



AURORA SILVER IS WILLING TO WAIT

Mabel, episode 29: Aurora Silver is Willing to Wait. In which someone plays a long game.

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]

ARTIFICIAL VOICE: Code required to access. Incorrect key will self-destruct.

[BEEPS OF CODE THING]

[CRACKLY, MUFFLED AUDIO, AS THOUGH RECORDED ON A DEVICE HELD IN SOMEONE'S POCKET A DECADE AGO]

AURORA SILVER: - very special. But you know that, don't you? You have never thought that you were an average creature. There has always been something - a peculiarity to you, an aberration. Can you feel it? Where does it live? In there, with your food and your drink and your bile? In your head, with the grey worm of your brain? I know you can feel it, glossy and hard.

Something like jet. Did you know that jet began its life as wood? Wood decomposed back in the Toarcian period, some 180 million years ago, then subjected to immense, incalculable pressure - the pressure of mountains shifting over mountains, the pressure of gods - until it was compressed and compacted and reduced to the purest, most perfect version of itself.

You're a smart girl, Mabel. You see where I'm going with this.

I am not your grandmother. I am not your mother, I am not your teacher, I am not your friend. What I am is, perhaps, a refinery. A source of incalculable pressure. I see the pure thing inside you, even if no one else does. Even if no one else ever has. I see it; I will help you excavate it.

[RUSTLING SOUNDS] I have three promises I'll make to you. Firstly, I will never lie to you. You wonder what I see when I look at you now? A sloppy child. An undisciplined, impractical child, an unsightly little pup far too in love with the sound of her own voice; and yet, I see potential.

I will never coddle you. That is my second promise. The process of purification cannot be cushioned. It will be painful; it will be ugly; you will wish and wish for something softer. That is my third promise to you, Mabel.

Welcome to El Segundo Academy.

[BEEP]

VERATRINE: Mabel -

MABEL: [FRUSTRATED] No, Anna, what - why have you done this, you're - [HYSTERICAL] was it to get back at me -

ANNA: Get back at you? Mabel, no, I had to - it's part of me, it was the only way I could get it to let you go! *I had to*, don't you - I'm fine, I promise. [LAUGHING, SLIGHTLY MANIC] It's listening, it's going to help us! I just had to get it to -

MABEL: You cut yourself! You tore yourself open, why - why would you -

ANNA: Because - because it's - it's *me*, I can't - I can't explain, okay? I just knew that. There wouldn't be any other way, there wouldn't be anything else - I had to get you back. I had to get you back, you were - it ate you, you were

just gone. What was I supposed to do? Just let you - [AUDIBLE ATTEMPT TO CALM SELF DOWN] I'm sorry. I didn't mean to worry you. I'm okay, I swear.

MABEL: You're not okay, you're bleeding - god deju vu all over again, we're back to this, we always come back to the same goddamn circle -

VERATRINE: But she bled so prettily for you. Surely you're grateful.

ANNA: You – Mabel. I'm sorry. I didn't know what else to *do*. It worked, didn't it? Don't you know I'd - don't you know I'd carve myself down to bone for you, too? Don't you know I would do *anything* to keep you?

MABEL: I -

VERATRINE: Well, you'd certainly do anything *now*.

ANNA: [ABOUT TO LOSE HER SHIT] How – [TRYING V HARD TO STAY CALM] Veratrine. Vera. Lovely little *twig*. You might have my memories, but you're still a baby, really, you're still barely a few days old, so here's something we tell babies: if you don't have something nice to say, don't say anything at all. Mabel, please. It's listening, can't you tell? It's - it's angry, it's - it's *furious*, but it's not - it wants things, too. It wants - us, over him. Us over him. It'll help, I just. I know it will.

MABEL: It - the house always kept me safe. From myself, from my grandmother, it - it did what it could. I never got hurt in this house. Ever. Even when she tried – [SUCKS IN BREATH] I believe you, but I'm just not sure how this can - go well for us. The house might not have hurt me, might have even kept me hale and whole but that doesn't mean it will let me out. It has *always* trapped me. That's what it does.

ANNA: That's not - no. The house is not a *good* thing. It's not - benevolent, maybe, maybe that's what I mean, but it's - it's a thing in its own right, and so it can be bargained with. Aren't we quick and clever? Can't we - can't we solve any problem, so long as we're together?

VERATRINE: Anna. You are too, too kind.

ANNA: I don't know why you can't just - [INCOHERENT NOISE]

VERATRINE: Go along to get along?

MABEL: What's - what is going on with you two? What happened while I was - was gone?

ANNA: Nothing. Nothing happened.

VERATRINE: Well, not at this time.

ANNA: Nothing has to *happen* for Veratrine to be an obnoxious, petulant child.

MABEL: Fair enough. [SHAKES HEAD] What do we do, then? And how do we take care of your - you don't look so great -

VERATRINE: She doesn't need your help, Mabel, don't you see? She's never needed you.

ANNA: That's *enough*, you - what do you want? What do you want me to say? You know I can hurt you. You know I can -

[HOUSE NOISES]

[SHATTERING GLASS]

ANNA - What was that?

MABEL: I. I don't know.

VERATRINE: The manor speaks.

[ANNA SAYS SOMETHING, MOVING TOWARDS THE NOISE AND AWAY FROM THEM]

VERATRINE: Mabel.

MABEL: Leave it. I don't trust you over Anna, I - I don't trust you at all.

VERATRINE: [VOICE SLIGHTLY CHANGES, MUFFLED] *I'm going into the ground for you.*

MABEL:What?

VERATRINE: You're lagging, mayflower. Let's catch up to your master, shall we?

ANNA: [CALLING] Guys, come and see. [GETTING CLOSER] The mirror broke. The big one, over the mantel in the Green Parlour. There was something in the shards, a - ow. A key.

MABEL: Don't *reach* for it, you're still bleeding - god! - is this what it's like to deal with me?

ANNA: I said I'm - okay, fine. Vera, pick up the key.

VERATRINE: *I'm* not your slave.

MABEL: I've got it.

ANNA: Do you - recognise it? Do you know what it opens?

VERATRINE: [LAUGHS SMUGLY]

MABEL: It opens a hole in Vera's fucking chest that I'm going to put my fucking fist in -

ANNA: Mabel. We all want to put our fists through Vera's chest.

VERATRINE: Fortunately I'm made of very solid, good quality oak.

MABEL: It goes to - Sally had a clock, on the mantelpiece, a grandfather clock. She used to wind it up by hand. I think that's what it opens. [LAUGHS] For what, who in hell's name knows.

ANNA: It's playing with us. It's a *game*. We have to -

[BEEP]

[AUTOMATED VOICE GLITCHING]

[BEEP]

UNKNOWN VOICE 1: There's nothing?

UNKNOWN VOICE 2: It's all gone.

[CELL PHONE RINGING]

UNKNOWN VOICE 1: But I - I double, I fucking triple checked -

UNKNOWN VOICE 3: Uh, guys?

UNKNOWN VOICE 2: What?

UNKNOWN VOICE 3: It's her.

UNKNOWN VOICE 2:shit.

[BEEP]

MABEL: - think this is a bad idea, but -

VERATRINE: What are we supposed to do, then, hummingbird? Little lucifer? Shall we ask nicely, *Oh, please, goodly, kindly house, if you would be ever so dear as to tell us how to excavate ourselves from your grasp, and every other* -

ANNA: [NOISES OF OPENING CLOCK] Mabel?

[MABEL MOVING CLOSER NOISES]

ANNA: ...I assume that when Sally used to wind this by hand, it wasn't - I mean. I've never had a - they're not supposed to be full of leaves, and - are those - owl pellets?

MABEL: Yes. Those are - they're my owl pellets, from when I was a teenager, how the hell -

VERATRINE: Sorry? *Your* owl pellets, you - were you a particularly ostentatious bird, Mabel, or were you -

MABEL: God, just -

VERATRINE: You don't have to call me *god*, Mabel, although I won't -

MABEL: Shut up, shut up! [DEEP BREATH] I collected them as a child, there was something - I used to dream of myself in an egg, all the time, and I -

there was something very compelling about the idea of a thing sucked of all blood and water and only the neat scrap of fur and bones left, it's - I'm rambling. I'm sorry. Those are mine. I can't believe Sally put them in this hideous old clock.

ANNA: You're not rambling. You don't have to - no, look, there's something behind them. Is it - [FUMBLING NOISES] I'm getting blood all over this, can you - [PAPER UNWRAPPING] Is that? it's a drawing of the - that's my old room, where I - where Sally had me -

MABEL: That was Lily's room. That's her vanity, the - the picture. I wasn't - I was never allowed in there but I snuck in. I know what it looks like.

ANNA: Why weren't you -

MABEL: She wanted it as a shrine. Poor Lily. [LAUGHS] But now you're dead, aren't you, Sally? Stop me now, you old white hag. Let's go.

VERATRINE: And what treasure do we seek, little bird?

MABEL: Who cares? I'm bored of inaction. This is something to do, at least. Something to unearth.

ANNA: I'm sorry for. For *boring* you. You're right, let's go.

MABEL: You don't bore me, you - that isn't what I meant. I'm only - I'm tired of being the bird in the cage, the bird that needs saving, the thing coveted by darkness. It *dulls* me, Anna, it *chafes*. I am tired of being defined by things happening to me. But I could never tire of you. Puzzle of a girl.

ANNA: I'm not. I'm not - you have to stop saying things like - look at this, she even put me in her old room, like a. Replacement Lily, a second-rate daughter she had to pay out of pocket. That's just - never mind.

VERATRINE: And now there's two of you, good Anna. How much more of an identity crisis can you take before you snap in two?

MABEL: You - [FLURRY OF MOVEMENT] *Say her name again! Say it! See what happens you rowan-rotted bitch -*

ANNA: I love you.

MABEL: What?

ANNA: What? Nothing. This is it. You open the door, it doesn't feel right for me to do it.

MABEL: You said - you -

VERATRINE: Oh, gods below.

MABEL: I - okay, yeah, right. Of - course. I'll do it.

[DOOR BEING KICKED OPEN]

ANNA; Well, that's. Different. I - I hope you know I didn't keep your mother's room like this. This is - new.

MABEL: I'm not that sentimental, anyway.

VERATRINE: As can be shown from your *breaking* the *door*. Where are you boarding school skills now?

MABEL: I don't care about anything that's not mine. [PAUSES] Remember that, Vera. You should really keep it in mind.

ANNA: All - *that* aside, what are we supposed to find in here? I'd ask what's different, but it's all different. [KICKING AT PLANT MATTER] This is like coming into a house that's been abandoned for fifty years, not. Whatever. It's weird, I used to - [PAUSE, HOUSE BACKGROUND SOUNDS] There used to be an eye painted into the bedpost. Lily did it, your mother did it. Do you see that - ?

MABEL: So the mirror would look at - it doesn't matter, it's - that's -

VERATRINE: Dark gaping mouth.

MABEL: It's just a hole.

ANNA: Shut up, Vera. There's something inside it. Here, help me -

MABEL: I can do it - ow, it's - what is that?

ANNA: It's a fucking datura seedpod. It's just - the whole thing is happening again. No, I no where we have to go, it's back down to -

[BEEP]

UNKNOWN VOICE 2: No. Yes, of course. Yes. Yes.

UNKNOWN VOICE 1 [WHISPERING]: Is that really - ?

UNKNOWN VOICE 3: Shut *up*. Unless you want to see us all flayed.

UNKNOWN VOICE 2: Yes, ma'am. I understand. We'll - I will personally ensure -

UNKNOWN VOICE 3: Well?

UNKNOWN VOICE 2: She hung up.

UNKNOWN VOICE 3: God *damn* it.

UNKNOWN VOICE 1: I. I thought. I really thought she was just, like. A boogeyman. I never thought she was really -

UNKNOWN VOICE 2: Who the fuck do you think is *listening* to this feed, you stupid -

[BEEP]

MABEL: [LAUGHING AND LAUGHING]

VERATRINE: Should have kept her locked up when you had the chance.

MABEL: [STILL LAUGHING] It's all - no, no, I'm fine – [LAUGHING] it's all the same thing, don't you get it? I didn't age, inside that place, I twisted myself inside out and emerged different, new, a changeling, a ghost of a girl - that's what - I'm sorry, you just don't understand how funny this is. You have no idea how long I've really been here, clawing at the silver.

ANNA: It's - I know. I mean, I don't, but. It's okay. Come on.

[WALKING SOUNDS]

MABEL: It's not okay. It's not okay. I crawled out of the mirror and peered into my own sleeping eyes as a child and there was nothing - nothing but silver, the endless mirage of itself, nothing but the long curve of eternity wrapped around my belly, my tongue, my throat, and there's nothing I can do, it will all circle back, but don't you know you can't go home again -

VERATRINE: Be quiet, please. You're...bothering me.

ANNA: Don't talk to her. Mabel. Listen. There is - there are circles, there are seasons, that's what it means to find yourself returning to the same place again and again - but it doesn't mean we're trapped, not us. Do you understand me? There are paths we walk over and over but we are always changing and that makes - that makes us - I don't know what I'm saying, it's just -

MABEL: No, you don't know - you don't know about the snake pearl or the venom they pumped into me or what I have done to myself, to - [DEEP BREATH] this is not - it's not a season. It's not a cyclical passing of time that happens for maintenance, for sustainability. It's something else, a terrible klein bottle.

ANNA: I don't. I don't understand, you're right. I'm sorry.

MABEL: No, don't apologize. You can't read my mind, you - only know what I tell you. None of this is your fault. Please don't think that.

ANNA: How, though? How is it not my fault? I should have - never mind. See? It's still there. The encyclopedia I used to look up datura back - god, I don't know. Back then. All those years and years ago. Hold this, please. [BOOK SLIDING OFF SHELF, PAGES TURNING] Oh. Yeah. There.

VERA: What? What is it?

ANNA: Someone carved out the last handful of pages to fit - something. A - notebook, I guess, or that's what it was at one point. It's. Look for yourself, it's -

MABEL: No - no no no, don't open it -

ANNA: [READING] "I wait and wait but she does not come back. I crawl up and down the walls of this room and eat the bugs I found when I crouch. I

like crouching, like a ghost in the walls." Who - who wrote this? Mabel, it wasn't -

MABEL: Give me that! Don't read anymore!

ANNA: Why? Why not? Because it's - I know what this means, you don't have to *hide* it from me -

MABEL: I'm not hiding it - I just – [FRUSTRATED NOISE] Fine, whatever. Read the whole thing, read about how I lived off of crickets for a week when she decided I sang too loudly - read about how - god, it doesn't matter, it doesn't – [SOUNDS OF MOVING AWAY]

ANNA: Mabel!

VERATRINE: Oh, broken bird, poor, poor -

MABEL: *Get away from me!*

ANNA: I told you not to touch her. I – what good are you? What do we need you for? Why shouldn't I just burn you down like this damn house? Tell me. Give me one reason.

[MUSIC BUILDING; STOPS SUDDENLY]

VERATRINE: Do you really want Mabel to know what a murderer you are, Anna?

ANNA: You –

MABEL: What?

VERATRINE: [LAUGHING TRIUMPHANTLY]

ANNA: Nothing! It's - nothing, she doesn't know anything. She's trying to - to drive herself between us, she's trying to -

VERATRINE: Why did you come to this house, Anna?

MABEL: What do you mean? She was - it was her job, she was just doing her job -

VERATRINE: Really? You're sure of that?

ANNA: Shut up, you - of course it was my job, you *know* that, I worked for - I was a, a - a home health worker, the company sent me here to -

MABEL: I only know what - wait. I know only what they tell me. Give me - give me my journal, from when I was a kid, there's something -

[PAGES TURNING]

Yes, yes, here - what day would it be up in the world-bound-by-time? What month is it?

ANNA: I. I don't know. The last time I remember there *being* time, it was - the end of December, maybe?

MABEL: That's what I thought, here, when I was little I used to write these - I thought they were spells, maybe, like I was conjuring up creatures out of the dirt, here, look, December, January: *I know only what they tell me. In shades of sea and stone. I sit with hares, all unawares, my kingdom for a bone. The king of air who's never there sits on his throne of earth. The king of lack all dressed in black is waiting for his birth.*

[SPOOKY HOUSE NOISES]

[MUFFLED SOUNDS OF TRESSA SPEAKING, ALMOST ENTIRELY INAUDIBLE]

ANNA: Can you hear that? What -

MABEL: It's trying to tell us - listen! I don't know how I knew then, I don't know why I can never just - see things as they are, why all experiences coalesce and reform inside me over and over again but what I wrote, over fifteen years ago - it's some kind of clue, I *know* it, we were *supposed* to find it, the seed, everything. We already know the answer, do you understand? We just have to - remember, forget -

ANNA: I don't - I'm stupid, you have to - remember that I'm stupid, talk to me like - a child, you know? I don't understand, Mabel.

MABEL: Don't call yourself names, you - you figured it out before I did, even if you couldn't name it. Remember when you called me King Mabel?

Remember when you talked about ownership and - and claiming? There's two of them, there's two of us, you just have to - use the power you have. It didn't work last time because there was no - no formality, no ritual. That's important, under the hill. Ritual.

VERATRINE: He cannot back down from a challenge.

ANNA: *Oh.*

[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; the voice of Mabel Martin is Mabel Martin. The voice of Miss Aurora Silver is Meg Dixon. The music from this episode was by Kai Engel, Sergey Cheremisinov, Pictures of the Floating World, Parvus Decree, System Morgue, 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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