



PILGRIMAGE

Mabel, episode 11: Pilgrimage. In which the mystery continually deepens.

[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]

[CAR NOISES; ENGINE CUTTING OFF, KEYS JANGLING]

ANNA: Okay, we're here, Mabel. Let's give this a shot. God damn, I'm nervous. Why am I so nervous? My hands are – my hands are shaking. Right. Mabel, can you – ?

[PHONE INTERFERENCE]

Oh my god, you're here! I mean, not here, but – it worked, we're still – we're together, I can, I can take you with me. I was so afraid it wouldn't work, but it did! Oh, right. We are down in [censored], parked outside the [censored] Cemetery, where Sally was buried two days ago. I looked it up in her obituary online. I still can't get in touch with anyone from my agency, I don't know if I even – I don't know if they're aware Sally has died.

It doesn't sound right to say that so casually. It should be a statement with weight, it should be something you have to whisper. Everyone in the whole world should be bowing their heads, don't they understand what has happened?

No, I'm sorry. I'm just trying to work up the courage to actually get out of the car. I know that as soon as I see the – the grave, it'll be real. There will be no more denying it.

All right, Anna. You can do this.

[EXITING CAR]

[GRAVEYARD NOISES: BIRDS, WIND, CHURCH BELLS]

I remember what it's like. In there, where you are. Everything is – silhouette and flame. Everything is stark, fire and shadow, there's nothing soft or gentle or blurred – so here, let me tell you where we are, where we're walking. The cemetery is big, but it's not one of those grim homogenous ones, it's – it's tucked up against the forest, the dark forest, the one that belongs to nobody. The oldest graves are right up along the hem of the treeline – graves from the 1700s, some of them, half-toppled, alive with lichen. The newer graves are in sections named for different species of trees. Ash, Elm, Beech, Oak. Some of the graves are – they're spectacles, I guess, with their enormous gilded angels and their marble cover slabs. Some of them are plain, plainer than plain, just wooden crosses with a name and a pair of dates etched on a brass plaque. I like the mix. It's interesting, it makes every grave feel deliberate. There are yews lining the rows of headstones, and holly bushes nestled up against the yew, and cherry trees clipped back for winter. Someone's hung a bunch of suet balls on the low-lying branches, and there are robins everywhere, all singing, and these little brown birds that could be sparrows or wrens or maybe skylarks or thrushes, I don't know. There are rooks out in the forest, standing guard. When you come here at night, you can hear the screech owls, too, they sound like harbingers.

[PHONE INTERFERENCE]

Yeah, you noticed that. I used to come here at night back when I was a teenager. My girlfriend thought she was Lestat, what can I say? It was nice, though. I like cemeteries at night. The dark, it seems to hum, and there's – I don't know, everything seems portentous. If you see a bird in a graveyard during the day, that's nothing, that's not even a story worth telling. But if you

see a bird in a graveyard at night? A bird, or a coyote, or a fox, or a deer, or – god, a *person*? That's important, that means something.

[WALKING]

We're at the cemetery office. I have to go in and ask them where Sally's buried. I'll call you right back, I promise.

[BEEP]

[FOOTSTEPS; GARBLED ROARING]

[BEEP]

[LAUGHING, MILDLY HYSTERICAL] Oh god. Look, I –

The lady –

The lady at the office was kind, not as though it was her job but as though kindness was a choice she'd made a long time ago. I must have looked as though I'd start crying at any moment, because she put her hand on my hand and offered me a cup of tea. I asked her where Sally Martin was buried, and she said, oh, she was so sorry to hear of Mrs. Martin's passing, she would have gone to the funeral herself but her daughter was in the hospital having her third baby, but the other office worker went and *she* said how lovely it was, to have a funeral with so many beautiful flowers, even in winter, even when there were only a few people in attendance. And I think I just *stared* at her, because – what could I say? What was left to say? I didn't have anything, not even surprise – and she was kind then, too, she didn't make the moment awkward and she could have, I was acting strangely enough to make anyone awkward – she just looked up Sally's name on her computer and told me she's buried in the section called Juniper.

[PHONE INTERFERENCE]

I know, my thoughts exactly. What the hell, Mabel. What is anything, anymore? What is *anything*?

[WALKING]

That one's Birch, so this one – yeah, Juniper. Plot 372, the lady said. She's buried with your grandfather, Esau, and with your mother. Which is – it's nice,

or it would be, if it wasn't so sad. I don't know. Ignore me, I'm sorry. They're your family. I shouldn't be telling you what it's like, what any of this means.

There, this is it. Esau's and Lily's graves are marked, but Sally's just has the blank headstone. I guess – I don't know who's going to organise the engraving. I – I don't know who organised the *funeral*, I don't know – a funeral home would have had to bring her here, lay her out, who – someone would have had to pick a *coffin*, I don't –

There are flowers on the grave, on the bed of the grave. They're – I recognise them from that encyclopedia entry all those days ago. The one with that poem written on it. Datura flowers, white and unfolded from themselves, a bundle of them tied with red ribbon.

It doesn't make sense. It can't have been *her*, she – she's *trapped* there, that's the whole – that's what this whole thing is about! She can't get out to plan burials or make funerary flower arrangements, but – but who else would – who else even *knew* about this? Who else knew about Luna Thorne, who else knew Sally had died? Who else –

[BEEP]

[DISTORTED NOISES]

[BEEP]

It's kind of like I'm smuggling you places. Like I'm doing something illicit. Which – I guess I am, but not in the way that makes sense.

I went back to the lady in the cemetery office. She didn't know anything about who had arranged the funeral, and she didn't know who'd left the flowers, and she was still kind to me, but by the time I left I think it was a strain for her. Now we're at [censored] hospital. I used to know people here, I have friends from nursing school who might still work in the ER. Maybe someone can tell us – something.

[PHONE INTERFERENCE]

Are you making that noise because you don't like hospitals?

[PHONE INTERFERENCE]

I know, I remember – Sally told me you were sick a lot as a kid. Do you want me to call you back?

[PHONE INTERFERENCE]

Is that a yes or a no? No, wait. One for yes, two for no.

[PHONE INTERFERENCE, TWICE]

Look at that, you're like the Paul Revere of ghost houses. I know it's weird, but – I like hospitals a lot, actually. At least, I like this one. It's old, but it's been renovated recently, and everything is white and clean. I like the sound of the nurses' shoes, I like the sounds of the heart monitors in the middle of the night, all those machines that keep bodies working. I like how the building never really sleeps. It's never dark, it's never completely quiet. But it's private, it cuts the real world off. It's like – it's like the ghost house. Time is strange in hospitals. Reality is strange. People die, people recover, lives are altered. And still, everything stays the same.

[WALKING]

That doctor was starting to look at me weirdly. Are these not normal conversations normal people have? I don't remember anymore.

The ICU is down here. I'm going to hang up, I'll call you back when I'm done – when I'm done, I guess.

[BEEP]

I can see the whole town from up here. It looks – the distance doesn't look real. If I jumped I wouldn't fall, I think, I'd just. Keep walking. Crunching tiny trees under my feet. Smashing houses like matchboxes.

[PHONE INTERFERENCE]

No, I'm not going to jump. You can't get rid of me.

I told a nurse that you were Sally's next of kin, and you've been officially missing for weeks, and asked her if Sally had left any belongings on the hospital, or if – if anyone could talk to me about how she died. I said I was sick, I don't know if they believed me. The nurse – I didn't know her, I didn't know any of them. I thought that was weird, like maybe I've been lied to all

along, maybe I've been inside that house for decades instead of days. Rip Van Winkle, awoken from his sleep to find everything, everything altered. But the nurse went and found one of the orderlies, a guy called Michael. He was – nice, he looked clean. You know the kind of guy I mean? Like maybe cleanliness and a friendly smile were the only character traits he really had, but they'd done okay by him so far. I told him, My name's Anna Limon, I was Sally Martin's home health carer, but before I finished he said, "You're Anna? She was asking for you."

It was – harder than I thought it would be. Seeing the bed where she died. Someone else was in it. Everything keeps moving, that's the nature of the world. Sally's dead and nothing stands still for her. Nothing but us. And – after everything, after *everything*, she had to die alone.

[I said that out loud. Not now, I mean, there, in the hospital. I was talking to myself. Or talking to you, maybe, even though – but I didn't realise he'd heard me. Michael the orderly had heard me. He said, "She didn't."

I thought he meant. I thought he meant himself. I was ready to thank him, I was just so *grateful*, I turned to him with it all over my face, and he – he stepped back, he said no, not me. She had a visitor.

I like it up here. It's – it's good to get perspective. There are the mountains. There is the ocean. Somewhere behind those hills is Sally's house. Somewhere behind those hills is you. God, Mabel, I *miss* you, it feels like – like a piece of me has been torn out, like I left more than just some blood and some strands of hair behind when I – when I left you there. It hurts, it's physical, I don't –

Michael said, it's so weird. I went to school with her, Mabel Martin. I used to stick rolled up pieces of paper in her braid, to make her pay attention to me, but she never did.

"Who was she?" I asked him. "The visitor, the person who was there with Sally. Did you recognise her?"

He said, it wasn't a her. It was a man, a tall, tall man. I didn't look too closely, he said, I didn't want to impose, I just was happy she had someone. He sat beside her and held her hand until she died, and then he got up and left. His coat, Michael said, was embroidered with silver hunting dogs.

There are so many moments when the world rips out from under you. I came up here to try and – but it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. He couldn't even let her die in peace. He couldn't even let her – do you hear me? You couldn't even let her *die* –

[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, Kai Engel, I AM esper, 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.