



Mabel, episode 37: Pas de Deux. In which the world splits like an atom.

[INTRO]

[BEEP]

MABEL: The hill is not a microcosm. It is not the universe. It is not a gaping mouth, or a gaping wound. It is not a void to fill. It is not a never-ending song of roses, or a lapse in the signature of time. It is not sprawling. It is not relentless. It is only what it is. Do you understand that it will rage and gnash its teeth against any limitation? That it will cower before them? Burn? Sing? There is no imposition we can inflict upon it. This is important.

ANNA: Why does it need a king at all, then? Why does it need any external force?

MABEL: Why does a body need cells? Why does a heart need blood? There are explanations, but beyond that, no answers. It's just the way that - there are physical facts of existence without which we would not be what we are. That's all I really know.

ANNA: What we did had repercussions. Unthroning him. I felt it even then.

MABEL: Yeah. There's always consequences. That's just - physics.

ANNA: I can - enforce my will onto things down here. Push and pull, cause and effect. That's not the same as - whatever it was *he* did. He was

necessary, like – like you said. Like cells, like blood. Is that what it will be like for me? If I –

MABEL: [AGGRESSIVELY] Yes. Yes, it will. I want you to understand that. It cannot go on without you, all this theatre. But with you bearing down upon it - you will have a throne. You will be a ruler. There is a hierarchy to that you might not like. I just want you to be sure. I won't let you do it if you're not sure.

ANNA: I am only sure of you. [PAUSE] You're saying I have a choice.

MABEL: You do. There's always a choice.

ANNA: And if I said no? If I turned my back on everything? You'd come with me, even if it meant - running, somehow, hiding, scrabbling around in the house or the roots of the hill like - fucking rats? You'd do that?

MABEL: Of course I would. We'd eat the darkness and drink sweat off of each other. It sounds interesting.

ANNA: You think the strangest things are interesting. Drinking sweat, me. [LAUGHS, BITTER] I won't make you do that, anyway. There is a very big part of me - the version of me that had to smile at people who called me racial slurs, the version of me doctors called *sweetheart* - that is looking forward to sitting on a throne.

MABEL: Good. I want you to. Not to [LAUGHS] not to *impose*, or anything.

ANNA: You could never.

MABEL: We can leave now. We can run away, if you like.

ANNA: Is that what you want?

MABEL: What I want. I - I am not so sure what I want. You. The freedom I was always denied. Beyond that, I don't know. I feel I keep saying that but I'm not sure what else to say.

ANNA: You have time. Even if I – do this. You could leave, if you decide that's what you want most. Pull a Persephone; visit me for a season. I would miss you. But it's your choice.

[LONGEST PAUSE IN THE WORLD]

MABEL: [VERY, VERY QUIETLY] I suppose it is my choice.

[BEEP]

[GROTESQUE GROWING NOISES, BROKEN UP BY ACONITE, LAUGHING]

[BEEP]

[FAIRY REVEL NOISES]

[BEEP]

JANET: Shut up!

[SILENCE.]

Okay. So. That happened.

Shit, that really *happened*. I, I, I went to the Morehampton Asylum, supposedly *the* most haunted place in the country, and I brought a – a fucking Ouija board, like, how stupid can you – and – remember this? Remember me getting so fucking pumped because – I don't even remember what it was, something *fell* in the next room over and I was like, this is it, I have Made Contact, I am like the literal ghost queen, all because an animal or a breeze toppled over a half-rotted plastic *chair* –

But I'm here. And there was – an echo. I heard it. It's on tape. This is. [HALF-LAUGHING] Really happening.

[GATHERS HERSELF] Okay.

[BACK TO AS PROFESSIONAL AS JANET EVER GETS] There have been some crazy theories about what happened in the Martin House and why. Ley lines, electromagnetic currents, um. Poltergeist activity. Demonic entities. Secret cults. Intersecting dimensions. One of my favourites is that Anna Limon was actually a super powerful practitioner of black magic, and she sacrificed Sally Martin to some ancient Cthulu god for – whatever magicians sacrifice people to Cthulu for. Eternal life, the answers to the mysteries of the universe. I never really believed any of that shit. I'm a simple girl at heart – I just think this is a house with a ghost in it.

But now...?

[HOUSE CREAKS. EERIE LAUGHTER. LOUD CLATTER AS RECORDER FALLS AND BOUNCES AWAY]

Hey - !

[BEEP]

[FAIRY PARTY NOISES]

CHALCEDONY: – my golden fox, my golden feather. It was nothing, a bundle of rags. [LAUGHS] What do you anticipate for tonight, Thornblood?

THORNBLOOD: Blood and glory. Perhaps not taken together. [LAUGHS] They won't fare well, take my word for it.

CHALCEDONY: Oh? [NASTILY, GIGGLING] You have no faith in our ill-bred incumbent rulers? She did best His Mercurial Infinitude in fair combat.

THORNBLOOD: Yes, *particularly* fair. [ALMOST THOUGHTFULLY] I wonder what really happened between them.

CHALCEDONY: The snake-girl and our fallen lord? Sweet thing, he seemed to grow quite fond of her. He always did have a penchant for collecting strays.

THORNBLOOD: I think the fair moon maiden might have something to say about it. [CONSPIRATORIALY] Between us, Chalcedony, I think the rabbit might be a bit jealous.

CHALCEDONY: [SCANDALIZED DELIGHT] You wicked creature. Poor dear Luna, with her endless golden chain. How could she have wanted anything but her freedom? [MORE POINTED] Someone else is likely to be jealous, before the night is over.

THORNBLOOD: Most certainly. [MEAN LAUGHTER]

[BEEP]

LUNA: I have never come to this place of my own free will. Only ever blindfolded, only ever with his rope around my throat. But every step I take now speaks to me two words: my choice, my choice, my choice.

It is curious that I do not hate them, these interwoven passageways, these proteoid roots, phosphorescent lights, the mythic Euclidean space of hell. It is not the cage's fault that the bird inside plucked and worried at her own feathers for want of freedom. This place is discrete, not only from the worlds beyond but from the merit and consequence of his actions. I have spent, now, a little time away, and believe that I can say, quite safely –

- I do not hate the kingdom under the hill, no matter how I might hate its toppled king.

And do you remember, little Ophidia, how he toppled? His game, his trickery, the sure casting of his die? He does not surrender. He does not give, he only takes; do you know, yet, what he has taken from you? Have you charted the length of his long shadow? Have you counted his golden ducks, in their bright, eternal row? Do you know, Mabel Martin, what he is planning?

[BEEP]

ACONITE: [MORE PANICKED, MORE DESPERATE THAN WE HAVE EVER HEARD HER] It will all be over soon. It will all be over soon. It will – it will all be over soon, it will all be over soon, it will all be, it will all be over soon, it –

[BEEP]

ANNA: – realise I was going to be nervous. I feel. Stupid, like I'm about to speak in some terrible school assembly.

MABEL: Don't be nervous. It's so much worse than a school assembly.

ANNA: I love that I can always count on you. [LAUGHS] Is there something - I should wear? Do - with myself? Underworld prom dress, cover up my - hand?

MABEL: [FORCEFULLY] No. Don't cover that up. They'll take you as you are or I'll burn them all. [HEAR THE SMILE IN HER VOICE] I should write disability campaign slogans.

ANNA: Just something else to add to your resume if we ever find ourselves in a different life. [SECRETIVELY, TENTATIVE] I still feel. Not enough. I doubt he ever felt like that. He was a - a force of nature, literally. I'm. Not.

MABEL: You think anything other than a force of nature could have done what you've done? Anna. Why are you so reluctant to see yourself as you are?

ANNA: I do, I do trust you. I'm just. It never makes much sense to me. Why I'm here, at all. Why any of this –

LUNA: Lovely king-elect. Sweet Mabel. Do I interrupt an intimate moment?

MABEL: You - what -

ANNA: [AT THE SAME TIME] What are you -

LUNA: Did you think I would miss this moment, girl-snake? A new hand on the tiller of the Hill? Such as the hand is, of course.

MABEL: Aren't you supposed to be happy somewhere? [VERY FAERY LIKE] Is domesticity *boring* you already?

ANNA: I - [CONFUSED] We thought you disappeared. With Vera.

LUNA: [LAUGHING] I see the scorpion has not lost her sting. Isn't that what they say about the scorpion, Mabel? That it must lash out with its tail, or succumb to its own venom? [TO ANNA] It seems she has not told you about the significance of this event. It is not only a ceremony. It is a *rite*. It is a holy thing, a true and sacred thing, and like every rite, requires both priest and sacrifice.

MABEL: I have explained it to her in the best way I know how. Unlike how you have lied past your due. No wonder nobody ever liked you here, with how easily you pull fantasy from ether. It's anathema to the rest of us.

[TO ANNA]

I would have told you sooner, but the fever took me and I couldn't remember until - [FRUSTRATION NOISES] She was not held captive by the king under the hill. She promised him - she *oathed* to him long, long ago, and then she

tried to break her oath, and he held her to it. She resented him because he [LAUGHS] he was more honest than she was. That's all.

ANNA: What -

LUNA: How many years did you spend with us, changeling? I do not recall your presence there, at the beginning of it all. I will not be so slandered by a child-thing barely free of her own shell.

ANNA: She's not a child. Any more than I am. What are you - what are you doing *here*? Priest and sacrifice, was it? Which one are you, Luna?

MABEL: He showed me when he let me win against him. *Let me*. She won't have any fancy explanations for that.

LUNA: It is remarkable, how you played into his hand. I had such - *expectations* of you. What a pity, to see them all dashed to the cliff-face so. [TO BOTH] Come, children. Your court awaits.

ANNA: [TO MABEL] He showed you?

MABEL: Yes. When he threw down the acorn. I was pulled into this place - trust me. She does not - [WHISPERS] she only wants to prove that anyone would have done what she did.

LUNA: [BEGINNING TO BE IRRITATED] I forget, you are entirely different. You did not rage against the bars of your prison. You placid creature, you only bore, and bore, and let him cosset you, his *favourite*, his precious, many-fanged pet. Your grandmother never -

MABEL: Do not compare them! Was Sally *trapped*, with her whiteness, with her *money*? Did I promise to free her and then run away when that became difficult? No, Luna, because I am not you. I saw what happened. I saw you! He was trapped, in himself, in his own lightless box of hell, and you told him you would free him, and *you left when you were bored*. When you were *bored* of your promises. Here is all I need to know: he let himself be slandered because he thought better of you. Even after -

[VICIOUSLY] I am so terribly glad that Sally did the same to you. It's all you deserve.

LUNA: Terrible child, do not -

ANNA: Stop.

[WEIRD THRUMMING SOUND BEGINS TO PULSE LIKE A BIZARRE ELECTRONIC HEARTBEAT]

[TO MABEL, SLIGHTLY DREAMY, AS THOUGH LUNA ISN'T THERE]

It's calling us. Not - calling, it's. Offering itself. Can you feel that?

MABEL: Yes. Feels like - gold inside my veins.

ANNA: Come with me. It's time to -

[BEEP]

[FAIRY PARTY NOISES, LOUD AND EXUBERANT. A DOOR ROLLS OPEN HEAVILY; VOICES HUSH, MUSIC PAUSES. CROWDS PART, CLOTH AGAINST CLOTH. FOOTSTEPS. A STRANGE PIECE OF MUSIC STARTS SOMEWHERE IN THE DISTANCE; SOMETHING VAGUELY RITUALISTIC. ANOTHER DOOR OPENS. THE CROWD WHISPERS TO ITSELF, DELIGHTED/APPALLED.]

[BEEP]

[STRANGE ATMOSPHERE SOUNDS; LIKE A CATHEDRAL, OR A CAVE. ECHOES AND SPACE, SOFT TRICKLING WATER]

ANNA: I thought it would - what is this place?

MABEL: The heart of the house, or the labyrinth, or the hill - I'm not sure. Someone's heart, anyway. Or something.

LUNA: The answer to every riddle. Anna Limón, do you intend to claim the throne?

ANNA: I. Yes.

LUNA: Do you intend to rule justly, according to the laws and strictures that govern this space, the prism of flawed glass between polar waves of light?

ANNA: ...Yes.

LUNA: Then you must say so. Let it hear you speak.

ANNA: I. It's. [GROWING SLIGHTLY LESS UNCOMFORTABLE AS SHE GOES ON] It is my intention to rule, as is my right, having beaten the king of the hill fairly. I claim my throne.

LUNA [SLIGHTLY BREATHLESS]: Girl-snake. Do you intend to pledge your loyalty to Anna, your ruler in all things?

MABEL: [CURTLY] Yes.

LUNA: Do you bind yourself to her, forsaking all others? Do you offer to her the leash around your neck, the key to your kingdom, the hand at your throat? Do you, Mabel Martin, offer yourself entirely to her, from this point until the hill itself cracks and dissipates into the black mud?

ANNA: Wait, what - ?

MABEL: I know what you're doing. You have a right to officiate, but that's it. I offer myself freely as her consort, should she have me. That's all. That's what will be.

[HILL MURMURS TO ITSELF]

[SMUGLY] It likes me better, see.

ANNA: You never said anything about - a *consort*, what does that –

LUNA: [VAGUELY SULLEN NOW] The bones of the hill are earth. The breath of the hill is air. The spirit of the hill is fire. The heart of the hill is water. Piece your flesh, king-that-would-be, and feed your blood to the running water. If the hill accepts you as its ruler, you will hear it.

ANNA: - If it doesn't?

LUNA: [AMUSED] Do you believe the hill would remain silent? Please do not doubt that you will feel that, too. You may feel little else, but that is another matter entirely.

ANNA: [TO MABEL] You should have told me.

MABEL: I know. I'm sorry. I wanted you to make this decision free of - of influence. You would have felt guilty. But I will always choose you.

ANNA: So will I.

[SOME SORT OF CUTTING NOISE, DRIPPING INTO WATER; THE HILL BEGINS TO STIR]

[BEEP]

[FAIRY PARTY NOISES. STILL-HUSHED WHISPERS, SOFT DRUM BEATS. THE DOOR OPENS; THE CITIZENS OF THE HILL GASP, OR LAUGH, OR FALL SILENT TOGETHER.]

ACONITE: I have come to lay my claim.

[ROARING HILL SOUND]

[FAIRY WHISPERS; ONLY A FEW, HERE AND THERE, ARE AUDIBLE.]

MISC FAIRIES: Did you hear that?

MISC FAIRIES: What did she say?

MISC FAIRIES: I knew it, I knew it, I knew it, I knew it -

ACONITE: [CUTTING ACROSS EVERYONE] Anna Limón is no king. She is a murderer, an infiltrator, plague-bearer, corruption; she and her champion saw my father put to death, and it is *my right* -

[HILL GOING MENTAL NOISES]

[BEEP]

OUTRO:

Mabel is written by Becca De La Rosa and Mabel Martin and produced by Becca De La Rosa; the voice of Mabel Martin is Mabel Martin, and the voice of Anna Limon is Becca De La Rosa. The voice of Janet Kirk is Dorrie Sacks. The voice of Aconite is Alexandra Serova.

The music in this episode was by Bob Roberts, Axeltree, Meydän, and (morse), and all of it is available to download from the Free Music Archive at freemusicarchive.org. For more information about this episode, including a full tracklist and transcript, visit us online at mabelpodcast.com.

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