



ACTING OUT

Mabel, episode twenty: Acting Out. In which there is no exit.

[INTRO:]

ANNA: – Anna Limon –

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

[BEEP]

[SINGING]

[BEEP]

I am hearing two worlds at once. If I press my ear to the walls of this house, I can hear its heartbeat. Or mine. Or yours. Someone's heartbeat, anyway. It might all be the same. We might share the space of one another, by now.

I am going slowly mad without you. It was different when I could hear you at least - your voice like a silver light through the fog, like a red thread around my wrist. Around my throat. I knew you were there. I had a kind of manifestation on which to hold. Like photographic proof of a ghost. A lack of argument in selfhood, something verifiable to a degree. But without that

there is nothing I can grasp. I am left fumbling here without you, scavenging for every inch of your presence in this new cage of mine. I miss your voice. I miss all of you, every bit, with a force that surprises me. You are always making me learn new things about myself.

I might be the bartered object for the incomprehensible dark, I might be the starling that cannot get out, Anna, but I will scrape that wooden imposter out of this world regardless. I am not helpless or cowardly. I will chew her up and spit her out. I will poke her with needles and burn her with a brand and laugh as she crumples to nothing. I am vicious as a fox. It's better that this false you, this nothing-you be dead than anyone be comforted by a lie. Don't you agree? I know you wouldn't stand for this. I know you. I know.

[BEEP]

Here goes nothing, Anna. Take two.

[ROTARY PHONE NOISES]

Hi, I am looking for Ta - I am looking for Miss Reyes. Hello, yes, this is Mab -

I know I...must have made a poor impression when we last spoke, but - no, I'm - will you

Listen, I - I do feel somewhat....poorly about how I -

Of course that's true but if you would just -

I know what I said! Will you just *listen* to me - she's not who - no - no! It isn't *her!* What's *wrong* with everyone, that you can't tell – [FRUSTRATED SCREAM]

[PHONE RECEIVER SLAMMING]

What - I can't believe - what's wrong with your friends, Anna! What did she want me to do, grovel? Beg? Oh *forgive* me, poor stupid – [CRASHING SOUND]

I'm....sorry. I'll apologize to *you*. I know I'm not going to win you over this way. I know that I am - sharp, that there's many edges inside of me, like tunas, needing fire and a good scrape with a knife before I resemble anything like sweetness. I just don't know how they cannot see you, cannot

know you well enough to tell when you are real and when you are automata. What must you look like to people? What do they see when they look into the warm darkness of your eyes? Do they know you? Can they excavate your secrets with a glance? Or is it only like looking into a mirror, into the water, into the dark of the earth? I think I am feeling distantly sympathetic for you, Anna. What must it have been like, for you, to hold back so much? Have you ever been free in your life? Or are you like me, that every portion of you has been imprisoned, one way or another?

[BEEP]

[KNOCKING]

There's been knocking for the past hour. Every time I go to see who it is, there's no one. Am I cut off completely from the outside world, do you think? Is anything other than this house able to be seen at all, or is it only shades of mist, of liminality? I tried to take a step outside - my foot on the solid earth - and the world tilted around me. All the colors ran into the sky. I was so angry. I knew I couldn't leave, but. Having it - validated, like that, realized in a physical way - it wasn't the best feeling in the world, Anna. Sometimes I wonder if anything outside of myself exists. Or if I exist.

It has no right. This house - this creeping, dark, puzzle of a house has no right to contain me. I am greater than it.

[KNOCKING GROWS STEADILY LOUDER]

I will gnaw at its bones. I'll come after you, Anna. I'll get out one way or another. I'll get us all out.

[KNOCKING BECOMES VERY LOUD]

[FRUSTRATED CRY] What!

[BEEP]

There was knocking at the door. [LAUGHS] I'm sure you heard it. I tried to answer but there was nothing except a bundle of sticks wrapped in green thread. Like the beginnings of a nest. An infestation. Is it her, do you think? Can she sense that I'm gunning for blood, that I'm coming for her, swift and righteous as a plague? I hope so. I hope she can feel every inch of my disdain.

This house, the land it sunk its claws into, the air around it - it's all playing on a loop. A repeating song. I can still hear the chickens with their primitive, intelligent noises, even though no one has kept them in years. Or the house hasn't kept them, I should say. I don't think anyone was ever the master of this place. I think it has always been its own master.

Have you ever raised any animals, Anna? It's a strange relationship. Cultivating dependency on a creature inhuman allows you to see how...unvirtuous, untrustworthy people are. Chickens are the last remnants of leviathans. They have a kind of intrinsic truth about them. They see and know things we don't. You can take their eggs and protect and kill and cure. I used to crawl into the coop to thank them with blood or berries or bits of apple, the chickens that lived here. You can feed them cooked eggs, too; they thrive on them, become small, cyclical gods. Eating time. I wonder if they'd help me catch your imposter if I thanked them now.

What *is* she? Who does she think she is, to take your name, to wear your clothes, to smile and nod and walk where you walk? What kind of presumption is that, to think she has any right to touch any part of you?

[KNOCKING]

Do you know me, Anna? I don't think you do. But I hope. I hope so fervently it curves into despair. I didn't ask you to do this. I didn't ask you to leave me here. I didn't. I don't - I cannot tell - I don't know how to not be *furious* with you, Anna. Anna with the hair of night, Anna with the pink peony for a mouth. Anna with the harp in her throat. Do you remember our time together? Do you remember how brief it was, how long it lasted, entire seasons crumbling at our feet? Do you remember the influence of all else melting away as you looked at me? You caught in my throat. I am never threatened. I am never frightened. I have faced down death; I have faced down the devil. I almost couldn't speak through the terror of you. Your face, your voice, your name like a fist in the earth. I thought, *This is the girl who will eat my heart. This is the girl come to ruin me like fire.*

[KNOCKING INCREASES SLIGHTLY]

[SCREAMS] Enough!

[KNOCKING STOPS ABRUPTLY]

Enough phantoms and masks. I think I understand the lesson, at the very least, I think there is to be no resolution for me, no ending to which I can cling and say, *my journey is over. Now I can rest.* There is enough rest in the Martin family for me already; all of us in the dirt, one way or another.

[DRAGGING, SHIFTING]

Anna, Saint Anna. Our future is pure and shining. I feel this surely, with every cell in my body. It is so close I can taste it. Grasp it in the greedy palm of my hand, in my clutching fingers. Its weight. Its purpose. Someday, Anna. Someday we will eat chorizo smoked potatoes, drink rose lemonade, feed each other fruit from our fingers. Someday you will ask me which dessert I want to buy at the bakery and I'll say, *all of them.* Someday we will be flower shopping and you will touch my shoulder underneath the pink magnolia tree, and your hair will curl with delight, and you will say, *I am so happy I feel like weeping.* It is like a photograph in my mind, impressed upon me. It is engraved onto the core of my being. What have I done to earn you? What wouldn't I do? What wouldn't I do to keep you, Anna?

Nothing. The answer is nothing.

[BEEP]

I tried to play fair. I tried to make you listen with words, with promises, but you wouldn't. You clawed at me and kept me and held me and trapped me and *I will not have that*, do you hear me? Do you hear every bit of me, every muscle and bone? I won't have it. You are mine. I am not yours. I do not exist for you. I do not exist for anyone. You cannot hold me here, and I will not let you.

[MATCH STRIKING]

You will let me out. You will let me out. *You will let me out!*

[FIRE ROARING]

[OUTRO:]

This is Becca De La Rosa, one of the co-creators of Mabel, and before I read the end credits I have a special message for you: because you all constantly amaze us with your interest, your talent, your analytical skills, and your

dedication to the show, we have hidden somewhere within season three a secret message. The message will not be complete until the season is finished. The first person to send us the finished message in full through the messaging system on our website will receive a substantial prize, and one we both frankly want to keep for our own. More details will be made available soon, but for now, all you need to do is keep consuming the show.

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, Chuck Bettis, Monplaisir, Jenifer Avila, Lloyd Rogers, 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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