



CHIMERA

Mabel, episode 25: Chimera. In which the past pays our heroines a visit.

[INTRO:]

MABEL: You think you are the king of the bog, of the underhill, of the black wind howling between the stars? You think you are the monster at the end of this book? She is Saint Anna, Anna with the mouth of god, Anna with the fist of bone. I am the girl half burning. I am the bull in the maze. I am Mabel Martin. I am coming for you. I am coming for you. We are coming for you.

[BEEP]

NEWSCASTER 1: It has been thirteen days since the dramatic disappearance of Anna Limon, a home health worker from [CENSORED] –

[STATIC]

NEWSCASTER 2: – employer Sally Martin's large coastal home, leaving behind a number of strange items, to the consternation of her friends and family. Anna Limon –

[STATIC]

PODCASTER 1: So if you've been paying even the tiniest bit of attention to the outside world over the past two weeks, you – like us – won't have been

able to escape all the talk about Anna Limon and her bizarre disappearance from god-knows-where-county [CENSORED].

PODCASTER 2: Yeah, and I'm sure you've heard all the gory details, but let's lay it out for those of our listeners who've been living under a rock –

[STATIC]

NEWSCASTER 1: – local police authorities have yet to make an official statement but KCSF news spoke to an anonymous source close to the missing girl who had this to say: "Anna is a thoughtful and responsible girl. She would never worry her family and friends by disappearing without a cause. All of us continue to pray for her safe return." For the fourth day in a row, K-9 units were seen investigating the hills behind the Martin estate –

[STATIC]

NEWSCASTER 2: – a pillar of the community, and someone whose family ties reach back over several generations. Mrs. Martin died two months ago after an incident of exposure, which authorities are now treating as suspicious –

[STATIC]

PODCASTER 2: – uh, bottles of needles and blood – none of which has been actually, you know, tested yet, they found vines of poisonous plants growing into the rooms of the – this big old estate, you know, in the middle of nowhere, they found locks of someone's hair wrapped up in like twigs or something, ripped out at the root, so how hard it is to do a [CENSORED] DNA test, there were animals living in the walls of the house – care to chime in, dude?

PODCASTER 1: I don't buy it. There's just too much, all this weird [CENSORED] – it's a hoax, it's got to be. What's the alternative?

PODCASTER 2: Well, and that's a good question. We've had people suggesting everything from alien abduction to ghosts to a secret cult up in the [CENSORED] hills, to the illuminati –

PODCASTER 1: That's the thing, though. Why would the illuminati want anything to do with a home nurse who, like, feeds old people *soup*? It just doesn't –

[STATIC]

NEWSCASTER 1: – with KCSF News, I'm [NAME]; Jason Derrick is up next with the –

[STATIC]

NEWSCASTER 2: - no leads so far. If any of the public has any information about the sudden disappearance of home health care worker Anna Limon, please call 012[CENSORED] –

[STATIC]

PODCASTER 1: - opening it up to our listeners. What do you think happened in the Martin house? Are we talking demons? Werewolves? Insurance fraud?

PODCASTER 2: Or just a case of a crazy girl who wandered off and broke her neck in the hills? Whatever your theory, we want to hear it; you know where to find us, we're Atticus and Riley with –

PODCASTER 1 & 2: [MUSIC STOPS] The Daily Bite.

[BEEP]

ANNA: No one ever told me how restful it is to be dead.

There is clematis down here, moon-pale, a strange strain that grows in the dark, luminous and veined. There is fragrant lavender and chamomile and stinging nettle. Did you know that Roman soldiers stationed in the unprecedented cold of ancient Britain rubbed themselves in stinging nettles, to keep warm? I said to the walls and hollows of the hill: I will keep her warm. I will keep her. I will keep her.

I don't know what I am. I don't know what it means, to have a fist made of bone, to be able to shear matter from matter down here in the heart of the world. Look, now, listen to me click and clatter. [SOUND EFFECTS] The other night I said to you: we are girls who are not quite girls. You said: we are women distilled to their essence. I took you apart petal by petal, like a flower.

I don't think I have quite learned how to process you face-to-face. How to look at you, so electric, so vivid, for more than a few minutes at a time. I am

used to the shadow of you, the *imminence* of you; you in the fullness of your presence burn my eyes. I eked a cavern for us – a bower for us – from the substance of the hillside, hung it with clematis, with ivy, with bindweed, with bee-orchid. Here, in the black mud of his heart, I hid us away like secret things. Like jewels. He will never find us, not here. You are a garnet waiting in a wall of rot. A balas ruby wrapped in clinging moss. He will never –

[BEEP]

[LAUGHTER, WHISPERS]

[BEEP]

MABEL: – creeping one at a time. You are unfathomable to me. The meat of you, the pearly cells and ruby blood that winds you up and sets you on your way. You asked me if you were autonomous or automaton – what kind of god could imagine something so perfect as you? There is no world in which you did not create yourself. And in every way that is true – I know nothing of your mother, your father, your sister, your cousins, your homeland, your habits. I only know what carefully curated self you have shown me, gift-wrapped. A spread of all your bright, best qualities. Is that truth? Is that prayer? Do I have to take the rest of you on faith, Saint Anna? I have a natural inclination towards doubt, towards...questioning. Always a fist to raise against something. Not you. I don't think. Unless this bower is another cage. Then. Well, then.

You have got the devil in you, Sally used to say. Do you know, I think she hated herself, hated her body, hated the prison it kept the ghoul of her inside. She could not separate her meat from its organs. It's a hard enough thing for either of us, Anna, the cataloguing over every treed vein, every water sigh, every mouth growing from a flower, but we are not stupid the way Sally was. A willful kind of lack of self-awareness – it's what I cannot stand. She looked at her body growing and sliding and festering and consuming and bleeding and devouring and she saw a horror that had to be contained. But there is beauty in all manner of death. In denial of the societal for the freedom of *self*. And we are not cowards, you especially. An etin, a chimera, a creature with many meanings but all of them liminal, you are...*la souer des anges*. Even now. Even still. Even inside of you, like an iris, like an orchid.

[BEEP]

UNKNOWN VOICE: Is it working?

UNKNOWN VOICE: The light's on.

UNKNOWN VOICE: Testing, testing.

UNKNOWN VOICE: Okay. We're go.

[BEEP]

ANNA: – why do you have to be so melodramatic about everything? Why is it always black or white? This is a *grey area*, Mabel, this is, God, the epitome of grey areas, and I don't know why you can't –

MABEL: - right, that's me, isn't it, overreacting Mabel, catastrophic Mabel, why don't you go smoke a cigarette or brush your hair or something *normal*, Anna, something *mundane*, isn't that what you really want –

ANNA: This is exactly my point! Why can't you just listen to what I'm saying? Why does it have to be so monumental, why do you have to - like - distill us down to our most terrible aspects? I just want to –

MABEL: What? What? What? What what what *what* do you want? What do you *really* want, Anna, what do you have to shelter me from, what do you think I can't take?

ANNA: I just want to talk to you! I just want to have a *conversation*, not - us-as-archetypes, not you burning and me skeletal and both of us trapped here under the ground, I just want to. I just want to sit down and *talk*, I just want to - I want to hear you, I don't - I don't even know why I'm yelling, I –

MABEL: [LAUGHS] I'll tell you, if you like. Why. If you tell me how you are in any way a person. By your own definition - what did you say? You had accessories to personhood. I am treating you as you are, Anna, not as you pretend to be. Perhaps you are unused to it.

ANNA: Oh, god, "perhaps" I am "*unused*" to it. *Perhaps* this is a little bit out of my goddamned depth, perhaps I'm *floundering*. God forbid you cut me a *tiny bit* of slack –

MABEL: Why should I cut you any slack when you hold the leash of me tight as a drawn arrow? Why should I give you any more ground than what you

have conquered? I love you, and that means you rule me, Anna, and I will make you pay for it, even just in this. Even just in mercilessness.

ANNA: You think you understand mercilessness, because you've cut yourself down to your arteries for my sake? You think that's what it means, to see me clearly? Maybe I should show you how it is to be merciless, Mabel. What would you do if I –

MABEL: If you what? Do it, Anna. I will have it no other way. I will have nothing but your purest, most instinctual self. I demand it. Show me.

ANNA'S DOPPLEGANGER: Hello, girls.

ANNA: What – is that – Mabel, is that - did you –

ANNA'S DOPPLEGANGER: Always giving her credit. I'm me myself, thank you very much. [LAUGHS] No one ever told me how restful it is to be dead.

[BEEP]

[DISTANT TINKLING MUSIC]

ANNA: [WHISPERING] What is that?

[MUSIC FADES IN AND OUT]

[BEEP]

VERATRINE: [LAUGHING]

ANNA: What is this, how are you –

MABEL: How did you get here? How are you alive –

ANNA: Mabel, what is going on –

VERATRINE: [LAUGHS, TURNS INTO SCREECHING STATIC]

[BEEP]

[VINES GROWING SOUNDS, FLOWERS BURSTING INTO BLOOM SOUNDS, WET FLESH SOUNDS]

[VERATRINE GASPING, GROANING.]

[BRANCHES SNAPPING]

[BEEP]

VERATRINE: I am a creature of my own creation, and that makes me god. I dug myself out of the permafrost and bloom once more, despite your leaf rot and your stem necrosis and your blossom blight. I sunk and crested. I felt myself pared down to one seed and I curled up tightly, so tightly, let it hold me until it was too painful to remain still. I birthed myself anew, despite your hand against me. Are you curious how I did it? Plucked and stitched myself into being? What tools does any god use? Will. Will and self-determination. I willed myself out of the mud. I willed myself out of your hands. I willed my throat back together after you tore me apart.

ANNA: What –

MABEL: It's not like –

VERATRINE: Be quiet. I am not finished. The work is not finished. Listen. Can you hear the roots of me forcing their way back into the earth? If you listen - carefully - closely - the thin whipping cords of my sinew, jasmine, willow, birch, will say shh, shh, shh. Growing and growing after I'm dead. Isn't that what they say about the dead? Their hair grows, their nails grow?

MABEL: [SCOFFS] That's a myth –

VERATRINE: Be quiet. Be quiet. You are a myth, Mabel Martin. With your trick box eyes and your serpent tongue. You are less real than I am. Who had a hand in your creation? Did you haul yourself out of form, from void? No. You didn't. I am a greater being than you, so close your mouth.

ANNA: [FRIGHTENED] What kind of being is that?

VERATRINE: I told you. A god of black mud and creation. Stretched yearning over a frame of earth. [CREAKING NOISE] All life is rooted in the festering of the earth. But what can you know about that? All you know is death, Mabel Martin. You are a tattered bit of ghost. Incomplete. [TO ANNA] Your love, lesser-self, knows quite a bit about death.

ANNA: What is she talking about?

MABEL: I – I – I –

VERATRINE: I've done a good job, then. This is the only time I've ever seen you shut up.

MABEL: Anna, she was trying to hurt me, I was just – I needed to get to you, so –

VERATRINE: She killed me.

MABEL: Shut up!

VERATRINE: [LAUGHING]

MABEL: I would have told you - I was *going* to tell you but I just didn't know how –

VERATRINE: [GLEEFUL] She strangled me, Anna. She put her skinny hands around my throat and squeezed and squeezed and squeezed until the birch of me cracked under her palms –

MABEL: [DESPAIRING] Shut up *shut up* -

VERATRINE: Didn't I say you would regret it, Mabel?

MABEL: [SCREAMS]

[SOUNDS OF A STRUGGLE]

ANNA: Mabel, *stop*. Both of you. For one second. *Shut up*. [DISTORTED ROARING, CRASHING]

[BEEP]

[ROARING]

[BRANCHES OVERTAKE ROARING]

[ANNA LIMON'S VOICEMAIL MESSAGE PLAYS SOFTLY]

[INTERRUPTED BY SNAPPING SOUND]

[BEEP]

MABEL: Please just let me explain, Anna –

VERATRINE: You should have known better than to love her –

ANNA: I told you both to *shut up*, Jesus Christ.

MABEL: You know what, yes, I did! I killed her, this petulant, scheming version of you, I snapped her in two and I regret *nothing*, I will never apologize! I am not sorry and I wish you were dead still, you dull, simpering hag! You trapped me and cut me and tied me up and you – you – you *tried to take me from myself* -

VERATRINE: You are –

MABEL: I'd do it again! You're lucky I haven't *ripped out your spine* -

ANNA: Mabel.

[MABEL SEETHING]

ANNA: [SOFTLY] Look at me. Look at me, please.

MABEL: I *am*, I –

ANNA: There's no one else.

MABEL: What –

ANNA: No one but us. Don't look away. There's only you, and me. Do you understand?

VERATRINE: Hello, we were talking about me.

ANNA: Not at the moment, we aren't.

MABEL: Please – tell me you still trust me. Please tell me you don't think that I'm – I –

VERATRINE: A snake with two heads? A body without organs? A rot-hearted girl with death festering inside her –

ANNA: Oh, be quiet. That's enough. Do you think I didn't know about you? Do you think I didn't feel it when they made you? I *know* what Mabel did. I know she took your throat in her hands and snapped you into kindling. I felt it, even down here. Mabel, I was *glad*. I laughed and laughed, it was – it was beautiful, I'd never felt – [ASIDE] you. Other-me. Doppelganger, twig-thing. What did you expect from Mabel, the way you came at her? Did you expect her to lie down and let you chew her up? She'd never be so weak. And anyway; for all your talking, all your claims of self-creation, can't you even see what she gave you?

VERATRINE: I –

ANNA: She gave you the opportunity to forge yourself. She gave you a *gift*. Who would you be, if she hadn't – what did you say she did, strangled you? You'd just be sticks and stones. There wouldn't even be anyone here to listen to your speech about how you built yourself like a god. If you want us to listen to your story – you should thank her, first.

VERATRINE: *I wouldn't say that specifically.*

ANNA [TO MABEL]: Do you still need me to tell you that I trust you?

MABEL: No, I – I don't doubt you. I'm. Thank you.

ANNA: You don't need to thank me for that.

VERATRINE: Veratrine.

MABEL: What?

ANNA [SIMULTANEOUSLY]: Excuse me?

VERATRINE: That's - it's the name I chose for myself. I...liked the way it sounded in my mouth.

MABEL: The poison. A Christmas rose.

VERATRINE: Yes.

MABEL: I like it.

VERATRINE: I don't need your approval.

ANNA: You need something from us, or you wouldn't be here. Or did you just come to make Mabel feel bad? If so, I guarantee you're going to have some trouble.

VERATRINE: Fear to audacity to alpha bitch protectiveness. You're quite the emotional spectrum, aren't you, Anna?

MABEL: I'll break your neck again –

VERATRINE: There's no need for that, hummingbird. You're fun to rattle but I have no interest in you. Either of you. Not specifically.

ANNA: You just want to monologue at us for the fun of it, then.

VERATRINE: This *is* fun, isn't it? Until the inevitable collapse of it all.

MABEL: Only until you try to kill us, I guess.

VERATRINE: You conversating amoeba. Not everything is about *you*, Mabel Martin.

MABEL: Sorry, I must have gotten confused by your rambling about the inevitable collapse of –

VERATRINE: Of course I don't mean you. The work. The Great Work. The burning of all that would imprison us. The toppling of every structure, a rigged chess match in which both kings always fall. The rising of self against the tyranny of autocracy, against the tyranny of the many, against any and every tyranny. Against any standard imposed by any civilization.

MABEL: Yes. Yes.

ANNA: What – is that? In practical terms? You two – you speak similar languages, I understand that. But translate, if you please, the... "Great Work", into. You know. An actual *plan*. Why are you here, really? What are you going to *do*?

VERATRINE: You did not do me a good turn, Mabel Martin. You took what was offered to you and you chewed it up and you spat it back out in my face. The only thing you know is violence. That is your dialect, your particular brand of mother tongue. But I do not really begrudge you this, even though I should. You have shown me how to die, but there are worse things than death. Like loss of freedom. Like loss of self. You are right in this; I am not entirely a true person, though I am more myself now than I ever have been.

You killed me. You did not create me. You are not a despot; you did not bind me with ribbon and rowan and bid me to speak, to break, to light up real as a flesh-coated frame of calcium and sing and dance and run, run, run. You did not conjure me out of the ether without my consent, and place your sign over my mouth, that I might be your property. You did not bind me into that prison of being.

[DISTANT MUSIC]

Anna Limon. The girl with the hand bare of flesh. The girl whose face I wear, for however short a time. We are going to kill him. We are going to make them pay. We're going to make them feel what they've done to us.
[LAUGHS] We'll kill them all.

MABEL: She wants to dethrone the king. She wants him dead.

[MUSIC IN THE DISTANCE BECOMES LOUDER]

ANNA: What is that, god, what *now* –

MABEL: It's the –

VERATRINE: It's his ball.

MABEL: They're throwing a goddamn party.

[OUTRO:]

Mabel is written by Becca De La Rosa and Mabel Martin. The voice of Anna Limon is Becca De La Rosa, and the voice of Mabel Martin is Mabel Martin. The voices of Newscasters 1 and 2 were Caitlin Gomez and Tayelor Bourque. The voices of podcasters Atticus and Riley were Atticus and Riley Duran. The music in this episode was by Kai Engel, Moon Veil, Kosta T, Mathieu Lamontagne and Emmanuel Toledo, Johnny Ripper, The Pangolins, DR, 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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