" either when he's trying to take care of me or when he's trying to insinuate that there's a situation that I am not in control of, and now I think he's trying to do both.

"There's no bread, Edgar's got a gluten thing..." I trail off, explaining the thing that doesn't need explaining. The shock waves of me using the present tense to describe Edgar threaten the stability of the house. The walls threaten to fall in. Everyone in earshot vibrates sympathetically to the shock wave, the additive power of everyone having the same thoughts about Edgar in the present tense rippling out toward me. And everything is so loud.

"There's a s-shopvac? In the basement?" I go to slide out my chair from under the table so that I can stand up and retrieve it, but Michael is purposefully standing too close for me to do so. Michael looks me up and down like cattle at an auction or like an antique behind a piece of glass that must be handled only by professionals lest it disintegrate into dust. He can tell. *Mike's done with this shit, y'all. The death, the wake, the funeral, and now this, everyone in his home all at once? Mike wants everyone to leave, but he's being too polite to say anything. This was for him, because it's definitely not for Edgar. Edgar's gone, and now this meeting is for us, and that inflection point means that it's time for everyone to go.* And he doesn't say any of this out loud, but I don't disagree.

Michael takes a knee beside me, which bothers me because I worry that other people will see him and think that something's wrong. All of the other chairs at the dining table are taken up by iterations all having their own conversations. Michael speaks in a low voice, not quite a whisper, but so that only I can hear him.

"You still wanna tough this out for a couple more hours, Mike? 'Cause if not, I brought my lasso with me. I can round all these suckers up, and we'll just drive 'em outta here like cattle." He smiles at me. I don't doubt that he brought his lasso with him.

"[Sighs.] I'll survive." Survival is another inappropriate topic to broach, another shock wave, smaller this time. "This is the last day that everyone's here. I get to see them now, and then by five o'clock everyone will be gone, and I'll have more peace and quiet in the house than I know what to do with."

"Just say the word," Michael says, and I can tell that he means it. "I can pick Marissa up over my head if I gotta." I smile weakly, which is enough for Michael. He pats me on the shoulder assuringly and then disappears off into the house to remedy the problem of the broken glass in the kitchen. I sit at the dining room table, watching the people in my home, waiting for the next one to approach me with concern or condolence, feeling like a guest of honor in my own house.

The house is completely filled with people. There are no more formal places to be—the cemetery, the funeral home—and so now everyone is here. They came from all over time and space, so many that it feels like a violation of the fire code. People I haven't seen in months or years relative to my time period, who have come together because what has happened necessitates coming together. They are supposed to be here.

The party starts in the living room and then expands outwards to every other unlocked room: the dining room, the kitchen, Edgar's study which will never have any other name, expanding to fill the container that they are in. Every time traveler that isn't celebrating Edgar's death has made an appearance. Even Bradford stopped by, offered his condolences, told me to take as much time as I need, and left. I don't know if he was making a time travel joke or if he actually thinks that it's inevitable that I will return to work for him at some date in the future, a future that keeps expanding forward with me on the cusp of it, like being tied to the front of a train moving expeditiously and out of my control, the wind resistance generated drying out my eyes as I hopelessly try to see where any of this is going. It is the only time that I have ever respected Bradford, him leaving. He is very keen about not stealing attention for himself at events like these, though I do wish that less attention was on me.

I am sitting in an uncomfortable wooden chair in the dining room because all of the other seats are taken. Me and Edgar never sat in these chairs. We usually ate in the living room because it was more comfortable. A group of iterations that I don't recognize is sitting in the remaining chairs, having a conversation about something that I don't understand from a time period that I'm not sure about. I'm not eager to enter this conversation, and honestly they seem afraid to interact with me, which I appreciate.

I wonder about the last time that I made a friend that wasn't through work or time travel (which is work), and I struggle to remember. The funeral services had to be bifurcated in order to accommodate time travelers and iterations as well as the friends and family of the deceased. This was accomplished with some time travel trickery that Edgar would not have approved of because it was not mission critical, but Edgar is dead, and everyone wants to be able to say goodbye to him, protocol be damned. The other set of mournings was much quieter but even more difficult, reading off the script to finish the construction of the false life that we told Edgar's family that he had: a mundane bureaucrat working for the United States government, someone

who never amounted to their potential. I was relieved that this would be the final performance of that story.

I never fully appreciated the way he kept things quiet. I was the loud one out of the duo, so quiet was always an action I took instead of being the water that I swam in, like it was for him. Edgar liked quiet because it was the sound of all things functioning normally, all things accounted for, all worries addressed, space for thoughtful consideration to make sure that things would continue this way into the future. They never did. Which is why it was always so important to have peace and quiet for thoughtful planning and introspection for next time. Raucousness should be appreciated in short, ordered bursts, and then it's time to return to quiet.

Not me, though. I am a light that is flickering so fast that you can hear it. I have to keep thinking fast and loud, because if the frenzy dies down for even a millisecond, that is time that could be wasted not taking action. And if I'm not taking action then I am going nowhere, and if I'm going nowhere then I am vulnerable, and if I am vulnerable then I am definitely going to die, pitched wide-eyed into the gaping maw of some monster that I mistook for the ground underneath me, swallowed up like so much dark soil, and torn asunder by rows of horrible long teeth, only finally becoming still as the last scraps of intensity are ripped out of me and aerosolized by the sheer force of my destruction. I need someone to bring the quiet to me.

I stand up and hope that a thousand eyes don't turn to look at me. Only a few do, and they don't look concerned. I slide my chair back under the table and walk through the dining room and into the living room. You can still see the smudge where I killed the spider on the wall if you know where to look. I hope that nobody notices the smudge and is able to suss out the story that it has inside of it. The TV is on. Iterations are sitting in mine and Edgar's chairs. They are sitting on the couch, one person is sitting on the coffee table, and I wish that they wouldn't because it has a glass top, but there is nowhere else to sit, and I did not come into the living room with the intention of having a conversation, much less one that combines a discussion of the fragility of my coffee table with thinly veiled pity for my current situation: "oh, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to, I'm so sorry." So I keep walking.

I unlock our bedroom door, enter, and then lock it from the inside. The thoughts that compelled me to come in here are loud. I pace for a moment, then crouch down beside the closet, overwhelmed by the volume, pinned down like a preserved insect. After a moment like this, I stand up, lay down across the bed sideways and over the covers, and close my eyes. I am asleep before I know whether or not I want to be asleep, unable to fight my body in the relative quietude of the bedroom, only hearing faint conversations from loved ones, muffled, made quiet by distance and by being finally on the other side of a door.

[Scene transition.]

[Sounds of a crackling fire.]

MICHAEL: There we go. Now it's goin'.

[Door opens.]

MIKE: Ugh— Oh, it's just the fireplace. Jesus, Michael, I thought the house was on fire.

MICHAEL: Well, well. Look who's returned to the world o' the livin'. You enjoy your nap, Mike?

MIKE: No, I was having a nightmare where the house was on fire. Is— Is everyone else... gone?

MICHAEL: Yup. Left a few hours ago, actually. You were out like a light, pard.

MIKE: *[Checking the clock.]* Fuck, it's ten p.m. Why didn't you wake me up when everyone left?

MICHAEL: You seemed like you could use some shut-eye. I told 'em that I'd stick around to make sure you weren't alone when ya came to.

MIKE: So you decided to get the fireplace going? Where did you get the wood for that?

MICHAEL: Made do with what I could find in the backyard. It ain't much, but it should be enough to warm us up a bit. You didn't hear me out there? 'Cause I was choppin' wood with an axe right outside your winda.

MIKE: Michael, where did you find an axe? Me and Edgar don't have an axe.

MICHAEL: Borrowed it from the fella next door, name o' Norm. Nice guy. Said he read Edgar's obituary in the paper and that if you need anything, give him a ring. I say ya take 'im up on it. He's got a nice ridin' lawn mower.

MIKE: *[Huffs.]* You talked to the neighbor? Ugh... Please tell me he doesn't suspect anything.

MICHAEL: Don't worry, I told 'im I was your long-lost brother. It's fine.

MIKE: *Ugh*, Michael... Edgar hated that fireplace, you know. I have no idea why we bought a house with a fireplace in it, 'cause we never used the damn thing. Edgar was always concerned about air quality. I tried to use it once when he was out of town, and I made a big mess and almost burned the house down. So, this is actually the first time it's ever been used.

MICHAEL: Well, whaddaya think, pard? Does it feel cozy? You wanna sit around with hot cocoa and tell stories 'round the fire?

MIKE: *[Huffs.]* No, do you? Because I don't *want* to do anything. The house is finally quiet, so I kinda just wanna *[Taking a breath.]* sit.

[We wait a beat as we hear the quiet house.]

MICHAEL: You're gonna start to hear sounds in the quiet, Mike. Sounds you didn't know was there but they always was, or sounds ya heard afore but you could put a reason to. Maybe Edgar's downstairs fiddlin' with somethin', ya know? But now that you're alone here, there ain't no excuse. It's just the house settlin', o' course, but it's gonna feel haunted. And the worst part is, it kind of is haunted. It is haunted by all them little sounds that used to have a reason and now they don't anymore, so it's like he's still here. And that's how ya wake up pointin' a shotgun at the coffee maker at two in the dang mornin' 'cause you didn't know it made a beepin' noise once the hot plate turned off.

MIKE: Wait, you don't mean my coffee maker. It—... Does it— Does it beep when it turns off? Are you sure?

MICHAEL: It's a true story, pard.

MIKE: No, it's not. You weren't a cowboy before Edgar died. You didn't become a cowboy until you went back to start Satellite Base.

MICHAEL: Now you ain't gotta be a cowboy to point a shotgun at a coffee pot. Hell, maybe that's what gave me the idea to become a cowboy in the first place. Ya oughta go shoot yours right now, go ahead and get started on the cowboyification. That's what Edgar'd want.

MIKE: No! Nonononono, you are not casting the "what Edgar would want" spell on me, you witch. I've been having crises about what that means, and if it means anything and if that's worth anything and if I want anything to happen after I die and how all want is negated by the cessation of all experience because want is an experience just like the rest of them and death is the end of experience and—

MICHAEL: Breathe, Mike.

MIKE: *[Takes a shaky break.]* Anyway, that reminds me: there's something that he wanted you to have. In the study. It's a— It's a bolo tie. Jus— Sorry to spoil the surprise. I think his grandfather gave it to him? And he said that he wanted you to have it.

MICHAEL: Hold onto it for me, pard. You turn into me, remember? And you're gonna need it, 'cause I don't see many other cowboy accoutrements around here. You're gonna need as many of 'em as you can gather if'n you're gonna turn into me.

MIKE: I'm not... I-I-I don't— I-I don't wanna have this conversation, Michael. Just let me give you the bolo tie. You might actually wear it. I'm never going to. Plus he— he "wanted you to have it," whatever that's worth.

MICHAEL: Alright, Mike. Give it to me if'n you wanna give it to me. I'd be happy to take it.

MIKE: Alright, yeah, let's— let's do it right now before we forget. It's too hot in here anyway.

[Scene transition.]

[Door opens.]

MICHAEL: Nice place. You gonna work outta this office from now on? It's the nicest room in the house. Put up some taxidermy in here and it's damn near perfect.

MIKE: What—? Oh. I haven't thought about using this room. This is the first time I've been in here since *it*... happened. I thought about just closing it off forever? Maybe coming in here once a year, uh, for his birthday or something?

[We hear Mike fumbling through some drawers.]

MIKE: Uh, it's... it's— it's in his desk somewhere. I know because we talked about it a couple of weeks ago, and there's so much stuff to go through, and so he was setting aside things so they didn't get lost. Uh... Maybe it was in here?

[A drawer opens.]

MIKE: Oh. Yeah, bingo! Found it. Uh. Here it is! It looks pretty nice, right? With, uh, the— the turquoise thingy? Uh, is that— is that what the bolo is in a bolo tie?

MICHAEL: That's called a slide. Thanks for this, pard, it's beautiful. I'll take damn good care of it, you can count on me. Definitely a special occasions only type o' tie. *[Pause.]* Hey, Mike. What's that there? Looks like a note addressed to ya.

[We hear Mike grabbing a file from the drawer.]

MIKE: Huh—? Uh— No, there— there shouldn't be anything that I don't know about, uh... We tried to say everything to each other because we knew when it was gonna happen... you know, um... Oh, that's my name, it— it's clipped to this folder... Yeah— It's to me, it says "My Bear." Ah— That's not you or Mikey.

MICHAEL: Well it sure as hell ain't Stinky.

MIKE *[holding paper]:* I don't know if Edgar knows who Stinky is. Okay... *[Reading.]* "Bear,

"Firstly, I love you. If you are reading this while I'm alive, please don't let me know about it. I'm trying to give you everything of mine so there isn't so much of me that is gone when I leave."
[Aside.] I hate that word. "Leave"? He didn't leave. *[Continues reading.]* "I told you about so many things that should have never been secrets, but the days flew by so fast. I didn't tell you everything. I didn't know how to tell you everything. But you have time on your side, an eternity

of time. You can go back and forward until you figure out everything on your own terms at your own pace. What a wonderful thing that you will get to know me even after I'm gone. I'm so happy to leave that for you.

"This folder contains documentation and reflections about the Lost Year. I thought about destroying these documents before my death but ultimately decided that you should be able to choose whether or not you want to know what happened. Everything you ever wanted to know about the Lost Year is in these files.

"You should seriously consider destroying these documents without reading them, Bear. They contain details of pain and hardship that you don't need to sympathetically endure. Doing so would not change what happened, and there is nothing that can be done now. You will gain nothing from these documents except for heartache. The knowledge contained within has no other value.

"I also want to be clear that there is no key, no cipher, no secret message in these files. Nothing inside of them will bring me back to life or change the inevitable. I've spoken to Michael before my death in his iteration of events. He spent 100 years breaking his own spirit, only to realize that he was fighting the inevitable. I don't want you to do the same. Do not spend a century trying to put together puzzle pieces that don't even exist. There will be plenty of desperation, struggle, hopelessness, sorrow. You do not need to invent it for yourself.

"I love you, Bear. Your life is my life. As long as you continue on, you will carry me with you. I can hear you rolling your eyes even from the grave, babe. I mean it. I know that I don't exist anymore, but that's a problem for me, which is to say that it is not a problem at all because I no longer exist. I can exist for you, in your mind, because you do exist and you do think and you do love me, just as much as I do while I'm writing this, living and breathing while you're asleep in the next room. I love you, and love is real because you still feel it, like seeing the light from a star long since burnt out.

"I love you. Remember that.

"Panther."

[There is a long beat while Mike collects himself.]

MICHAEL: So. What do you wanna do, pilgrim?

MIKE: Flip a coin. Heads: we read what happened during the Lost Year. And tails: we throw the whole thing in the fireplace.

MICHAEL: Well aren't ya glad I got it workin', Mike? Alright. I got my lucky coin what Boris gave to me right here. You ready?

MIKE: *[Breathes in.]* I'm ready.

[The coin flips and lands.]

[Scene transition.]

[We hear the sounds of a blizzard. Someone huffs while chopping wood. 38 approaches through snow. Wood chopping stops.]

38: Hey, you still out here, Stock? Take a break for a minute, let me jaw atcha.

[Stock (previously Mike) talks with a cowboy accent.]

STOCK: Yeah, sure thing, boss. What is it?

38: What do you mean, "what is it"? You sayin' you don't know what day today is? You really have gone feral, Stock.

STOCK: Yeah, you shoulda caught onto that when I stopped correctin' ya and letcha call me Stock instead o' Mike. So what is it, pard? You said somethin' about what day it is?

38: It's the one-year anniversary o' the day you transported out here to Yellowknife, pilgrim! You been livin' out here for 365 dang days, boy. And I was in town yesterday, so I wanted to getcha somethin' special. So I swung by a shop, and they had this in the window.

[38 reaches into his pockets.]

STOCK: Is that a... Is that a signed photograph o' Ty Betteridge?

38: That's the wrong pocket, par— You, ah— You weren't supposed to see that, [**STOCK:** Why is it signed like he's some sorta rock star?] uh— uh— I got it somewhere around here, where is it? Found it. This is what I meant to give ya, pard, so you can forget about that other stuff.

STOCK: A bolo tie? 38, you shouldna. That's— That's too generous. Reminds me o' the— the one I found in Edgar's stuff way back when.

38: I know, pard. That's why I got it for ya. You talk in your sleep, ya know that, Stock?

STOCK: Well, I reckon I gotta do somethin' about my sleep talkin', then... But thank ya, 38. *[Sniffs.]* This means a whole lot to me. *[Sniffs again.]* You think we're 'bout ready to roll outta here? We gotta get this cattle drive underway soon, right? It's already snowin'.

38: We're behind schedule, like usual. It'll come together when it's time to move them cattle. Always does. It'll be easier than ever this year with our fourth set o' hands thanks to you, Stock.

STOCK: Oh, I'm just doin' what I can. Earnin' my keep.

38: Well I speak for everyone when I say that we appreciate it, believe you me. Welp, I'll let ya get back to choppin' wood. And maybe we got a little somethin' else cooked up for ya come dinner time. See ya 'round, Stock.

[38 walks away.]

STOCK: Yup. Thanks for the present, 38! See ya at supper.

[Stock chops some more wood while whistling to the tune of "Ol' Brush Valley."]

STOCK: *[Stops.]* Hey, uh, XL, you 'round?

[Stock approaches XL's tent, whistling briefly.]

STOCK: Hello, uh, XL? Hey, uh... do you know about this bolo tie thing? I-It's pretty nifty. I-I wanted to— I wanna say thanks, uh, I guess it was you that heard me talkin' in my sleep, uh. ...H-H-Hello? Hey. You ain't in here, are ya?

[Stock looks into XL's tent. A notification chime comes from the computer.]

STOCK: What the hell was that? Y-You ain't holdin' out on us, are ya, XL? 'Cause 38 said no electronics 'cause o' disconnectivity and that you weren't supposed to be keepin' up with the news no more.

[Notification chime.]

STOCK *[to himself]:* What— What is this? "Invitation Rendezvous Point for Tex's Poker Night"... Rendezvous Point, like they're— t-they— they're transportin' outta here? XL was gonna go to poker night. *[Pause.]* They're settin' up a transportation location right here. *[Sniffs.]* So— So if I clicked accept...

[There is a pause while he decides what to do. Notification chime and beep. Then we hear a click and the time travel noise.]

XL *[sing-songy]:* Coffee, coffee, coffee, I love coffee!

[XL closes the lid of a travel mug filled with coffee.]

XL: Those fuckin' Poker Night Michaels aren't gonna know what hit 'em. Alright, let's see. Let's get outta here. *[Pauses.]* Wait, wait! Wait, where's the invite? Where'd it go? I didn't miss it—!

[Frantically clicks the computer mouse.] C'mon, I had to go get my coffee! I— Ca— The window can't be that small, goddamnit.

[Closing theme plays.]

BLOOPER (MIKE): He suddenly looks down at his cowboy boots. *[Breaks character.]* "AdBlock has blocked 219,718 ads for you," thank you, I wasn't in the middle of anything.

[END Episode 219.]