



## FAIRY HILL

Mabel, Episode 5: Fairy Hill. In which an artifact is uncovered.

[INTRO:]

MABEL: Hi, you've reached Mabel Martin. I'm not here to take your call right now, so please leave a message after the beep. Thanks!

[BEEP]

The worst part of this house is the singing.

[BEEP]

It happens every so often. You'll be doing something around the house, washing dishes or folding laundry, and suddenly you'll hear singing from a different room. The first few times I heard it I thought it was just Sally playing her radio especially loud. But – it has a different quality to the radio. It's – I don't know music, really, I don't know the right terms to say what I mean, but it sounds more – more silver, less warm. A radio sounds like music set against the background of a bonfire. This sounds like someone singing inside a cave, or inside a big metal pipe. The whole first week I was here I tried to find where the singing was coming from. I followed it from room to room, but when you're upstairs it sounds like it's downstairs, when you go down again it sounds like it's above you. If you're in the library you think it's in the kitchen, but when you get to the kitchen you think it might be back in the Green

Parlour – you could spend hours tracing it through the nervous system of the house, if you had the time, and if it ever lasted longer than a minute or so.

I asked Sally about it back when I first moved in. God, that strange, shapeless length of days. She said, “Oh, you know how sounds get stuck in the walls of old houses. Don’t you think it’s pretty? It’s been happening since I was a girl. These big old structures make the funniest noises.” I stared at her. I think I said, “that’s not science.” I know she reached over and patted my hand. “You’ll get used to it,” she said. “There’s nothing to worry about; you’ll see.”

Do you think she lies? Do you think there’s something she knows about this place, something she’s not telling me? I never asked her about the letters again. I couldn’t bring myself to.

[BEEP]

Mabel, what’s it like where you are? Is it sunny there too? Sometimes I try and picture it, but I can’t. There’s a mental block. I know you have to be somewhere in this state. Logic dictates that you must have a house, or an apartment, somewhere to sleep and eat and live, and my imagination doesn’t usually fail me, it’s usually the opposite: too vivid, too full of endless possibilities. Why can’t I even dream up a home for you? Doesn’t have to be big or unique, it could just be a –

Like, a –

Or –

It’s sunny here. That kind of defiant sunlight you get in autumn, when it’s cold and everything smells of smoke and dead leaves and the light is thrown out over the day. It’s good, we’ve needed a bright morning. Too much greyness. Too much fog blurring the lines between one thing and another. For a while now, we’ve needed to see the world as it is.

Later on I’ll go out into the garden and look for buckeyes. Maybe pick the last of the hydrangeas, put them in a vase for Sally.

I hope your morning is bright, wherever you are. Over and out.

[BEEP]

Calling – Mabel Martin. *Please* come in, Mabel.

[BEEP]

We're out in the garden now. Liza's with Sally, they're doing the crossword. It's bright out still, though it's more brittle now, and the birds are – hold on, I'll put you on speaker.

Sally told me once that when they were kids, she and her brother loved naming things. They gave names to everything – the boiler was Mad Tom, the kitchen wood stove was Blister, the pantry was – what was it? – Bean Cave, or something. She said they used to make maps of the garden with all their names for the various features. Like the maps you find at the beginning of fantasy novels. Stained them with tea, burnt them at the edges so they'd look like treasure maps. I told Sally that was a very conquistador thing to do, going around naming things. But she told me –

I almost just said *look, Mabel*. I'm not stupid, I know you're not here with me. It's habit, maybe, or some strange sense of...some illogical, baseless camaraderie. You know if you asked me to stop, I would stop calling you, right? You know I'm not doing this to harass you, or make you feel – inundated with me, or frightened by me, by – whatever it is I'm doing. If you told me to shut up, I would. I'd never call you again, never contact you again, never trouble you with any of this, this – fairy tale family drama, this *crazy*. But I think you know that. You *must* know that you could get rid of me if you just said something, and you haven't, not yet. You're listening. You don't let your inbox fill up anymore. That's friendship for you.

If you were here I'd have said *look, Mabel*, and I would have pointed at the ring of mushrooms in the grass beside the tree-swing. They're tall and spindly with yellow caps, pale runny egg-yolk yellow, smooth except for a few scattered white dots like eyes, or like cigarette burns healed to scar. They look like little ghost faces, the kind of ghosts that wear bedsheets and say "boo". A perfect ring, thirteen of them.

What was I talking about? The maps, all the place names. I called Sally a conquistador, and she said no, that wasn't it at all – they weren't naming the places, they were just transcribing them. The places already had names.

I asked her, well, who told them what the names were, then, and she just laughed.

When I was little we lived in an apartment. A cardboard box, really, the walls were so thin you could hear the neighbours breathing. There was a courtyard, but it wasn't somewhere you could play, just a stone block where the grown-up kids used to smoke and fight. This garden is the kind of place I *dreamed* about. Good climbing trees, hiding places, a swing, a greenhouse, a rose garden, a real pet cemetery – Sally said there used to be chickens in the big coop, up until she got sick, and there were dogs, and cats, and whole families of crows, and bats, and sometimes deer wandered in off the hills. I would –

[BEEP]

SINGING VOICE:

*There's one of them buried beneath the tree at the well below the valley-o*  
*Another two buried beneath the stone at the well below the valley-o*  
*Two of them outside the graveyard wall at the well below the valley-o*  
*Green grows the lily-o, right among the bushes-o*

[BEEP]

– to my aunt Bertha's house. Which was pretty nice, there was a pool so we were happy. It's amazing how long you can entertain yourself and your friends as a kid just with a pool. Underwater tea parties, Marco Polo, chicken fights...

[TRIPS]

What –

There's something down here in the mud. It's a – a sign, I think, though it's been, like, stamped into the ground, it's half-buried. Give me a sec, Mabel.

It is a sign. God, it looks ancient. Hand-painted, though it's hard to see what's written on it, the whole thing's so dirty. The wood's all spongy, it – it keeps crumbling when I try to clean it off. I think it says –

It says Fairy Hill.

I don't. I don't understand. Why – why is this here, why – is this –

[BEEP]

Mabel, I'm back at the tree-swing. The mushrooms, they're – they're all uprooted, someone came and plucked them all out of the ground, and – Jesus, the stems of them, I think they're – they look like they're *bleeding*. I can't –

[BEEP]

I thought about it. I sat on the garden steps and put my head on my knees and I thought about calling the agency and telling them I quit. Just like that, just leaving. Or calling my manager Cynthia and telling her I don't think the situation here is working out. It wouldn't be the end in the world. If I quit outright I'd find a new job eventually, even if I had to work at my uncle's grocery store for a while to tide me over. If I talked to Cynthia, she'd find me a new position, find someone else to come and take care of Sally. I'd go home for a bit, move into a new place, learn a new routine.

Doesn't that sound right? Doesn't that sound – human, achievable? People move on from parts of their life every damn day, it's not monumental. Not really.

It's not Sally. She's not the whole reason. It's not that I made a commitment, it's not that I really do like her and worry about her. It's not the money, it's not a sense of pride, it's not that I'm ashamed to give up.

So what is it? Why can't I leave? I think about it and – it's like my ribs close up on themselves, like my heart forgets how to pump blood. My body doesn't think it's an option, doesn't seem willing to give me a choice. Do you know why? Are you keeping it secret from me? Will you tell me, Mabel?

[BEEP]

[OUTRO:]

Mabel is written and produced by Becca De La Rosa. The voice of Mabel Martin is [CENSORED]. The voice of Anna Limon is Becca De La Rosa. The music in this episode was by Ars Sonor, Avoidant, AlteredCarbon, Hogan Grip, Mathiew Lamontagne and Emmanuel Toledo, and (morse), and all of it is available to download on the Free Music Archive at [freemusicarchive.org](http://freemusicarchive.org). For more information about Mabel, including a full tracklist for each episode, visit us online at [mabelpodcast.com](http://mabelpodcast.com), or on Twitter, @podcastmabel.

