



KING IN THE LABYRINTH

Mabel, episode 7: The King in the Labyrinth. In which the snake begins to eat its own tail.

[INTRO:]

ANNA: – Anna Limon –

AUTOMATED FEMALE VOICE: – is not available. At the tone, please record your message.

[BEEP]

MABEL: -- the matter is that you just can't swing it, can you, it has to be your way or nobody else's. I'm not going to get pushed around anymore. You can't just make me –

[BEEP]

Hi, Anna, right? It's me. I mean – it's Mabel, you don't – you don't know me. You left a message for me awhile back and I've been trying to get ahold of you, but it's just

difficult, where I am, sometimes, uh. The thing is that the reception isn't great and sometimes –

[BEEP]

[WATER; FIRE; RUNNING FOOTSTEPS; A BELL; DRUMS; LAUGHTER]

[BEEP]

Hi, Anna, right? It's me. I mean – it's Mabel, ha, you don't – you don't know me, right. You left a message for me a few hours ago and I just wanted to touch – to touch base from here. From. Where I am. Ah, so. I'm kind of – kind of *swamped*, right now, but I wanted to talk to you about the house, just a few things, uh. So first of all, I really appreciate everything you're doing, I mean, I assume – I know that job's not easy, and not just anyone can do it, so thank you, really. I'm grateful.

I have some suggestions about – about everything, really, but uh. It can be tough, being so isolated. I know, and sometimes it's difficult not to get caught up in how alone you are. Sometimes you miss things because you're paying too much attention to the wrong corners. But I grew up there, so I thought I'd offer you some advice, um. So, I – I would not recommend going to the third floor at night, because – see the hardwood floors up there are really old, and sometimes they get weak in certain areas. Old houses require a lot of upkeep, and I know – I know there hasn't been a lot done in recent years, so I'm just, uh. Concerned about the safety of the place.

I also don't think – you probably also shouldn't go into the garden at night. Sometimes foxes like to hide in the flower patches and they can get mean. They're feral, you know, and should just be left alone. There's all these nooks and crannies down there that you won't...notice, at first, unless you've lived there awhile, and I'm – I'm afraid you could get hurt, like sprain your ankle or something. So just, don't go down there, it's a hazard and there's nothing much to see, anyway. I can't imagine it's been kept up.

There's also this spot, from the outside, in the light, you can see it from the tire swing – a third window, mismatched, set oddly into the stone of the house. Try not to – pay too much attention to that. When it was added at first it was my favorite place in the whole world, because the window was – anyway, it used to be interesting, and then, like everything else, the slow march of time killed it. It's not a big deal, but don't dwell on why it's there. Oh, and make sure you don't -

[BEEP]

– talking about the individual, sure, but we aren't. What you're talking about is the whole of them, and that's just - it's absurd. You can't generalize an entire group and you certainly can't generalize me, because I'm not going to let you, you cannot have this one last piece of myself that I have kept and –

[DISTORTED GARBLED VOICES, UNINTELLIGIBLE CONVERSATION/RESPONSE]

I am not *moon and mirror*, I am flesh and bone, see? Do you see where I –

[DISTORTED GARBLED VOICES GET LOUDER AND LOUDER]

Well, they don't know what they're asking for, do they? Should I show them? Should I show –

[BEEP]

Hi, Anna, right? It's me. I mean. – it's Mabel, you don't – you don't know me. You left a message on the underside of an oak leaf and I only just got it today, because sometimes the wind lags and it gets lazy, so if you're having trouble just make sure you give it a good smack, otherwise it won't be intimidated and it'll just sit there, and you also have to be really careful to –

[BEEP]

[SINGING]

[BEEP]

Hi, this is Mabel Martin. I'm not sure if –

[DISTORTION]

[AWAY FROM PHONE] Come on. Be sporting. Be fair. Come on. You have to give me a hint, at least, a clue. Am I getting through? [INTO PHONE] Hello? Hello? Can you hear me? [AWAY FROM PHONE] Can she hear me?

[DISTORTION]

Play fair. Play fair. These are – the rules. You have to follow the rules, you *invented* the rules, you have to follow them, you can't just make up new ones whenever you like and make –

[BEEP]

This isn't you, is it? This is just me. Hello Mabel, hello hello. You've reached Mabel Martin. No, you haven't.

It's nothing new, I guess. I used to talk to the girl in the mirror when I was a child, all the time. I knew, always, that she and I were – we weren't the same. I knew that her face wasn't mine.

So this is just like that. Catharsis. God knows I'm due for some, right? No – no, that's not how anything works. We don't get what we're due, or what we're owed, we only get what we get, and we can crumble and cry about it or we can make do. I've made do. The girl in the mirror, maybe she wasn't so lucky. I don't know. Like I said, our faces didn't match, not really. She was scarred on the wrong side, and now we have nothing in common at all, because I'm free, and she's just –

[DISTORTED GARBLED VOICES]

What? What are you going to do? What exactly are you going to do if I tell everyone that –

[BEEP]

I mean – what's his goddamn problem, anyway? Does everything have to be like this all the time, so theatrical? Couldn't he, I don't know, calm down?

That's probably a stupid question. You know, I don't – I don't care. Sometimes those are the only kinds of questions that mean anything. Like: who am I talking to? Will they respond? Where is this signal coming from? Have you ever seen a moon so red it made your blood look white? Have you ever heard a fox scream?

Have you ever heard a fox scream, Anna? It sounds like someone dying. I was a little girl, once, and I heard this – this awful noise, this scream, like a baby crying or a woman in trouble – I got out of bed, in the middle of the night, and ran down the stairs, all of them creaking, you know, they do that when you don't want them to, because they're always trying to get you in trouble –

Anyway. I ran out the door and down the hill. Next to the moonflower patch there was this fox. I've always loved foxes, all animals really, but especially when I was little, and so I – reached out to it, tried to see if it was injured, because of the way it had screamed and it –

It snapped at me. It snapped at me and then, I swear on my life, on my freedom, it laughed. It threw back its pointed little head and laughed at me in the moonlight, and

then sprinted off and left me with my fingertips bleeding into the earth. I swear to you, to the girl in the mirror – this fox knew I would come running, it knew that I would want to help and it used that to hurt me. Be careful when someone needs help, because, Anna – sometimes they don't. Sometimes they just want to know how to hurt you.

My grandmother was so angry with me that night. I came into the house all crying, you know, what a baby, and then of course there was endless fussing over something that was essentially a papercut, and when she'd found out what I'd done – god, I'd never been yelled at like that, not even when I – went down the staircase on a cookie tray or ate all that chocolate in one sitting. My grandmother, she's not – she's not really the yelling type. I'd do terrible things, and she'd just stand there, disappointed, with her face all scrunched up and that was worse, somehow, that she wouldn't raise her voice to me, like I wasn't worth it. That's why – after the fox – I don't know, it *pulled* something from me, something hard, and harsh and yearning and then I – then the girl in the mirror just changed, she changed, and it –

We didn't get along. We'd fight. Not my grandmother, the other – the other girl, the one who lived in the mirror. Although my grandmother and I fought too, I guess, especially when I wouldn't stop leaving the house. I covered all the mirrors with black sheets. She was so angry. And then she put glass in my food and killed me. Ha! I'm just kidding. She did kill me though, just later. There's more than one way to kill someone. And it's not as if she knew that it would make me so –

Anyway. Oh, Anna. He said you are looking for me, looking for Mabel Martin, the girl who eats too much cake and drinks too much wine straight from the bottle, the girl who loves her family fiercely but never speaks to them, the girl - He said, she is looking for Mabel Martin. That's me – Mabel. But I am not myself. I don't think I've been my real self for a very long time.

[DISTORTION]

What? What? What? What? What? What?

[DISTORTION]

Anna, listen. Please take care of the house. It means so much to – to Sally. She loves that house more than I can ever convey to you, more than anyone has a right to love anything. It's like – like a religion. People don't- they don't love like that anymore. They don't even love each other like that anymore, let alone something that just – stands there. Something created. We're bad gods. We let all our works rot into the ground.

And the house, it *remembers*, it *knows*. The house isn't haunted, I know a lot of people think that, because it's so – the house isn't haunted, but it is a *haunting*, in itself. It remembers, it remembers everything, every stitch and cross, every scratch in the hardwood floors and rings from drinks left to sweat without a coaster. It will either resent you or protect you, and you *need its protection*, Anna. Listen to me: I never broke my ankle running down the stairs. I never bashed my head into the banister playing kings and robbers. The dark wood curved around me in love, even when I slammed my head into it, when I was pushed down the stairs, or when I – listen. What you love protects you. In the whole of my childhood in that house I never got a scratch on me. Even when I tried, a little bit, nothing stuck. Nothing could hurt me. And you know what? After awhile – after awhile, that isn't comforting. It's just stifling.

[BEEP]

Hi, Anna, right? It's me. I mean – it's Mabel, you don't – you don't know me. You left a message for me awhile back, about the power outages and the rest of the problems with the house, and I've been trying to get ahold of you, but it's just difficult, where I am, sometimes, uh. The reception isn't great, where I am, uh. Where I am. Anyway! It's an old house, um, these things happen. The wood and stone, it has a will of its own. It's sat too long in the dark. You have to tell it who's in charge and make it fear you. You have to grab it by its roots and shake it into submission, make a yoke of what it loves. And then it will listen. Isn't that how you get anything done?

[OUTRO:]

This episode of Mabel was guest-written by Mabel Martin, and produced by Becca De La Rosa. The voice of Mabel Martin is [censored] and the voice of Anna Limon is Becca De La Rosa. The music in this episode was by Ars Sonora, 2Kutup, Bluedark, a k u a, c4, Andrew Sacco, i AM esper, Hallock Hill, and (morse), and all of it is available to download from the Free Music Archive at freemusicarchive.org. For more information about Mabel, including a full tracklist for each episode, visit us online at mabelpodcast.com, or on Twitter, [@podcastmabel](https://twitter.com/podcastmabel).