



ASTERION

Mabel, episode 12: Asterion. In which our protagonists remember their history.

[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]

[GASP AWAKE]

[BEEP]

I know it's late. I hope you're – I hope I didn't –

I had a nightmare. I was back in the dark with you, and – I was glad to see you, I was so glad to see you again, and at the same time I was horrified. I couldn't be back there, I couldn't, I'd gotten out. Is this survivor's guilt? No, it's not, because if it was that'd mean you hadn't survived – it would mean you *wouldn't* survive, and that's not true. I won't let it be true.

You said, *come see what I found*. Every time I dream about you, you're leading me somewhere. You're the girl with the thread, the girl in the labyrinth. I don't know who that makes me. The minotaur?

No, *he's* the minotaur.

You took my hand and led me into a room – a cubbyhole, really, a crawlspace, we had to squeeze inside on our hands and knees. It was lit by – the light was ghostly, greenish, like the bioluminescence of animals that have lived their whole lives without ever seeing the sun. Light in imitation of light. There were dead vines in knots, huge roping clumps of brown and black, and something wet on the floor that sounded like marshland when I stepped on it. The walls were wet, too, black and dripping. *What is this?* I asked you.

It's his heart, you said. *Anna, look*.

I looked where you pointed. The dead vines had been cleared away from one section of the wall, and there were –

They'd been carved into the flesh of the room, these markings, these pictures, thick white lines like scar tissue. They – there was a wolf with its mouth open, and inside its jaws, on the bed of its tongue, was a rabbit. I looked back at you and you were crying. *The hound swallows stars in his tongue*, you said. *The hound carved the cage from the hill. The hound chewed the key like meat. The hound harrows all*. And then you started screaming at me, saying *where are you, where are you, I looked and looked but never found you, I –*

[BEEP]

It's morning, seven thirty in the morning, the time I'd usually be going in to help Sally get up. I keep measuring my day against what I would be doing if she was still alive. She'd be calling me in now, I'd be making her breakfast, I'd be making her lunch, she'd be napping in her chair, she'd be watching the news – it makes sense, I'm in her house. I'm in her house and she's dead and I shouldn't, by any right, be here at all, but – I can't leave, I can't leave you –

There's a – cognitive dissonance, I guess you could call it. Part of me knows this never was my home, it was my place of employment; and being here now that my employer's gone – it's awkward, an infringement. I spent a lot of time sitting on my hands so I don't touch anything that isn't mine. And part of me – part of me is a teenager again, left alone for the first time while her

parents go away for the weekend. Did you know I can stay up until four a.m. if I want to? I can go into town and buy *beer*, I can drink it in the green parlour with my shoes up on the sofa, I can drink it with breakfast if I want to! Who's going to stop me? Who's going to care? I still can't get in touch with King's County home help. If people around here know Sally's dead, they don't seem very affected by it. You're her only relative, and you're missing, as far as anyone knows.

[ELECTRIC INTERFERENCE]

Yeah, I know. I'm just saying.

[ELECTRIC INTERFERENCE]

Okay, I'm getting up. I'll call you back when I'm dressed.

[BEEP]

Let's talk about Ariadne.

That's her name, the girl in the labyrinth. I found a book of classical mythology waiting for me in the kitchen when I got downstairs – what a coincidence, what a funny little synchronicity. Do you want to know her story? Don't say anything, I'm going to tell you anyway.

Ariadne is the princess of Crete. Did they have princesses back then? Whatever, her father is king, King Minos, and her mother's the queen, Queen Pasiphae. Crete, like every good kingdom, has a secret. A monster lives in the labyrinth beneath the palace, a monster with the head of a bull and the body of a man and some seriously interesting ancestry, and every seven years the minotaur demands a sacrifice: seven young men and seven young ladies to be sent down into his maze and devoured. The third time the tithe draws near, Theseus, badass Athenian hero, decides to volunteer as one of the young men to be killed, and see if he can do the heroic thing and murder the minotaur. But on the boat to Crete, all of his weapons are taken away from him, and he's – he's kind of totally screwed, right?

And then there's Ariadne. And Ariadne is lovely and Ariadne is kind and she likes Theseus, so handsome and brave and stupid, so *linear*, a man with a task to undertake, and Ariadne knows the secrets that live under her floorboards, she's been watching and listening for years, so she gives him a present. Not a sword or a bow or an AK47, a ball of thread. Theseus uses the

thread to mark his path through the labyrinth, and he finds the minotaur and kills him, and he makes his way back to safety and says hey, Ariadne, come with me, I owe you big time. And this is what they call love.

The story doesn't end there. Because Theseus – he's kind of a *dick*, Mabel, he just – he just gets bored of Ariadne and leaves her in the middle of the Aegean Sea, on this tiny little island called Dia, and he and his men sail away. This is the girl who saved his *life*, with nothing more than – never mind. I hate Theseus. So Ariadne's there on Dia, saying, holy crap, that asshole, I'm legitimately stuck here in the middle of the goddamned Mediterranean – when out of nowhere, out of the sky and the sand and the ocean, comes Dionysus. Dionysus with his leopards and his pan-flutes, Dionysus draped in grape-vines, crazy and drunk and wild and wiser than anything, and he sees Ariadne and he knows *everything*, the way gods do: he sees how clever, how brave, how observant and kind she is, and he falls in love with her, just like that, and he says, forget him. I will make you into a star, into the brightest star in the sky, the diamond point of a crown made of fire, and you will be the single true light that saves sailors from drowning, you will be their compass, their hope, their memory of home. And Ariadne says –

[CRASH]

[BEEP]

They keep finding ways to sneak into the house. I've started carrying Sally's secateurs around on my belt-loop, so I can snip them out whenever I find them. This time it was in the room with the wet-bar – one of the vines managed to push its way out of the wall and topple the drinks cart. I hope Sally didn't leave those crystal highball glasses to anyone in her will.

It – it's too little, I think. Cutting out the vines when I see them. Chopping them up and burying them in kitchen salt. It's not enough to stop him, not enough to keep you safe. I should be doing more. But short of – of burning the house down and salting the whole grounds, I don't know what that *is*. I don't even know what *he* is. How can I stop something I don't –

He doesn't have rules. Or if he does, they aren't rules like ours. He's too many things. Too many selves of him, all of them –

In my dream, I think you were saying – I think you were saying it's the cage around her he loves. Not *her*. But – I was there, Mabel, I saw –

[BEEP]

[BELLS, BOOMING]

[BEEP]

The house is giving me back my newspapers, but not in a useful way. I found a pile on the stairs when I went to go shower, and they're all from 1990. April 1990. Thanks, house, but I don't –

[RUSTLING PAPER]

Oh, god. Oh, Mabel, I didn't know, I'm so sorry. I wouldn't have said anything if I *knew*, I just. I didn't.

There's an interview with her. Two weeks after Lily went missing. [RUSTLING PAPER] 'Local woman still distraught after her daughter's disappearance'. Yeah, no shit. "Sally Martin, lifelong resident of [CENSORED], is begging the public for any information they might have about her missing daughter, Lily Martin, aged 28, who disappeared after a hiking trip on April 3rd. "Lily is a good girl," said Mrs. Martin, speaking from her [censored] home. "She grew up here, she knows the right precautions to take when she goes out walking in the hills. Every night I go out in the dark with my lantern, hoping she'll see it and find her way back. I keep saying, *Lily, where are you? Where are you? I looked and looked but never found you, I need you to come home.*"

'[CENSORED] residents who might have seen Lily Martin are requested to please contact the sheriff's office, or the Martins' dedicated tipline at 1800-[CENSORED].'

God, Mabel, I didn't –

[BEEP]

I opened one of the letters. I did it before I called you, because – maybe I knew you'd try to talk me out of it. Just one, just the first one, postmarked 1948. Sally would have been, what? Twenty-two? Something like that.

It's not really a letter. Just two words, written in that red ink or vegetable dye or whatever it is, like the poem I found inside the doll's skirt. Two words.

You promised.

It's dark here, the days are shorter than ever. I'm in the kitchen with the lights off, looking at the hills. I think if I look long enough I'll see her, out with her lantern and her yellow raincoat, hunting for your mother. I think that's where she left herself. Even after they found Lily, Sally never really found her. Not once she was gone.

Sally made a promise, and she broke it. Does that make her a bad person? I don't know. It's not my place, I guess, to make judgments like that. It makes her a faithless one, though.

The thing about the minotaur, he wasn't just a monster. He was Pasiphae's son, he was the queen's son. Monsters are never only one thing, like people are never only one thing. I think that's why – that's why they're monstrous, because they move between worlds. Neither a man nor a bull but something twisted, something not quite either. Sally broke her promise, but she loved you. She loved me. She was kind, she bore her punishment.

It wasn't a sword forged in the fires of Mount Olympus and baptised in ichor that killed the minotaur. It was a ball of twine, something you'd find in any kitchen drawer or garden shed, something so commonplace you'd never even consider it a weapon. I'm not Ariadne, I'm not Theseus, I'm not the minotaur. If I'm anyone in this story –

If I'm anyone, I'm the ball of twine. Because – Mabel, I keep my promises. I'm not Sally. I'm not a hero, but I'm not nobody, either. I'm not strong or brave or particularly smart, but I'm little and sturdy and I'm *here*, here in your pocket, here in the dark with you. Just keep walking. Just don't give up. I promise I won't leave you there. *I promise.*

[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, Free Piece of Tape, Mary Lattimore, Yarrow, Blue Dressed Man, Mathieu Lamontagne and Emmanuel Toledo, *смерть в летнюю полночь*, 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.