



THE FREEZE

Mabel, Episode 8: The Freeze. In which all is lost.

[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 and I'll get back to you soon as I can. Thanks!

[BEEP]

ANNA: If the house is a heart, you're the hook cut through it.

[BEEP]

I didn't notice it until I tried to leave and pick up Sally from the hospital. I slept so well last night, it was like being drugged, like being anaesthetized, and when I woke up I must have still been asleep – I walked past all the windows without seeing, and it wasn't until I tried to open the front door that I understood. Why the light seems so *ghostly*, why I could see my breath in the bathroom. Why everything feels muted and heavy.

I tried to go online and check the local news, but the internet's down. Then I tried to turn on the TV and check there, but the TV's out, too, and the radio, and the landline. You're the only person I could get through to on my cell, and you –

Is this – is this normal? I can't – it's hard to remember. I couldn't even remember what date it is, what month it is, and when I tried to look at my phone calendar, the whole screen froze. It's – isn't it November? Is that right? I'm trying to – the last time it snowed, I don't –

I slept well last night, almost blindly, but there was one dream I remember. You and I were sitting on a stone wall somewhere above a shoreline. We could see the water, and boats on the water, and the hem of ocean and sky over at the curve of the earth's surface. You were – you, but – you had my face. I mean, I knew it was you, but it was like looking in a mirror, too, I could never quite be sure which one of us was speaking. I think it was you who said, "the problem isn't distance, it's demand." I think I was the one who told you, "She never should have promised anything, not to them." We laughed, both of us, though I'm not sure what was supposed to be so funny. "Catch them watching," you said. And then I looked out at the water, and I saw that it was red, red and black, and the boats were ragged, threadbare things, like spiders curled around scraps of lace, and the sky was slashed open near the sunset and blackness was spilling out, blackness like tar, like oil.

I'm going to try looking out one of the third-floor windows, I'll call you back.

[BEEP]

Can you hear that? It's – it sounds like nothing. There's snow everywhere, Mabel, the landscape isn't just changed, it's – it's gone. There's white, and cold, and wind, and – that's it. I feel like I'm inside a television set to a static channel. If I were younger, or maybe just less tired, I'd be afraid that the world beyond the snow wasn't only obscured, but vanished altogether, or altered in some terrible way. Object permanence. Just because you can't see the road doesn't mean the road's not there.

Do I sound like I'm trying to convince myself? I don't know, maybe I am.

I feel strange. Not completely real. Disconnected from my body, disconnected from my thoughts. A spinal column trailing over a bed of nerves. This isn't my house, I shouldn't be here alone, but I am, I'm drifting through the hallway, I'm running my hand along the wall. If the house is a heart, I'm its blood. Do you know what I mean? Am I making sense?

Once upon a time we were strangers. We'd never even heard one another's names. Now, we're – something else. Strange, maybe, not strangers. Not now.

What's...

I just found a book on the kitchen counter. It's a leather-bound spiral notebook, stuffed with – clippings, mostly, from magazines. *Old* magazines, one of these clippings is an ad for Virginia Slims that says *you've come a long way, baby*. I think it's a diary. A kid's diary, a teenager's, probably. All these cutouts of fashion shoots and band names scribbled over and over and boys' names inside hearts.

You know what, before I moved here I would have flipped out if I came downstairs in the morning and found a book had mysteriously appeared on the kitchen counter. But this is – god, this is the least bizarre thing that has happened. I can deal with this.

It sure would be handy if there was a helpful name written inside the front cover, so I know who this belongs to, but there's just a picture of – is that...? – it looks like part of Sally's garden. The picture must have been taken in summer, there are roses everywhere. No people, though. Just flowers.

Mabel, listen to this.

"I dreamed of a place lightless with the wings of many black-winged birds, the air full of feathers and wind. In this dream my hands are clawed and yellow, my nails long and haggard and hooked, and in my mouth my tongue is a flat black worm. I scream, the sound of high places, of mountains. When I turn to move from wherever it is I am, I find myself launching off into space, and for a moment I drown in the air like I drowned in the carp-pond when I was three years old, but then I right myself, shudder, and fly. And when I fly I fly to her; and she is too big to see all at once, so I have to cut her up into pieces. Wrist. Sleeve. Eye. Cheekbone. Her mouth on my beak. Her fingers in my feathers. Her leather around my foot. Her hood over my head. She says, *good bird, good bird.*"

It's weird, there's – you can see a shift in the entries. Up to a certain point, they're very – I don't want to say *typical teenager*, there's no such thing as a typical teenager, but they're...everyday. Homework, bad teachers, friend drama, band names, boy names, doodles of flowers and stars and girls with big cartoony eyes. And then – like this one, this page I'm looking at now. There's a drawing of a naked woman with a spike through her stomach. Underneath, it says, *tenebra tenebrarum: darkness of darkness*. And then – a few pages later, there's a little sketch of a rabbit eating something that – it's

dripping red, whatever it is. There's that passage about being a bird, there's a – a symbol of some kind with arrows and loops poking out at all directions, there's –

– there's a heart with two names inside. Lily and Juniper.

Mabel, I think –

[BEEP]

[THUMPING, SHUFFLING]

God *damn* it, why won't you –

[BEEP]

I found a vine. It's growing in through the library wall. Not the outside wall, not the window. It's growing through the wall that connects the library to the corridor. I went to check, there's no plant in the corridor, there's nothing at all out of place. Should I pull it out? I think – I think I should, but –

[BEEP]

The calendar's gone. I mean the big one, the one down in the kitchen with all Sally's appointments and meetings written on it. I was trying – I really can't – I can't remember what day it is, I thought if I could just check – but it's gone, just the pin in the wall is left, and a stain on the plaster. The pile of newspapers is gone from the dining room. Sally's date book is gone from her bedroom, the – the TV won't turn on anymore, all the clocks have stopped at three, the computer – I went to Sally's computer and found it sitting in a pool of water, and I know it was weird and I know it was stupid but I tasted it, it was saltwater. I think – I don't think there's anything in this house that can tell me what time it is, what day it is.

Maybe I should be more afraid. Maybe, Mabel. But I'm not. I don't think I am. I went through the freezer, there's food enough to last for weeks. The tap's still running, the electricity's on, even if it won't let me watch TV or get online. There are whole boxes of candles under the kitchen sink. I've lit a fire in the library fireplace, it's warm and white and quiet.

There's a vine in the kitchen, too, threading in through the skirting board.

[BEEP]

When I was twenty my aunt took me to Italy with her on summer vacation. We were there for two weeks, in the middle of a heatwave – it gets humid here, but over there it was punishing. No AC anywhere, just hoards of tourists inside ancient buildings that were never meant to accommodate them. I hated the Vatican, it was like Disneyland. Too much standing in line, too much walking around barriers, too many people to spend any time with the pictures or sculptures or frescoes. But – my aunt's catholic, and one of the things she loves to do is visit churches. Not even famous ones, like St Peter's Basilica or the Duomo or Milan Cathedral, just little local churches. They were always cool, and quiet, and dark. There were always candles, the smell of the incense they use in mass. That – that particular feeling you get when a place is holy, like – the air is heavier than usual, more weighted, and everything you say matters more. Everything becomes ritualistic. Metaphoric.

Do you think there's a process that a place goes through to become holy? A – sanctifying alteration? If there is, I think – I think it's happening here.

[BEEP]

This is another entry, towards the end of the book.

"I went down to the garden at midnight. She told me to leave everything, so I went naked, because I know how important it is to follow instructions down to the letter. I left my earrings, and my bracelets, and my clothes, and my shoes, and went down to the hill, which lay open like an artery dug out of skin. I could hear them laughing, but she was there on the rock, dressed in green, dressed in white. She told me I was beautiful. She was crying, and I had never seen her cry before, not even once, not even when she told me about the curse. *You have to come with me, she said. If you don't come with me now I can't protect you. You have to leave it all behind, and I can keep you safe, I promise I will keep you safe from him and his anger and her bad, bad fortune, but only if you leave now.*

"I wanted to go with her. I wish I had. But suddenly I thought about Mila-Cat, and Kitsa and the puppies, and Mother with her sad eyes, and Jo waiting for me at the bus stop and me never turning up, and I stepped away from her. *I can't just leave, I said. I can't just go.*

"She reached over and touched my cheek. *You'll die alone, she said, and she wasn't crying anymore. You'll die watching your own blood seep out over*

goldenrod and bluestem, clutching the broken bones in your throat, and you'll remember, then, that I might have saved you, that I loved you enough to try. Even if twenty years have passed from this moment until that one, you'll remember, and the memory will be a hook in your heart as you die. And then she kissed me. And she walked away into the hill, into the light, and she spread her hands out against the glow from the candles, until all I could see was her silhouette with her palms raised, like a saint, like a saint, like a saint on fire."

I think –

I think it's Fairy Hill. I think that's the answer. What was it that poem said, the one I found in the doll's dress? The hound of the sun, the hare of the moon? And this, this entry says "I will keep you safe from him and his anger and her bad, bad fortune." I thought it was just a weird metaphor, but what if the poem is talking about people. The hare of the moon, what if that was Luna Thorne, what if she was someone Sally knew, what if Sally – like – what if she did something to her, and – what if there was someone they were afraid of, someone who –

[CRASH]

What the – ?

[FOOTSTEPS]

[MUTED] How did you – ?

No, I –

Okay. Yeah, okay.

[SCREAM]

[ELECTRICAL INTERFERENCE, INCOHERENT VOICES]

[FEMALE LAUGH]

[DIAL TONE]

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, Caroline Park, Altered:Carbon, Rebecca Foon, Nest, Epoxia, Avoidant, Lloyd Rogers, and (morse), and all of it is available to download on the Free Music Archive at freemusicarchive.org. For more information about Mabel, including a full tracklist and transcript for each episode, visit us online at mabelpodcast.com, or on Twitter, [@podcastmabel](https://twitter.com/podcastmabel). Season two will be debuting in just a few weeks – to stay up to date with all our news, subscribe to the mailing list on our website or follow any of our social media pages. If you'd like to help us make season two as eerie and immersive as possible, please consider donating a dollar or two – it really would make a difference. Thank you to all of our listeners who have made Mabel such a treat to write, perform, and produce.