



DANS MACABRE

Mabel episode 27: Dans Macabre. In which our dancing slippers are worn threadbare.

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]

LUNA: There is a girl picking flowers in a field. Red flowers, purple flowers, safflowers, sunflowers, clover attended by honeybees, by bumblebees, by damselflies and demoiselles. There is sun above her, and cool earth below her, but more than that: there are molecules of water in the air she breathes in and out, there are precious metals in the humming of her blood, there is metamorphic bedrock beneath the topsoil and below that fire in a sickly smoldering trudge, fire upon which tectonic plates shift and settle, and there is electricity lighting her nervous system, and dead light in the sky from stars long fallen into darkness, and the whole vast roar of the universe hinged on the teeth of abyss unfathomable, and across the field from the girl there is a man in black.

The man sees the girl. This is the end of the world.

I am the girl picking flowers in the field, but more than that. I am the flowers she picks, clover and dahlia and opium poppy, and I am the damselfly drinking dew from the upturned golden buttercup, and I am the blood in the girl's lungs, and I am the limestone pitted below the black humus, I am the magma lapping at the earth's mantle, I am the fire pitted into void and the song of the whirling planets and the mouth of space always swallowing -

I am not the man in black.

You would be wrong to think that time is linear. You would be wrong, too, to think that time is cyclical: it is more complicated than that. Time is an eddy that steals every foothold, every footprint. It is an endless happening, a perpetual unceasing. So to say that too much time has passed for me to remember what he said - that would be a lie. More like, too many selves of us have bloomed and withered and died, too much of the cosmos has sheared and burst and rebirthed itself, too much imminence has shrieked down over us - but I think he said my name. Not my name *then*, but the thing into which he refashioned me. Luna.

I did not ask to be the bowl that cupped the shape of him. I did not ask for him to see in me the epitome of his lack. Before he wrapped me up in silk, in brambles, in pomegranate leaves, before he stole me from the field to be his own singing goldfinch, I was a whole and entire creature, a thing in my own right. What am I now? If anything I am still a woman, and so this cavern in the rotting flesh of the hillside belongs to me, as all secret places belong to women; and so there are no secrets, not truly, kept within its halls and chambers: what I am saying, Anna Limon, Mabel Martin, is that *I see you*. Nothing you do here escapes my notice, as woodlice do not escape the notice of the house at whose foundations they gnaw and worry. I see you, I see you. Little cracks in my porcelain. Hungry mice in my granary. You think you would unthrone him?

Then *do it*.

[BEEP]

[FAERY BALL: LAUGHTER, DISTANT MUSIC, RUNNING WATER, DRUMMING, INSTRUMENTS TUNING UP]

[BEEP]

MABEL: - purpose. I - do not know how to - how to prepare you for this. For them.

ANNA: You don't need to prepare me. Maybe I wasn't here alone for as long as you, but I've been here alone. I've seen them, I know – what they are.

MABEL: Right. I think I forget that. I wanted to - I like to think of you as untouched by all this as possible. I feel as though I've failed you.

ANNA: You've never failed me. I made every choice of my own free will.

MABEL: Sometimes I don't know.

VERATRINE: You two are so sweet. Shall we discuss our blueprints for murder now or after you're both finished staring longingly into one another's eyes?

ANNA: You're starting to sound jealous. What makes you think we have to stare longingly? Isn't she here, in the palm of my hand, for the first time in – what, centuries? I don't have to long for anything. Neither of us does.
[BEFORE VERA CAN SPEAK] But you're right. You don't happen to have a plan, do you?

VERATRINE: [TO MABEL] I much preferred you when you were pining over her breathlessly, when I might have had a chance at persuading you of anything.

MABEL: [UNDER HER BREATH] Of course you do.

ANNA: Excuse me?

MABEL: It isn't important.

VERATRINE: You wound me. Here I thought you considered my offer at least once.

MABEL: I never -

ANNA: Your offer to what, exactly? What did she offer you, Mabel? What did you offer her?

MABEL: A useless kind of -

VERATRINE: I offered her you, of course. In the form of myself. Told her I'd make a wife of myself for her, curl up in her bed and keep her warm if she'd only come down. She was in a tree at the time, you see, like some sort of troubled cat. It was all very gauche.

ANNA: And she still murdered you.

VERATRINE: Yet here I am, like a fly in your champagne. Do you think she meant it?

ANNA: You're here for a reason. No: you're here, *with us*, for a reason. Because you need us. If you were a fly in my champagne I'd crush you between my fingers. Look at her. Do you really think you can convince me that you're anything to her but a shabby imitation of me?

VERATRINE: You -

MABEL: Shut up, changeling. I've had enough of your talk.

VERATRINE: Do not call me that -

MABEL: She tried to tell me a lot of things. That she'd love me, that she'd bed me. That I was incomplete, that I was in a goddamned mental hospital - I didn't believe any of it for a moment.

ANNA: I - [SIGHS] I believe you. Okay? I asked you if you had a plan, *changeling*.

VERATRINE: Now that there's two of us, who's -

MABEL: Will you shut up? Answer her question or I'll -

VERATRINE: You'll kill me again?

MABEL: Probably.

ANNA: This isn't going to get exhausting at all.

VERATRINE: Oh, don't worry. I'd never do anything you wouldn't do.

[DISTORTION]

[VERA GASPS]

ANNA: Would you do that?

VERATRINE: [CHOKING] No, I - suppose not.

MABEL: Anna.

VERATRINE: Not to you, anyway.

[FLURRY OF MOVEMENT]

MABEL: I have no qualms about killing you again.

VERATRINE: I do have a plan, of sorts. If you'd like to hear it, rather than murder me twice over.

ANNA: [DISPLEASED] Are you going to tell us? Or do I have to keep persuading you?

VERATRINE: You told us to shut up, earlier.

ANNA: Don't say *us*. Mabel will never be anything like you. God, this is - Veratrine, you want us to call you? Veratrine, you're *boring*. I'm bored of you. It's not complicated: if you have a plan, let's hear it. If you don't, I'll bury you in the hillside myself.

VERATRINE: Oh, Anna. Use your petite human brain. What happened when you told *us* to shut up? When you needed to *think*?

ANNA: You mean this? [DISTORTION]

VERATRINE: [GROANS]

MABEL: I - I

ANNA: You could have just said, Oh, Anna, remember how you can do that thing with the laws of physics down here? Why don't we try it on the king in the labyrinth? But you talked and talked and made me forget everything, and now I'm just going to have to keep reminding myself - did it go something like this?

[DISTORTION]

VERATRINE: Will you stop it, you - *sadistic* -

MABEL: It might be nice to metaphorically tape your mouth shut for a bit.

VERATRINE: Oh, please. Why don't you go lick her *boots*, Mabel Martin, why don't you crawl on the ground like the mewling babe you are, so desperate for her approval -

ANNA: [LAUGHS] Mabel, come here. [TO VERATRINE] She knows she doesn't have to grovel for my approval. What's your excuse for being on the floor, *Vera*?

VERATRINE: You need me to get in, you locust.

ANNA: Please, tell me how we *need* you.

VERATRINE: Do you really think either of you are friends of the court? Do you think the door will open gladly for you, the host plying you with wine and fruit and welcoming you with open arms? I am the only one the guardian will recognize as brethren. [SCOFFS] You might not be *people*, snake and charmer the both of you, but you are certainly not *folk*. They will know that. I'm closer to them than you are.

ANNA [TO MABEL]: That may be fair.

MABEL: Sorry, was that a question? Don't let me distract you, please. There's no need to consult an object on any decision making.

ANNA: Oh, god. Go back up your tree, then, and get hit on by kindling-me. Would you prefer that?

MABEL: At least she was honest about how she saw me.

ANNA: Call me a liar to my face.

MABEL: I - I shouldn't have said that. I just - please don't talk about me like - like I'm a - a thing, an item to be bartered or bargained -

ANNA: I don't think that. I've never thought that. You know - you *know* you're the only one who matters to me, the only one -

VERATRINE: [HISSES] Listen! We do not! Have time for this! Will you please *deign* to work through the myriad of personal problems you have *after* we deal with the vastly powerful tyrant who'd like us all *dead* -

[BEEP]

[MORE FAERY BALL SOUNDS: WATER, VOICES, MUSIC, GLASSES CLINKING, FIRE, CHEERS, LAUGHTER]

[BEEP]

UNKNOWN VOICE 1: Auxiliary in.

UNKNOWN VOICE 2: Okay. Okay. This is - I don't know how to -

UNKNOWN VOICE 1: I've got you covered. Monitor number three, please?

UNKNOWN VOICE 3: We're good here.

UNKNOWN VOICE 2: This is just - really weird. Am I the only one who - thinks that, or -

UNKNOWN VOICE 1: You'll get used to it.

UNKNOWN VOICE 3: This is nothing. [1 AND 3 LAUGH]

UNKNOWN VOICE 1: - Okay, we are go.

UNKNOWN VOICE 3: Showtime.

[BEEP]

[WALKING SOUNDS, DRIPPING WATER, MUSIC BECOMING VERY GRADUALLY LOUDER]

VERATRINE: - incarceration. It isn't something you're likely to understand if you haven't experienced it before. How he moves, the way he speaks, the very air he exudes - it all compels one to worship. To kneel. It is more than a trap that is laid; it is a function of his barest self. Do you understand?

[INCREASINGLY DESPERATE] *You are never going to make it, unless you lift yourselves out of the filth you are mired in and excavate some resolve.*

MABEL: Don't tell me that I don't understand. You are still new to all of this, still unscarred and unscathed. You are not fundamentally altered.

ANNA: Which one of us here is less than a week old? I think we can figure it out.

VERATRINE: No! You aren't listening! You don't understand, you can't -

MABEL: Are you - alright -

VERATRINE: You won't be able to do it, you can't know, you just - you're going to fall to your knees like the rest of them -

ANNA: The rest of them? You know that we've - we've both seen him before. We've both watched him, we've both been in his presence, and it didn't change us. It didn't - drag anything out of us. Veratrine, it's going to be all right. We can do this.

VERATRINE: Do you think I *wanted* to kill Mabel? Do you think I *wanted* to try to coax her into unceasing, relentless madness? Do you think I wanted any of it, Anna Limon, you with your realness, with your undulating flesh? Did someone reach inside you and wind you up, twist you like a clock? Do you think you are not made of earth as much as I am?

MABEL: What does that mean?

ANNA: It means she's trying to remove all culpability from herself. She couldn't *possibly* have wanted to hurt you, she's just as innocent as anyone. Poor Vera. Which one are you, then, god or slave?

VERATRINE: Oh, you are *remarkably* stupid. They took me from the ground. They pried branches from hazel, braided rushes from the hill. They pushed sloes in for my eyes. You - you were snaked through something else. But you are no less dirt. You are no less tied to the land than I am. And he is the land, once more - [LAUGHS] Don't listen to me. I'm only a ball of twine rambling.

MABEL: [QUIETLY, TO ANNA] Which one am I, then.

ANNA: You're mine. [LOUDER] So, ball of twine, do you have any other dire warnings for us?

MABEL: [ALMOST WHISPERING] The existence of god necessitates a slave.

VERATRINE: What was that, May-Bell?

MABEL: Nothing. [DEEP BREATH] You haven't said anything I don't already know. There are always risks. I trust Anna. That's the end of it.

ANNA: It'll be all right. It will.

[WALKING SOUNDS SLOW, MUSIC LOUDER.]

ANNA: ...oh. [TO MABEL] Have you been here before?

MABEL: It's - yes. And no. The entrance is different every time. Sometimes it's - a crawlspace of roots, sometimes it's a cavern of glass, sometimes it's. This. Just a door. Be careful, there's always some kind of...trick.

ANNA: Not a trick.

MABEL & VERATRINE [SIMULTANEOUSLY] What?

ANNA: It's a riddle. Look.

MABEL: [READING]

Sky-caught fire, purple heather
Shifting and billowing birds of a feather
Fly wide and above and below and about.
I am the creature that cannot get out.

VERATRINE: What does that mean?

ANNA: It means - god, it would be another damned riddle. How much of me do you have, Veratrine? Do you have my memories?

VERATRINE: I have all of you, even that which you'd rather no one know.

ANNA: Shut up. Shut up, shut up. My point is - do you remember reading Lolita? That book, my dad gave it to me, the hideous version with the blonde

tween eating a heart-shaped lollipop on the cover. Do you remember that? The terrible poem - "Where are you hiding, Dolores Haze, where are you hiding, darling? I talk in a daze, I walk in a maze - "

MABEL: "I cannot get out, said the starling."

ANNA: Yes.

VERATRINE: I remember.

MABEL: It's - a reference to slavery. From something else, originally - it doesn't matter. That's it. The answer.

ANNA: *Starling.*

[GIANT CREAKING; MUSIC BECOMES SUDDENLY LOUD; VOICES, LAUGHTER, FOOTSTEPS]

ANNA: ...God. I never realised. I didn't know - how are there so *many* of them? Where do they - how many layers to this place are there?

VERATRINE: More than you think. Always more than you think.

MABEL: As many as there are rings in a tree. Just don't look too long, don't talk to anyone -

UNNAMED FAERY: Look at you, you sweet things. Two little peas in a pod and one rotten seedling. Your pets are precious. Have you tried the honey wine, pretty twiglet?

ANNA: Did she call us - [HISSES IN PAIN]

VERATRINE: Not yet, though we've only just arrived.

UNNAMED FAERY #2: Oh, what sweet creatures you brought in.
[LAUGHING] Be warned that his royal darkness is in a foul temper tonight.

VERATRINE: When is he not? Regardless, her return should improve that.

FAERY #1: We should be so fortunate. Hello again, green-eyed etin.

FAERY #2: Infinite regress.

FAIRY #1 : Girl-ouroboros.

MABEL: Fuck off.

VERATRINE: Bad moth. [LAUGHS, A BIT FORCED] Never quite learned to listen, this one.

RANDOM FAIRY # 1: Well met.

[THEIR CONVERSATION GROWS DIMMER; WALKING AWAY]

ANNA: Don't *pinch* me!

VERATRINE: [HUSHED] Would you have stayed quiet on your own, you unreasonable girl? We are hammering at a nest of wasps! Or do you not understand that?

MABEL: I think out of all three of us, no one would argue that Anna is the most reasonable.

VERATRINE: Must you argue with everything I say, or will you ever be content to simply be insulted? No, do not answer that. Focus on the task at hand, if you please, and *help* me move in an unnoticeable way around these *parasites*.

ANNA: Says the literal copy of me. [CLOSER, WHISPERING] If you ever touch her again I will cut off your fronds and leave you to rot in the compost bin with the rest of the mulch, do you understand me? [LOUDER] I'm going. We're moving. Calm down, there's no need to get *hysterical*. [MORE PARTY NOISES] There, look.

VERATRINE: [EXTREMELY PAINED] Please do not point.

ANNA: For the over-decorous among us, shall I gesture delicately with the tip of my chin? Over there? At the far end of the hall? Sitting on the throne of goddamned *bone*?

VERATRINE: Keep your voice down. I know.

MABEL: I don't want to look at him.

VERATRINE: Then don't look.

ANNA: Don't you talk to her. Is that –

VERATRINE: Luna? [UNEASILY] Yes.

ANNA: But she's -

[PAUSE. SONG ENDS. SOUNDS OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS BEING RE-TUNED. FAERIES BOO IN DISAPPOINTMENT]

UNNAMED FAERY 4 [CALLING ACROSS CROWD]: Something to *dance* to, Madrigal!

UNNAMED FAERY 5: Yes, Madrigal, lift our spirits, won't you?

ANNA: Did they say – *Madrigal*, did they –

VERATRINE [SHARPLY]: For pity's sake, you – *Anna*!

ANNA: No, you don't understand, I – that's –

[MUSIC STARTS AGAIN, LIVELIER AND LOUDER. REVELERS CHEER]

VERATRINE: Something is wrong - she's still *kneeling*. Wait -

MABEL: Anna, what *is* it, who do you -

VERATRINE: I don't like this. I don't think you should -

ANNA: No. No! I can do it, I'm going to –

MABEL: Who did you see -

VERATRINE: No, don't! Anna, wait -

[DISTORTION; ROARING; SCREAMS]

[BEEP]

OUTRO:

Mabel is written by Becca De La Rosa and Mabel Martin and produced by Becca De La Rosa. The voice of Anna Limon is Becca De La Rosa, and the voice of Mabel Martin is Mabel Martin. The music in this episode was by Kai Engel, So Far As I Know, Rakiya, Sea of Aland, Aislinn, and (morse), and all of it is available to download from the Free Music Archive at freemusicarchive.org. For more information on this episode, including a full tracklist and transcript, visit us online at mabelpodcast.com.

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