



THE KING SPEAKS

Mabel episode 31: The King Speaks. In which the dark, at last, is given voice.

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]

ANNA/THE KING: - fire-tailed comet until all trace of me (matter and anti-matter, shadow and shadowed) had been curtailed in the most succinct, the most perfect ending –

[BEEP]

[SINGING]

[BEEP]

ANNA/THE KING: Anna Limon. [PAUSE] Anna Limon. [PAUSE] Anna, Anna, Anna, Anna, Anna -

[BEEP]

ANNA/THE KING: I know you are listening. You with your malachite, you with your needle-tips, your whirring clockwork, your ear to the ground of me. Do you think you have escaped my notice? Do you think I am beyond you, great white-hearted thing that I am, and you nothing but a protozoan in my clay loam? I am a spider with a hundred golden eyes. I am a hall full of mirrors. I see you now, as I saw you then. I have found myself a mouth, so I might say:

What do you know of seeds? What do you know of the shell the world wears? What do you know of the endless dark -

[BEEP]

MABEL: [FREAKING OUT]

[BEEP]

ANNA/THE KING: The kingdom under the ground is a fractional place, a liminal place, a fictional place, a territory devised and ruled by its own mythologies. Its citizens are coalescences, the way a person coalesces in their memory - impressed and compacted into the quintessence of themselves. A thing with wings, a thing with teeth, a gust of laughter, a bundle of twigs. This is a nation haunted by its fictions, just as it is reliant on them (for what do we eat, if not history? What feeds our engines, if not fairy tales? What keeps the fires of us burning, if not the stories we tell ourselves?) and so I will tell you, now, a story.

Once there was a stone. Grey and black, moss-edged, born in the burning hollow heart of the world, a stone: it had no name, for stones need no name. It had no purpose, for it was a thing unto itself. It had no thoughts, no song, no soul, no fortune.

Once there was a bird. A flying bird, a gold-feathered bird, mouth full of music, bluebird, singing bird. She perched on a birch branch and cried out to the dawn and the stone, lying senseless and grey beneath her, felt the great foundations of the world shift, shudder; felt her song like precious metal at the core of it, burnishing it to gold, to silver. How could the stone want

anything less than to cup the bird in its hand? How could it not want to hold her?

Once there was a red meadow, a green meadow. It grew and grew and bloomed and flourished, long-grass and clover and blackberry and sedge, quaking-grass, toad rush, mayweed, love-in-a-mist. Do you understand me? A surfeit, an over-saturation, an impossibility of growth, life without death, *life without death*, and once there is no end to a thing it becomes all things, the way an unnamed threat becomes all danger - so all there is and all there ever was became the red meadow, the green meadow, which is a kind of death, the fullness of such proliferation, consumption, devouring –

– but out of the boundless green eternity (a mouth in and of itself, for so much presence eventually becomes absence of its own) came lack. Lack with its hands outstretched, lack in a black suit, the most harrowing hunger. Lack brought death and lack brought decay and the green meadow ceased, at last, its terrible flourishing. And the world settled into the spokes of its own wheel. And trundled round, and round.

The hand that grasps the bird would not, then, be cruelty. It would only be *absence*.

[BEEP]

Luna Thorne. Light of the great void. Luna Thorne, ghost in the night sky. Luna, Luna, flower of all that hungers, Luna with the hair of pearl, Luna with bluebells in her throat, Luna-ever-turned-away, the reluctant queen of hell; the bird in the golden cage, shadow of my shadow. I say: *I have given you everything, I will give you everything*. She says: *I will gnaw off to the marrow any hand that you offer to me*. If I am a man, I am a man with unscrupulous hungers, but I saw her in the green meadow, in the red meadow, and time unfurled itself from the angles of its own labyrinth and I read the denouement to our story, not a gracious epithet or a garden full of roses but a night that never ends, and still I caught her up in my great wide net, for what am I, if not night? What am I, if not the loops and whorls of the land-under-the-land? What am I if not a jaw full of teeth?

From the house on the hill there comes a girl. Upstart, splinterskin, box full of matches waiting to be struck. She says: look. She says: *imagine if she wanted you*. She is not afraid. I look at her and see an ending.

Listen to me. I have risen and fallen for longer than the house has stood on the hill. For longer than the hill has stood, for longer than the ocean, abrading and banishing itself, has toyed with the cliffs above it. As long as salt; as long as stone; as long as coal. There are no endings, only repetition, only circles that weave themselves over and over, a confluence of seasons always echoing and echoing. To do a thing infinitely is to never do a thing at all. A story that refuses to end is not a story. It is a *prison*.

[BEEP]

What is the nature of ownership? I do not own Luna Thorne, for all it is my chain around her neck, my hand in her hair. I do not own the kingdom under the hill, for all there is no other crowned king: a king is not landowner in allodium, he is a chess piece held in the fist of the land. I do not own my courtiers (for a creature that constructs itself can never be owned). I do not own Anna Limon, nor Mabel Martin.

If anything, I believe that I own you.

You, with your life bent around the shape of me. You, listening and listening. All ears, gnawing parasite, you cupped hand; you crave me the way the land craved me, back when there was only green and green and green. I infiltrate your dreams. I paralyse your thoughts. Inside the knot of your skeleton there is only my name. You have fought, and slaughtered, and worried, and scabbled, and campaigned, and lied, and eaten bitter meals, only to find me. To catalogue me in your book. Is that not a form of ownership? Do I not have you leashed? Would it not be the end of you, Aurora Silver, for me to say: you will never find me, you will never catch me, there will be no trace of me left for you to hold?

[BEEP]

Mabel Martin said to me: imagine if she wanted you. Perhaps I am judicious, for I did what she asked of me, and I saw the dream of it like a zoetrope playing its cycles of light and shadow, but it was not Luna Thorne who took my hand. It was not Luna Thorne who stroked my head. It was not Luna, there in the cage of my heart: it was a thing made of angles, an aperture of lightlessness, a smiling mouth, and it came from the vault of the spinning stars and it laid its hand on my throat and it swallowed me like a fire-tailed comet until all trace of me (matter and anti-matter, shadow and shadowed) had been curtailed in the most succinct, the most perfect ending –

[BEEP]

OUTRO:

This episode of Mabel was written and produced by Becca De La Rosa and performed by Becca De La Rosa and Mabel Martin. The music in this episode was by Kai Engel, Circus Marcus, Dee Yan-Key, Mary Lattimore, Nosens, Kai Engel, 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.

Do you like free things? Do you have a mailbox into which strange packages can be ferreted away? Check out our tumblr at mabelpodcast.tumblr.com for news about our latest giveaway. And please remember: we rely on your help to keep Mabel going. If you like what we do, visit our Patreon at patreon.com/mabelpodcast and check out the huge range of rewards.