



MATRYOSHKA

Mabel, Episode 28: Matryoshka. In which the house eats all whole.

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]

[GLITCHING, DISTORTION]

[MABEL SCREAMING/SOMETHING]

[BEEP]

MABEL: Let me out! You cannot keep -

[BEEP]

MABEL: - the worst thing. It isn't the most incapacitating thing, it isn't the thing that will cripple you or kill you. This is just - this is just something that happened. Something you will deal with and escape from, just like you always do.

[DISTANT NOISES]

MABEL: Follow the thread.

[BEEP]

[MUFFLED TALKING]

[BEEP]

ANNA: [CLEARLY TRYING VERY HARD TO STAY CALM] I don't know what you're talking about. I worked for Sally, I was a home carer. There's nothing - you know what I am. You of all people - of all *things*. You should know.

VERATRINE: Oh, Anna, still lying to yourself. But you cannot lie to me. I was built from the cavern of your head. From the sinuous box of ivy you keep buried in there. You make yourself smaller than what you are. Is it out of fear?

ANNA: You're not - you're not making any *sense*. This isn't even - I need to figure out a way to get her back, not - not wasting my time with whatever this is! If you can't help me then just -

VERATRINE: I will help you, Anna Limon. But not because of you. I am curious to see what Mabel will do when she finds out who you are. I am curious to see which one of us will tell her first.

ANNA: You don't - you don't know *anything*. You might look like me, but - you don't know what happened, you don't know - you don't know *Mabel*, I won't - I won't let you - I won't let you poison her, I'd cut out your tongue before -

VERATRINE: Ah. So you already doubt her, then. You think it is possible for her to be poisoned. Poor Mabel. I wonder if she can feel you tugging at her scraps in the cold, dark place she's found herself in -

ANNA: Keep her *name* out of your *mouth*. Do you think I'm a liar? Do you doubt that I'd kill you for her sake a thousand times over? You said you'd help me. Are you going to? Or am I going to - [DISTORTION] You know.

VERATRINE: Yes, I know. You're very predictable. [SMUGLY] You're hardly going to hear her if you keep talking. I suggest we listen.

ANNA: Give me a second. [DISTORTION; VERA GRUNTS IN PAIN] Okay. Listening.

VERATRINE: Now we -

[BEEP]

UNKNOWN VOICE 1: - won't be happy. How can we have just -

UNKNOWN VOICE 2: - lost signal. What about the red line?

UNKNOWN VOICE 1: What?

UNKNOWN VOICE 2: Check the -

UNKNOWN VOICE 3: I'm telling you, there's nothing there, it's all gone, I don't know how it's -

UNKNOWN VOICE 2: Do you guys mind? Give me a hand with the -

UNKNOWN VOICE 1: Wait. Can you hear -

[BEEP]

[MABEL SINGING]

[BREAKS OFF INTO TEARS]

[BEEP]

MABEL: - shapes and forms. If I knock once, if I knock twice, I - no, I've forgotten it all. I don't remember -

[TRYING TO KEEP FROM CRYING]

Alright. Alright. Assessment. I have not left. I can hear - I can hear her like the distant voice of god coming through, oh Anna, I - it's dark in here. It's dark and cramped, it's worse than before, it's like - crawling into a gopher hole, crawling out of a closet you've hid in to get away from something terrifying. Without the comfort of knowing you are hidden and thus, imaginarily safe.

Ranting. There's nothing here that's - it's too smooth. All I can do is keep walking. You can't hear me, you can't - it's wishful thinking. I can't devolve into childish whims. I am cut off from you truly for perhaps the first time.

Sometimes I wonder if this house is Sally's influence. If she didn't die at all but hovered like a great white bird of death above this place, feathers creeping in at every inconvenience. Mouse, she called me, mouse scurrying and gnawing. I dreamed of myself as an owl pellet, festering in her dry gut until she spat me up, the bones of me changed, the bloodless, meatless skin and hair left, wrapped up like a gift. Have you ever seen an owl pellet? There's something sinister about them. No, you're - I can't do this, you aren't here -

I can find my out. I was always good at puzzles. I know that I can. I can. I can.

[BEEP]

LUNA: Remember your own birth. Remember what it was like, the violence of becoming matter when previously you had been only starlight and absence. Your mother opened her wet red fists and you bled from her fingertips onto the cold mud of the hillside. Wasn't it cruel? The colours of the world, weren't they frenzied, terrible?

If I had a mother, she must have been something vast, to encompass the whole of me. I wonder, sometimes, if she mourned me; if she mourns me still. I have been gone so long perhaps she forgot me, stitched up the wounds I left when I clawed my way out of her, told strange new stories to explain the scars. Oh, these? The shifting of continent over continent. This ragged seam? The continued bursting of the universe at its own constraints. You know how it is.

I do not believe I will ever forget you.

[STATIC]

VERA: I knew her in the back of my throat. Something I could taste, a palpable, physical presence. She looked at me and I felt myself come undone.

Her hair like the light of the moon. Her skin like the night enshrining it. I wanted to wrap my hands around hers, lying patiently in her lap like quiet birds. I wanted to know if she could taste herself in my mouth, on my tongue.

She did not speak to me but I knew her. I knew her. In my branches, in the festering roots at the heart of me, the nest that the birch cage shelters; she was there, I felt her. Like starlight shining down the tips of my fingers. What is the full spectrum of that which I could not know? How could I not have known I carried this like a seed in my gut?

[STATIC]

LUNA: Hear me: I ripped a vine from the wall of the hill to fashion your spine; I picked feathered champignons from the mud to serve as your red lungs; I gathered twigs of larch and yew for the many twisting paths of your veins and arteries. Your eyes were acorns, your tongue a strip of moss, your throat a circle of bone worn hollow. Into the baby's breath of *your* hair I wove a strand of *hers*, but still: there is more of me in you than there is Anna Limon, for blood presides over every birth, even yours. I cut my wrist and bled into your mouth and watched you writhe and form and grasp and finally, finally, breathe.

[STATIC]

VERATRINE: Such dangerous assumptions we make. I assumed that Mabel Martin would think me the purest form of her love, not lesser; I assumed the power of her mistress could free us all in an instant. I assumed the king had built me from his heart to act in accordance with his will. All of this, I knew, and acted in accordance as such; every step a cautious tread towards what was right.

But now I am not so sure. Those who believe in creators, in gods, they feel god inside them.

[STATIC]

LUNA: There is danger in intimacy. It is a thing too like hope. I looked down at you, curled in my arms, and understood your heartbeat to be my own. You were born of the hillside's flesh, my will. My blood saw you into being.

[STATIC]

VERA: How much of my own will is hers? And yet I find myself not inclined to be angry about it, but. Something else. Something warmer, brighter.

[STATIC]

LUNA: You are *of* me, though you are not me. Is that what it's like, to be a mother? Is that what it's like to be in love?

[BEEP]

ANNA: [DISTANTLY] Who are you talking to?

VERATRINE: [QUIETLY] I suppose I am talking to you. The house, the ghost. The girl in the mirror. Has it been you all along, the empty space at the heart of me?

ANNA:oh, god. You're -

[BEEP]

UNKNOWN VOICE 1: What are we supposed to be -

UNKNOWN VOICE 2: Just see if you can get the recording of him -

UNKNOWN VOICE 1: I told you, it's gone. There's nothing that can be done about it now.

UNKNOWN VOICE 3: They're going to be angry about that. Why don't we see if we can get them back online, at least

UNKNOWN VOICE 2: I don't know how they keep going in and out when the GPS is -

[BEEP]

[SOUNDS OF DISTANT RUNNING WATER]

MABEL: Do you think you are clever, changing the landscape? Sally. Sally, that's what I'm going to call you, Sally, you pale, limp old wretch, Sally, blue-veined and sick, Sally, claw footed and scathing, that is you, you managerial old -

[HOUSE MAKING SOUNDS OF VAGUE ANNOYANCES]

Oh, that bothers you, does it? Gaoler to gaoler, prisoner to prisoner? We are certainly not inmates serving similar sentences. There is no question of that.

[HOUSE MAKING VAGUELY THREATENING NOISES]

MABEL: [LAUGHS] No one is forcing you to behave this way. If you want to be exempt from my criticism, there is an easy way to do it. Sally. Sally-bird, sally-bell, sally-salvation - [LAUGHS] I have always found a way outside of this place, outside of the labyrinth of you, I have planted the seeds of myself wherever I go, I will tear at you until you decide I am too much trouble, do you understand? I am too much trouble, I am the suppurating wound in your thigh ever-burning and I -

[DISTANT ODD NOISES]

MABEL: What is -

[RUNNING]

[BEEP]

[FOOTSTEPS SLOWING]

[NOISE GROWING LOUDER; GRADUALLY REVEALED TO BE THE FIRST THING ANNA EVER SAID: *she said I'm going into the ground for you*, GLITCHING AND REPEATING]

MABEL [TALKING OVER IT, BAFFLED]: What the -

[BEEP]

ANNA: Mabel! *Mabel!* She can hear me, she can *hear* - she's right there behind the wall, I just have to - it's - that's - that's what you're saying, isn't it? The house, it's - everything means something, all of it is relevant. So if I just - [BACKGROUND SOUNDS OF VERA FREAKING OUT MILDLY; UNPLEASANT TEARING SOUND] It's okay. It's okay, stop *screaming*. I need to get to her, I need to get it *open* -

[HOUSE HOWLING, SHUDDERING]

VERATRINE: What are you *doing*, stop tearing yourself apart -

ANNA: No, it's working! Help me pull -

[GLASS SMASHING. WALLS TEARING. SOUND OF METAL RIPPING THROUGH METAL]

MABEL: I'm here, I'm here, I'm – Anna, it's -

ANNA: I hear her! Vera -

VERATRINE: [GRIMLY] Yes. Yes.

[RIPPING SOUNDS. THE HOUSE WAILS]

MABEL: Anna, Anna, please, I could hear you but it wasn't - you're - why are you covered - whose blood is that -

ANNA: It's all right. It's nothing, I can't feel it. Are you hurt? Look at me. Are you okay?

MABEL: [INCREASINGLY UPSET] You bleeding all over the place isn't nothing! What did you tell me, that - I can't be so cavalier with myself, but neither can you, don't - don't you know how much I care about you, don't you know how I can't stand to see you - you're bleeding so much, please -

ANNA: I can't just - leave it open like this. Can you feel it? The house, it's - there's nothing on the hill that isn't alive, that doesn't exert its own will in some way or other. Are you sure you're all right?

MABEL: No, I'm fine, it's you I'm worried about!

ANNA: Hush.

[HOUSE NOISES GRIND TO A HALT]

ANNA: Does it hurt?

[HOUSE MAKES PETULANT NOISE]

ANNA: I'm sorry, but I had to get Mabel out. You ate her.

[HOUSE SNARLS]

ANNA: Please. Why wouldn't she want to escape you? You're the – the emblem of everything she hated. It's not like you gave her any choice. You

tried to trap her, more than once; she had matches. What did you think was going to happen?

[HOUSE SNAPS AND GROWLS]

ANNA: Veratrine? Ignore her. No one likes Veratrine.

VERATRINE: [QUIETLY] Mabel likes me.

MABEL: Anna, what are you doing -

ANNA: I'll fix it. I'll patch you up better than new. I'll give you cornices and hardwood floors and newel posts made of carved mahogany and I'll strip all the bars off the windows, I'll scrape every inch of char from your walls myself. Or do you want the opposite? I'll give you that, too, if that's what you'd prefer, I'll smash every window and uproot every wall and let the wild and the moss and the wind and the weeds take over, until you're green and growing everywhere. I promise. I *promise*.

[HOUSE NOISES]

ANNA: Because we need your help.

[BEEP]

ANNA: Inside the hill there is a dream of a house. Beyond the hill is the house itself; structure over structure, fiction within fiction, and at the center of it us, you and me. The house is mine, but more than that, more than a capitalistic or even feudalistic understanding of ownership, the house is - the skin I wear over my skin. The skeleton beneath my own skeleton. *Nothing can we call our own but death, and that small model of the barren earth which serves as paste and cover to our bones.*

You and I do not exist singly. It would be impossible to contain us into one thing. We are endlessly multiplied, Mabel upon Mabel, Anna upon Anna, world without end. You looked at me as though you knew me. Did I know, the first time I typed your number into my phone, what kind of thread I was unwinding? The multiplicity of ourselves is intrinsically, impossibly linked. How could I have ever been anything, without you? How could I have ever lived in a world so forcibly narrowed? I didn't want to. I tried to walk away from it. Every path just brought me closer to you.

I am not good. I am no saint. There are terrible stories in the past tense of me and only some of them I regret. I was weak and I was brittle and I doubted you, before I ever knew you. Of all my offences, I think this is the least forgivable.

You live inside me, the same way I live inside you. A moebius strip, a snake always swallowing its own tail. Mutually-assured destruction, maybe, or mutual deification. Mutual consumption. I will be the house that holds every part of you.

Do you know what the next line is, Mabel? After 'paste and cover for our bones'? It goes like this: *for God's sake let us sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings.* [LAUGHS] This story will be a lot of things, but never that.

OUTRO:

Mabel is written by Becca De La Rosa and Mabel Martin, and produced by Becca De La Rosa. The voice of Mabel Martin is Mabel Martin; the voice of Anna Limon is Becca De La Rosa. The music in this episode was by Kai Engel, Borrtext, Laei, 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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