



ORIENTATION

Mabel, episode seventeen: Orientation. In which – [GARBLED]

DISTORTED VOICE: *Erat autem hora tertia.*

[INTRO]

ANNA: - Anna Limon –

AUTOMATED TELEPHONE VOICE: - is not available. At the tone, please record your message.

[BEEP]

MABEL: Anna! Anna!

[CRASHING]

[BEEP]

I don't - I don't. I don't understand this place. I don't understand why I'm here. I don't understand the mechanics of what happened. I don't understand the *story*, Anna. I don't understand this narrative. Tell me. Tell me, please just *tell* me, tell me -

[BEEP]

It's been. It's *been* - let's start with that. There is a sense of time here, a sense of finality, a sense of here and after, a linear path woven deeply into the groove of the land. That's the first change. What was and what is - the separation of the **two**. A beginning and an end.

It's been...*hard*. It's day and night and then day again. Everything is too bright, or so dark all at once. I can't make any sense of it. My brain feels like fluid. I don't control what images scratch themselves onto the surface of me. Such a delicate constitution, of matter, in *softness*. I don't like being soft. It does not feel like my real self.

There is nothing to be had in extremes here, no fullest love or hate, no opulent gold or barren wood, nothing - nothing familiar, nothing that feels like home. Half measures and shadows; grey shades of apathy. I can't - I can't divine, I cannot intuit, I can't make any sense of it because there is *sense* here, Anna. Because there is a way things must be done, there is a set formation of thought, there are patterns, there are *rules*. There are always rules, it's true, and no more true anywhere than where you have gone from me but here it's - it's nothing like what I'm used to. Nothing here is controlled by whim, by *will*. There is an awful lot of room for luck, for interpretation. Room for lying, room for the truth folding in over itself until it cracks in half. I cannot understand that. I can't work within such a place. The fabric of me snags against it.

The strength and stubbornness of my will don't matter, anymore. There are flowers growing out of me, Anna. The house is in disarray. The mail is covered in mold. The fireplace is full of wet ash and the wind howls through the broken windows and there's no food and even if I could - even if I *can* leave, I don't look anything like a person. I don't think I ever did. What I am supposed to do with that?

[BEEP]

[DISTANT] No, I don't -

I don't -

I don't know! I don't know! I don't -

[BEEP]

[DRAGGING, RATTLING]

[CRACKING GLASS]

Oh. Oops. [LAUGHS] Serves her right, I guess. [LAUGHTER TURNS TO HYSTERICAL SOBBING]

[BEEP]

The house rearranges itself when I sleep. When I try to sleep. There is no less decay but it becomes - more bearable, somehow. Time passes. That's all time seems to do here.

This morning the house phone was placed on top of the rotting dining room table, like a missing puzzle piece. I stare and stare at it when it rings. The electricity doesn't work in this house, anymore, and so I have no rational, no human, no *in-world* explanation. I think I shall ignore it for a little while longer. I don't think there's anything it can hurt.

This touch aches. This air sears. Everything here is - is rot, ash, and smoke. What world have you left me in? You have not done me a kindness, Anna. Do not fool yourself about that. I know you will - I know you will wrap yourself up in smugness like furs. I know you will feast on the wealth of your sacrifice. You think you are the perfect heroine. The true believer, of all of them. But you have not *once* asked me what I wanted. You only assumed, same as them. Same as him. Same as everybody else. You're all alike. You think in lines and in words. You are more metal than water. I am split in two and both halves are bleeding. Dry rot and pollen. (shuffles) I can't think here. Nothing makes sense. Or...everything makes too much sense. There's no room for me. Sharp and cold and soft all at once.

What do you want of me, Anna? To thank you for saving me? You're so good, aren't you? Aren't you satisfied in your righteousness? Do you suffer beautifully? Do you delight in your punishment, knowing you have sacrificed yourself for a noble and just cause? You *martyr*, you can save everyone else but you can't save yourself, can you, lost there in the ether, in the *mist*, between this world and the next, you get what you deserve, you get what you ask for, Anna, all the meat and blood and bone and sting of it - you absolute, self-loathing *martyr* -

[BEEP]

[PHONE RINGING]

Who is this? Who is this? Who is this? Who is this who is this who is this -

Your name. That's it. I've got you now. How stupid are you, to tell me? What's wrong with you?

I don't know - oh. Oh. *Oh*. [LAUGHS] Anna? Oh, *Anna*? Sweet Anna, Saint Anna, she's gone off to the *gloaming*, comadre, she's with our dearly departed good neighbors, she's in hell, she's *burning* and twisting up for the lack of me, *friend*, she drank down the flowers from my wrists and she suffers with her pretty face and she waits and waits and waits and waits and waits -

[BEEP]

I broke every mirror in the house, Anna. I cannot bear to look at myself, it isn't me in there, it hasn't been me in so long, I -

I look for you instead. The curve of you, your softness, the way your lips part when you smile. The pearls of your teeth. The flower of your mouth. Your black curls, your blushing skin, your face like the moon, shining. And distant. [WHISPERS] Where were you, where are you - I looked and looked but never found you, I -

You'll be singing. They'll make you sing for them. Sing for your supper. They like silver throated girls. They like girls who drank down the moon and stars, girls who shine the night out of their eyes and mouths and hearts. That's you. Like a painting.

The air is smoke. I breathe it in and cannot spit it out. I can smell everything rotting; death curling her fingers around everything that passes for green. I am not silver here, Anna. I am not sweet-blooded. But I am focusing on what cannot be fictionalized. The stern, iron hold of what is, and not what could be.

These are the facts. The house is falling apart. The encroaching fist of entropy, ever present, ever daunting. [LAUGHS] It looks like a wreck. The house, I mean. I don't know how long it's stood empty. If I were looking from the outside in, I'd say *This place must have been abandoned for years*. The floor is waterlogged. The windows are almost all gone. There are vines covering half of the walls. I'll have to go through everything piece by piece, carefully pry the plant matter from the insulation, carefully dry out the floors, the furniture. I'll have to inspect every corner and crevice. It's going to be dull work, Anna. I don't like putting things back together. I'm not sure I even know how anymore.

I talked about rules, before. I should have been - clearer, during the time we had together. I worry about you. I am angry at you for that, I think. I didn't know what it was like before you, to value someone so outside of myself so intimately. I think about you stumbling your way through, in the halls of wood, in the rooms of bone, in the path sprung up in gold. How you might fall. How you might say the wrong thing, make the wrong inference, sing the wrong note, and then you would be chewed up and spat out and that would be the end of you, bones and all. I don't think I could bear it, but: it would be nothing less than you deserve.

What did you see in me, that you thought me capable of leaving the dark, the antechamber of the earth? Do you think I am like you, that I am good, that I am pure of heart? My heart is a rotting bulb, Anna. It is not shining like yours. I have only humus for you to excavate. I feel like you have gutted me, here. Leaving me. Replacing me - I feel like the bundle of twigs I ought to be. Sometimes I think it's been me all along, the girl in the mirror, that I am only stone who got notions about itself, got ideas and walked above its station, and one day I'll collapse in a heap of dust and that will be all, goodnight Mabel, goodnight blackrock, goodnight moon. I have a very nebulous sense of self, you see. It has become enmeshed with you.

But what is that? What do we really know about you? Where did you come from? What do you want? I have thought about it long and hard, in the emptiness of this house, to the tune of woodlice and moths. How little you have revealed of yourself to me, while you collected my secrets, my family's secrets, the secrets of this house of mine that you have taken for your own. I have thought about how carefully constructed your sense of self might be, honest as I believe you are. I have thought about why you have done what you have, over and over again, a repeating frenzy of images and words. Are you furious? Are you righteous? Are you the girl in the mirror? Are you the labyrinth? Are you the red thread that ties me to myself, this place, your own? *Who are you, Anna Limon?*

In the end - in every end, it doesn't matter. I have loved nothing and no one but you, Anna. Consign me not to hell, for in hell I cannot love thee.

[BEEP]

[OUTRO:]

Mabel was created by Becca De La Rosa and Mabel Martin. This episode was written and performed by Mabel Martin, and produced by Becca De La Rosa. The music in this episode was by Ars Sonor, DR, quietest, Jared C. Balogh, the Vainglories, Scott Holmes, Hallock Hill, and (morse), and all of it is available to download from the Free Music Archive at freemusicarchive.org. For more information about this episode, including a full tracklist and transcript, visit us online at mabelpodcast.com.

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