

IN TREATMENT

EPISODE 75: MIA

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FADE IN:

1 EXT. PAUL'S STOOP - 7:00 A.M. 1

MIA sits sipping a latte, waiting for her therapy session with PAUL. She appears simultaneously hopeful, nervous, and calm, and has dressed with care. She sees Paul round the street corner with a very attractive WOMAN IN HER MID-30S wearing running gear. She watches them flirt and touch goodbye as the woman goes off for her run. Paul admires the woman's form for a moment, then comes down the street and takes in the expression on Mia's face: Shock.

2 INT. PAUL'S WAITING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER 2

Paul, casual but formal, escorts Mia inside. She is aloof; part of her is not in the room. She's carrying several bags, and eyes the coat rack. He gestures to it.

PAUL
Would you like to-- ?

MIA
Uh, no. No.

3 INT. PAUL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 3

Mia enters the office and sits on the couch, collecting her things around her. Her anger is palpable, though she remains self-contained. Paul takes his chair, and tries to draw her out.

PAUL
Mia?

She musters the courage to look him in the eyes, then examines him as if he were on trial.

PAUL
You look upset.

MIA
Do I?

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Why don't you tell me what's going on with you.

MIA

Now that we're on intimate terms, you mean.

PAUL

On intimate terms?

MIA

(staring him down)
Yeah. Like last week.

PAUL

Is there something you'd like to discuss about last week?

(beat)

It was my impression we had a breakthrough. An understanding of our work here.

MIA

Ah. Breakthrough. Yeah.

PAUL

(tries a light approach)
I thought I bought at least some time with you.

MIA

What's the expression? Believe me Paul, "you couldn't afford me."

PAUL

I see. Not a breakthrough then. You seem disappointed this morning, Mia.

MIA

Really.

PAUL

Have I done something to upset you?

(CONTINUED)

MIA

What makes you say that?

PAUL

Just my sense. Last week you said you wanted to continue our work. I thought we were making progress toward--

MIA

--Progress. Running in place is more like it. Last session, I got caught up, that's all. In the--
(she stops herself)

PAUL

In what?

MIA

In the moment. In what I was feeling. I don't know. It doesn't matter now.

PAUL

I think it does. From the look of you, I feel fairly certain that what may be bothering you has nothing to do with what happened last week.

MIA

"From the look of me." Judging a book by its cover, Paul? Do they encourage that shallow sensibility in shrink school?

PAUL

Well, I don't know, Mia. Do they discourage it in jury selection?

MIA

Fine. Okay, well, enlighten me.

PAUL

Fine. Did it bother you seeing me with a woman this morning?

(CONTINUED)

MIA

No, why should it bother me?
That isn't the nature of our
relationship. We've been over
this.

PAUL

And yet you wish it could be
otherwise. You've said so.

In a burst, Mia gets up, clatters the coffee table in front
of her, and starts rounding room, avoiding his gaze.

MIA

Boy, you're flattering yourself
this morning, aren't you? Two
women want you and it's not even
8:00 a.m. What happens by noon?

PAUL

Maybe by then I'll have an
understanding of why you're
choosing to act out this way.

MIA

This is acting out? Why? Because
I'm simply displaying the very
sense of humor you said you
would miss if I left therapy?

PAUL

In terms of your treatment,
this

(points to her,
indicating her response)
is obstruction. Resistance.
Suddenly I'm on trial because
you've made an assumption about
someone I was having a
conversation with. It's not even
10 minutes into our session, and
it seems I've already betrayed
your trust. Like all the other
men in your life whom you believe
failed you time and again. Isn't
that right?

(CONTINUED)

MIA

I see. So you're telling me she's just a neighbor? That I don't know how to read body language? I saw how you were looking at her. Don't tell me I misread it.

PAUL

You can read into it whatever you like. But if as you say you accept our relationship as that of therapist and patient, and accept the boundaries that go with that relationship--

MIA

--It just bothers me, I guess. I'm human.

(beat)

What's her name?

PAUL

You know it's against my--

MIA

--policy. I know. To discuss her. I get it. Boundaries. I had them this morning. I was waiting patiently for you. I wasn't going to barge in and bring breakfast again. Assume something was going to happen between us that I know can't happen.

(beat)

Is she your type? Is that what Laura looked like? Is she part of your pattern, Paul?

PAUL

What do you imagine my type to be?

MIA

You know, I've thought about that. I'm really not sure. Like to tell me?

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Do you ever wonder whether I consider you my type?

She stops pacing.

MIA

Please, Paul. You rejected me 20 years ago, you reject me now. I know I'm not your type.

PAUL

You sound quite certain of that.

MIA

What, I am? I offered to fuck you last week. The offer still stands. Maybe if I took up running. But with my pattern, I'd probably continue to run in circles, right?

PAUL

As long as you don't run over everyone who crosses your path.

MIA

I get paid to do that, remember? Defend the undefendable.

PAUL

That must be quite difficult.

MIA

Oh, I don't know. You get numb to it. You must feel that way too, sitting in that chair week after week. Listening to people bitch and moan. All the depressing commentary.

Mia sits back down.

PAUL

Well, I'm trained to handle that.

MIA

Mmmm.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Tell me Mia, how was going back to work after taking time off from the firm last week?

MIA

Oh, you know. It was okay. Though I have a lot of shit on my desk. And when I go home, there's still nothing. Just nondescript beige walls around me for comfort.

PAUL

Not the kind of protection you need.

MIA

No. But at least they're not closing in.

PAUL

So we'll rule out claustrophobia. Well, that's encouraging. And your father? Has he contacted you since you last spoke?

MIA

For God's sake, Paul. Stop poking at me. I told you he doesn't want to speak to me now. Thanks to you.

PAUL

I know you're unhappy about what he said to you that day.

MIA

What, about how dare I accuse him, or how no one could ever love me the way I am, ever? Maybe he's right.

PAUL

He's not. It's understandable you'd still be upset.

(CONTINUED)

MIA

Upset? Right now, I don't even feel human. I feel sub-human. But rage I feel, rage I have.

PAUL

Yes, I can see that. I think it's been rage that has fueled you all your life. It's harder to feel hurt feelings when you have the fire of rage to console you.

MIA

Some consolation. Is that what you think I've done?

PAUL

I do. Rage can keep a person going during stressful times. When you can't process traumatic events and have to move forward and function day after day. I think in your case, you clung to rage and were never able to let go. You used your rage to hold yourself together when you were most vulnerable. But somehow you got stuck, and haven't been able to get past it. Process the hurt feelings along the way. And you've built a wall.

MIA

Fortress is more like it.

PAUL

Now I'm trying to get you to take it down. See what's behind it.

MIA

And if I do?

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

You'll probably feel even more vulnerable for awhile. It may even bring to mind some events from your past that will be helpful for us to explore.

MIA

Like what? The first time my father failed me?

PAUL

Does something come to mind?

MIA

No Paul, I'm just saying. Nothing comes to mind. Sorry to disappoint you. And this morning--

PAUL

Yes?

MIA

What about what's happened this morning?

PAUL

Why don't you tell me.

Mia shakes her head as if to say, "I can't go there." She steels herself, gets up, and begins to pace the room again as if about to cross-examine a witness. Suddenly, she realizes she can't play this role. Her behavior shifts, and softens, and she sits down on the arm of couch, at a safer distance from Paul. She's come to a decision to let her guard down.

MIA

Okay. Here's an honest exploration of my hurts. A step or two beneath rage.

PAUL

Okay.

(CONTINUED)

MIA

What I want to know is, if it were possible, what--

A long pause. She begins to cry softly, then continues.

MIA

What--

PAUL

Go on.

She looks down at the floor, at her feet.

MIA

What would make you want to choose me, want me-- love me?

PAUL

Mia--

As soon as Paul speaks, Mia gets up and turns away. Embarrassed, she crosses the room and looks out the window.

PAUL

Mia, I think last week you sensed that I do care deeply about you. About what happens to you in your life.

Still facing away from Paul, Mia nods through her tears. Paul looks around to find a tissue, and goes to get a box from his desk. He comes to her, and offers her one.

PAUL

Here.

MIA

Thanks.

He hovers over her a moment, then sits. Mia continues to look out the window as she speaks, as if envisioning the on-the-street scenario. Then, to distance herself from the memory, she walks around the room absorbed in various objects, and at times, is able to turn and face him.

(CONTINUED)

MIA

You aren't rejecting me, I realize. But something happened to me last week. Though it was shot to shit the minute I saw you with her out there. The last few minutes of the session, I felt closer to you than I have with anyone, including my father when I was a girl. I had the most intimate experience with a man I can never really be close to. What am supposed to do with that, Paul? I can't have you in my life the way I want. Yes, in some ways I can, that we established, but you know what? As ridiculous as it sounds, I came here today to try and win you. I wasn't planning to do anything really, not today, not next week. But it was my long-term plan. To set my mind to it, like playing practice drills on the piano, or preparing for depositions on a really big case. A steady, consistent, plan of action. Practical, huh? You see, because without you in my life, I'm empty. I have no life. Not really.

(beat)

It happened in a moment. A few moments last week. I felt it with you 20 years ago, and again now. And there you were with her. Smiling. Like I've never seen you. Hopeful, the way I feel about you. I don't know what to do with all this. How to look at you. I hate having you know how much I care, when I can't do a thing about it.

Paul has been listening intently, and is moved.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

I appreciate the courage it took for you to say this to me.

MIA

Yeah, well, it hurts to care. Whatever happened to the "joy" of connection?

PAUL

This is intimacy Mia. Remember. There's also joy, but making deep connections can be difficult. Life is messy, and not everyone cooperates the way you'd like them to. It's also hard to find true connection these days-- our society makes it challenging to find people invested in opening themselves up that way.

MIA

(locks eyes with him)
It's also difficult when feelings are unrequited too.

PAUL

I'm not sure what you'd like me to say to that. As your therapist, I can tell you it's important for you to get to a point where you are able to share your feelings and not blame the object of your affections for failing to give you what you want in the way that you want. Then you'll be freer in your life. You won't rack up the "slings and arrows" of your hurts. You'll be able to let them go.

MIA

That's from Hamlet, right?

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Yes. He also had a difficult relationship with his father.

MIA

And mother too, as I recall.

PAUL

You know your Shakespeare. The point is, you won't punish yourself when someone can't return your love. You won't take it so personally, and will be better equipped to move on.

MIA

To the next insult. And the one after that.

PAUL

If someone can't give you what you want, Mia, it isn't an insult. Perhaps the person isn't capable of it. As to our professional relationship, it's built in that there are limitations to the affection we may have for each other.

On this note, she sits.

MIA

You have affection for me?

PAUL

Yes, Mia. I do. But there's something else we should talk about. Transference. It's why you may be having such intense feelings towards me.

MIA

I think we've discussed that before.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Then you know that you have been unconsciously transferring onto me all the burdens of relationships from your past. Bennett, other men in your life, your father, and the people who've shaped you. It's that transference that will enable me to see what's going on with you more clearly, and help you make better choices.

MIA

If you say so.

PAUL

You don't believe me.

MIA

I haven't seen anything work out better. In fact, things have been a lot worse lately.

PAUL

Your view of the world is being shaken up, that's all. That's progress.

MIA

You like that word progress, don't you? Doesn't feel very good.

PAUL

No, but it will in time, if we keep working. I also want to say something to you. I want to thank you for what you've said. For trusting me enough to be vulnerable with me. And for the tremendous compliment you've given me. I'm flattered.

MIA

Yeah, well don't be too flattered 'cause I'm still angry.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Fair enough.

MIA

No other man has made me feel what you have, my whole adult life. Where do I go from there?

PAUL

The fact that you're capable of feeling those feelings for me, means you're capable of it with others.

MIA

Is that right?

PAUL

Yes, absolutely.

MIA

Well, that's something.

PAUL

You know, I also had a thought, awhile back. Listening to you.

MIA

What?

PAUL

You mentioned something about setting your mind to things, like "playing practice drills on the piano."

MIA

What about it?

PAUL

I remember last week, you were talking about the piano you used to play growing up. Didn't you say your father sold it after you were sent to live with your Aunt in NJ?

(CONTINUED)

MIA

Yes, that's right.

PAUL

Would you say you were playing your "practice drills" around that time? Before you left?

MIA

I guess so. Why?

PAUL

Do you think there might have been something going on that you were "setting your mind to" back then?

MIA

Like what?

PAUL

Well-- what happened in the weeks before you left for NJ?

MIA

I don't know. The usual stuff.

PAUL

When did you do these "practice drills?"

MIA

Scales, you mean. Not drills.

PAUL

Okay. Yes, your scales.

MIA

After school mostly. When my parents were out of the house. They were a ritual for me.

PAUL

Why a ritual?

(CONTINUED)

MIA

Oh, all sorts of reasons, not just to practice. If I was thinking about a test I had to take, or a boy I liked, or to clear my head, I'd move my fingers up and down, faster and faster, until I felt better.

PAUL

Why faster?

MIA

I'd lose myself in it. In the motion. I'd distract myself.

PAUL

From what?

MIA

It just made me feel safe. I liked the noise-- I liked the control. My mother never really gave me what I needed, as you know, and my father wasn't always around. He absolutely hated when I would make a mistake.

PAUL

Did he.

MIA

Well, he was supportive-- but I guess he just wanted me to try harder. Be my best. You know.

PAUL

A perfectionist.

MIA

Yes, but he still enjoyed my playing.

PAUL

Did he tell you that?

(CONTINUED)

MIA

Not in so many words. But I do remember he liked when I played that song "The Entertainer," by Scott Joplin. From that movie, "The Sting."

PAUL

Yes, I'm familiar with it. How do you know he liked that piece?

MIA

I just have that memory. He smiled-- laughed when I played it.

PAUL

He laughed?

MIA

Yes, Paul. Out of enjoyment.

PAUL

I see. And did you think of perfecting your playing as a kind of "drill"?

MIA

Not really. I don't know why I used that word.

PAUL

Mmmmm. Did you play for your parents often?

MIA

Well, I played at night sometimes, when my father was home. After dinner. But it wasn't like they sat around listening to me.

PAUL

Would that be a composition, like the Chopin you gave me years ago?

MIA

My father hated classical.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Mia, do you recall your father ever saying he was proud of your ability to play?

MIA

Well, he wasn't overly demonstrative about it.

PAUL

Yet he supported you in other ways.

MIA

In many ways, yes.

PAUL

But not in this one.

MIA

Is there a point to all this?

Paul locks eyes with Mia for a moment, then proceeds.

PAUL

Who took you to your lessons?

MIA

My mother for awhile, then I'd sometimes go myself when I got older.

PAUL

But never your father.

MIA

No, he was too busy.

PAUL

Did he go to your recitals?

MIA

My mother did. She always embarrassed me. He usually had to work late.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

So he never heard you play in public?

MIA

No, Paul. Would you please just make your point?

PAUL

The point, Mia, is that it seems with all your accomplishment, your father never once gave you a genuine compliment, or came to support you when you performed. Yet you still seem to want to defend his actions.

MIA

Forgive me, Paul. It's hard finding out my father was such a bad guy, so relatively late in my life. I'll try harder to adjust.

The two pause and regard each other for another moment, then Paul continues.

PAUL

Did you ever wonder why you were sent to live with your Aunt so suddenly?

MIA

Of course I did. Now I know my mother had a difficult pregnancy-- with the twins.

PAUL

They didn't explain it, at the time?

MIA

Nope. Just a "visit," they said.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

That couldn't have been easy for you. And when you returned, you found that the piano you loved, that was such a part of you, was simply gone.

MIA

Yeah, it was awful.

PAUL

Where did you use to play? In the house.

MIA

In our small rec room, next to the living room. By the time I came back, it was the twins' bedroom. There wasn't anyplace else to put them.

PAUL

What do you make of that?

MIA

Paul, I loved my sisters on sight. Do you think I made some sort of warped connection between my sisters being there and the piano being sold? Oh, come on, Paul. Talk about over-reaching.

PAUL

No? It must have seemed like a punishment of some kind. You were 10, and suddenly relegated to the background of this new, growing family. And it happened without a word to you. Without your consent. All the while you were staying dutifully with your Aunt in NJ.

MIA

(quietly)

I suppose you're right.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

You never mentioned why he sold it.

MIA

For money, I guess. For space.

PAUL

If that was the case, then I wonder why he simply didn't move it elsewhere in the house. It couldn't possibly take up that much room.

MIA

That's true too.

PAUL

What were you told about why it was no longer there for you?

MIA

Nothing. My father never said anything about it.

PAUL

Did your mother?

MIA

I don't think so. Maybe that "it had to be done," or something like that.

PAUL

Did you ask them to explain it to you?

MIA

I couldn't open my mouth. Me, the loud-mouthed attorney.

PAUL

Did either of your parents give you any indication it was going to be taken from you before you left?

(CONTINUED)

MIA

No. When I got back it was this unspoken thing. I just accepted it. But I did get the feeling it was my father's decision.

PAUL

Let's assume money was the reason it was sold. Did your parents ever suggest to you that you could continue your lessons, even if you had to get a small after school job to help pay for them?

MIA

They never suggested that. I guess they could have, couldn't they? Why wouldn't they? That makes sense.

PAUL

It seems to me they could have.

MIA

Yeah. But I didn't think of doing it either.

PAUL

Maybe you felt the whole situation was spoiled in some way. It also wasn't your responsibility to come up with such a grown-up solution.

MIA

It just became this different time. You know, when you're a kid, you just roll with what happens. But you're right. It was spoiled for me. I didn't want to think about it, or talk about it.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

So you had no warning this instrument that you loved, that you relied on to help you create, and escape in your life, was going to be taken from you. And that the music that was in you to express, virtually had no outlet anymore.

MIA

No.

PAUL

I would say that was hurtful. Cruel, in fact. Could it be that your father simply didn't want to hear you play it anymore? That he didn't have the capacity to care about how all this impacted you? And while you were gone, he simply made an executive decision to get rid of it? As coldly as he packed and shipped you off to NJ? And that your mother just went along, in collusion with him?

MIA

(realization dawning)

You think they both betrayed me.

PAUL

No Mia, I think they abandoned you. It could explain why you remain on the outside looking in in your life. I think it's quite possible you've been replaying this particular loss all your life, moving through relationships one after the other, with all the tenacity of playing "practice drills" on the piano. Rushing through them, but never letting yourself get too close, or too attached.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

PAUL (cont'd)

Looking for a familiar type of attention your father gave you, which was severely lacking, in my opinion. It appears in relationships, you wait vigilantly for things to come to an end, as you're certain they inevitably will. It may be why, with all your desire for connection, you keep getting involved with men who end up either rejecting you or who are circumstantially unavailable in some way.

MIA

I guess that means you.

PAUL

I think inside you're still that 10-year-old girl who stood in the middle of what was once the favorite room in her familiar home and wondered what happened to her life. Your parents didn't warn you about what they were going to do, discuss it with you, or protect your feelings, did they? Didn't this action prevent you from exploring your potential, your interest in music, from then on?

MIA

(weeping quietly)

Things just changed one day. I didn't really remember that much about it. Until now.

PAUL

My guess is you psychically split from the situation. It was too painful for you to comprehend.

MIA

Yeah, well, it's still painful to comprehend.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Of course it is.

MIA

But why would they do such a thing?

PAUL

The short answer is your father's narcissism. His inability to understand your needs, and have empathy for you. From what you described earlier, it sounds like he may have envied your ability to play too, which is characteristic of narcissism. He may have been threatened by your ability. Your talent.

MIA

It's interesting you say that.

PAUL

How come?

MIA

I do remember him saying one time he wished he could play. He also regularly drilled it into me that that I was to have a respectable profession, not a risky career in the arts.

PAUL

He drilled it into you?

MIA

(gets the connection)
He used to be in this band when my parents first got married. My mother said he hated giving it up, but with work--

PAUL

Was it a good band?

(CONTINUED)

MIA

Not really, from what I hear. Do you think he was trying to stop me from doing what I loved?

PAUL

I think it would be important for you to ask him that.

MIA

He'd never admit to anything.

PAUL

Then you'll have to put your deposing abilities to good use, and see what's under the facade. You know, you and I aren't very different in that way.

MIA

I should consider you a shark too?

PAUL

No. Well, if you like. But I do think your father is looking a bit like one. I'd say the jury's still out on your mother, though she did play a part in all this too.

MIA

What about my practice "drills?"

PAUL

I got the sense from hearing you talk about the scales as "drills" that there was a desperation you were articulating. The need to move forward, and achieve, and please your father. Also there was a bit of "magical thinking" in it too. If I do my practice drills, everything will be okay. That you'll be fine, and able to resolve things in your life. Maybe that childhood fantasy has followed you your whole life.

(CONTINUED)

MIA

That's exactly how I felt about it.

PAUL

And today, you mentioned that you were going to set your mind to a relationship with me, like playing practice drills on the piano.

MIA

I did, didn't I? I can fantasize, can't I?

PAUL

(clears throat)

Do you ever fantasize about playing the piano again?

MIA

Not lately.

PAUL

Maybe next week we should discuss how losing such a vital part of yourself may have left a mark on you. Perhaps we can trace some of your feelings of emptiness to that time period. You suffered a big loss. It could be you sensed something was going to happen with the piano. Children are very in touch that way.

MIA

I don't know. I just cut off from the whole experience. I don't really think I'm that person anymore.

Mia begins to slowly collect her things as the session winds down.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

Are you sure? Things may not be so different for you today. Keeping a frenetic work pace, drilling for depositions instead of concerts-- setting your mind to making romantic partnerships happen at will--

MIA

(tries levity)

A cop and a musician in one day, will I ever live that down?--

Mia begins to get up.

PAUL

I see you'll be leaving, humor intact--

She suddenly stops, arrested by a thought, then sits back down.

MIA

(sharp realization)

--and willing my belief in a false pregnancy?

PAUL

Yes, Mia. There's that too. That's a brave insight. Perhaps it was your subconscious wish that if you had a baby of your very own, the way your parents did when they had the twins, that you could go back and change things in some way. Reconnect to the part of you that was lost back then.

MIA

I thought "magical thinking" was just for kids.

(CONTINUED)

PAUL

No, Mia. You know, it's a very human response to try to hang on to something, even a wish or false hope, when the threat of loss is near. To have that feeling of control. Perhaps what began as a child's response to a situation that was completely out of her control many years ago-- literally out of her hands-- is still with you today.

MIA

Now I want to hang onto you.

PAUL

I'm right here. I won't just disappear on you one day like the home you once knew, or your piano.

MIA

Thank you, Paul.

PAUL

Mia, creating an authentic connection with someone can't truly happen until you have that very relationship with yourself first. Maybe it's a connection with who you were then, and the person you still are at the core that you've been yearning for, not just the desire for a husband or a child-- or me. That self-knowledge-- and self-acceptance--can give you comfort within the walls of your home as well. Beige, or any other color.

(CONTINUED)

Mia and Paul get up to conclude the session.

MIA
Well, there goes my parrot.

Paul walks Mia to the door.

PAUL
By all means, get the parrot.
Just don't expect it to marvel
at your Chopin.

MIA
What would be the point? It
would be like going home again.

They have a doorknob moment.

Tell me Paul, if we weren't
patient and therapist, would
you ever consider taking
me to a concert sometime?
A classical one?

PAUL
If the circumstances were
different Mia, I think I
would. But I'd settle for
hearing you play again.

MIA
I wish that would be enough
for me. See you next week.

Paul shuts the door behind her and ponders her response.
He sighs, looks out the window, and watches her walk down
the street.

FADE OUT

The End