



TEMPORAL SNAKE

Mabel episode 32: Temporal Snake. In which they all fall down.

[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: [CHOKING]

MABEL: Anna - you - are you okay what do you need what -

ANNA: That wasn't - I could *feel* him, it wasn't -

[BEEP]

[A HEARTBEAT GROWS LOUDER, STRANGER]

[BEEP]

AURORA SILVER: - know how small you are? Do you have any idea how utterly insignificant, how entirely, appallingly meaningless the whole span of your life is in relation to the work we do? Do you not understand that you are the merest speck of sand on a vast oceanic floor? I have given you everything you might need to accomplish our goals. I have given you money, and equipment, and *time*, Jonathan, I have given you days, and months, and years, I have waited so patiently for you; because you promised me results. You said to me: I can find him for you. I can track him, I can record him. [GENTLY] Do you see this, Jonathan? [SHAKING NOISE] This metal, this plastic, these computer chips and wires? What is this?

No? You have no answer for me? I can tell you. It's *rubbish*. It's garbage, best thrown into the gutter. For all of your recording equipment, all of your *wires*, I might as well have furnished this cave of yours with knitting needles and twine; [COLDER, MORE SLOWLY] you recorded his voice, and then you lost it. *You had him, and you lost him.*

What is your name? You, yes, *you*, young man, the one I'm *pointing* at.

UNKNOWN VOICE 1: Uh, it's Brandon, your - miss -

AURORA SILVER: *Brandon*. Charming. Come here, *Brandon*. I have a task for you. [FOOTSTEPS RECEDING] [AS THOUGH AN AFTERTHOUGHT] I'd like you to remember, Jonathan, how everything that happens from this moment on is your fault. Do you understand me?

[BEEP]

[WALKING]

ANNA: What - do you think he wants from us?

MABEL: I don't know. I don't know. [PAUSE] What did it - what was it like? To have him speak through you?

ANNA: It felt - it was. I could feel him. Not just him using my voice - all of him. I thought I understood him, but -

MABEL: But you didn't?

ANNA: Maybe not. Maybe not - wholly. [PAUSE] I scared you, didn't I?

MABEL: Yes. You were - god. [LAUGHS, ON THE EDGE OF HYSTERIA] Yes, you were god, weren't you? God stuffed itself into the suit of you and you [SHAKING] you - shook and shook -

ANNA: I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. It's - I'm me, I don't - I'm sorry, I didn't know how to *stop* it -

MABEL: No! No, I'm - don't apologize to me. You owe me nothing, not like that. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. This isn't about me. I was just - I was so afraid. You were - you were choking, are you okay, are you still -

ANNA: I'm okay. I promise. I hate that - I keep upsetting you. I keep scaring you, making you - unhappy. I don't mean to. It's the last thing I want, I swear, it just -

MABEL: I'm fine. Nothing's wrong with me. [LAUGHS] I mean, other than the obvious half-charred, half-flooded with greenery. You don't scare me. I just want to make sure you're alright.

ANNA: Right. Well, I'm fine.

MABEL: Not to be the pedantic person that I am but. You don't sound so fine. Please. Tell me what to do.

ANNA: I don't know. That's the problem. I don't know what to expect.

MABEL: I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do. I've never - he has only ever been another one of my gaolers, not. Not a thing-unto-himself. I have no idea what to expect. This isn't - I never thought he'd want to see us. He's [LAUGHS] he's stepping outside his circle of understandable villainy.

ANNA: Exactly. I understood him when he was the - the man in black, the devil under the world, but - that's what I meant. When he used my voice, when I felt him, it wasn't - so succinct. He isn't unnameable evil, there's -

MABEL: There's something else. He's - I don't know. He's. Something.

ANNA: He - wanted this. To meet us, I mean. He wants - that's important. God, there's so much complexity to everything, why can't any of it just be straightforward?

MABEL: When has anything in your life been straightforward? Or straight, at all?

ANNA: Ha ha. You're funny.

MABEL: Yes. [SIGH] Where's Vera? If anyone knows what the king in black is thinking, it'll be her. He *made* her, after all.

ANNA: Didn't she run off after that - Luna's - whatever she was? Maybe she decided to follow through on her threat and - fucked off.

VERATRINE: I did not.

MABEL: *CHRIST-CHILD*, where the hell'd you come from? A little warning?

VERATRINE: I crawled through the stitchery in my green, green veins.
[PAUSE] I'm here.

MABEL: That's not a warning - rowan, never mind. Trio of irreverent miscreants, together again. Where were you?

VERATRINE: With my creator.

ANNA: You were with the king...?

VERATRINE: The man with a thousand shadows did not mold me. I - I thought he did. But it was her. The moon in a cage.

ANNA: Luna - oh. *Oh*. Are you - are you *crying*?

VERATRINE: She is trapped. They're all trapped. Even you, Anna Limon.

ANNA: Well. I mean. Hey, it's - going to be okay, maybe -

MABEL: We'll fix it, Vera. We can free everyone. [SOFTLY] You too.

VERATRINE: [HYSTERICAL LAUGHTER, DISSOLVING INTO WRETCHED SOBBING]

[BEEP]

[ROARING]

[BEEP]

ANNA: Once upon a time three girls – one part skeleton, one lashed together from leaves and vines, one burning blue and gold and blue again – walked together into the heart of the underhill. The pit of the world that housed the king in black, the monster. Only he wasn't a monster, not entirely, for nothing is fixed to its shape; nothing is solid; all is prone to transfiguration.

MABEL: The process of gold from lead. The process of god from girl. The perfect spiral, mathematical, serene. Isn't that what we walked through? Isn't that what that nix with shells for teeth said, at the ball? Infinite regress?

ANNA: All things in infinitude. You and me, the world under the world.
[LAUGHING] The girls opened the door - [CREAKING DOOR SOUNDS] - and they saw him.

[STATIC ROARING]

ANNA: I come to you as a challenger.

THE KING: How quaint. The hummingbird, the butcherbird, and her cracked mirror.

ANNA: Do you go by your majesty, or just His Eternal Iniquity?

VERATRINE: Sir, I am not here in the capacity they are, I swear to you. I have not become disloyal to your court -

THE KING: Be quiet, little nothing.

ANNA: Oh god, Vera.

MABEL [SIMULTANEOUSLY]: How could -

[STATIC]

MABEL: You can't know. You think you know but you don't - how he bends the earth around him, how the shape of him carves out terrible, wretched space for itself where none should rightfully exist - have you ever heard that a

black hole bends light? Warps the space around it so that nothing but darkness can make its way through, a physical event, measurable, observable. Picture that unfurling before you, on a smaller, less manageably distant scale. Are you able to? If you were put through a black hole, as you died, as you lived, your body, the matter of you, would become almost incomprehensibly dense, not pared down but pushed down, a kind of cosmic bowing. You do not have *will*. You do not have *self*. There is only nothing, and nothing, and nothing.

ANNA: There are parts of us still there, under the earth, in his - throne room, you might call it. You *might*. A cavernous place, a lightless place, him in the centre of it, the door into which all light disappears, shapeless and pulling and crowned in darkness. There is no such thing as time in its linear form, so we are there still, in fragmentations, listening to him say -

[STATIC]

THE KING: You have been gnawing at the edges of my kingdom, like ghosts, like vermin.

ANNA: Vermin are tenacious. You can never fully be rid of them. Isn't that right, Luna?

LUNA: [LAUGHS]

THE KING: Is it customary for those above ground to address pets? Do you often bring your cat into conversation, Anna Limon?

ANNA: I loved my cat. I used to talk to her all the time. She wasn't as articulate as *your* pet, though.

[STATIC]

ANNA: If you were to frame this story as the two heroines against the towering villain, you would not be doing it justice. If you were to see it as two sides of a chess set, white versus black, you would be seeing only splinters, only shadows. Down in the heart of the hill, there were two voices capable of peeling matter from matter. There were two throats cupped by leashes. How many birds, how many cages? Do you understand what I'm saying to you? It was Anna Limon, Anna-with-the-fist-of-bone, who said,

[STATIC]

ANNA: But that's not important. We do not come here to exchange pleasantries, pleasant as it might be.

THE KING: Then why are you here, bloody-beaked bird? Tell me, and be explicit.

ANNA: I have come to challenge your right to the throne.

[STATIC ROARING SUPER LOUD]

MABEL: What does it mean to be pinned in place like a butterfly, like an iridescent beetle? Does it scar you? Does it tear at your throat? Can you move, when you are pierced in such a way? When all else is taken from you, what is your instinct - to run, or brawl, or stick fast in your place and stare at the oncoming thing of unstoppable force?

ANNA: Would it be accurate, do you think, to say that everything fell silent? Did the entire world draw close to witness?

MABEL: We split the whole of it in two. The earth turned on our axis.

[STATIC]

THE KING: How precocious. Barely have you been here a season, and you claim your right to challenge. [PAUSE; STRANGE NOISES, VAGUE HOWLING OF SOME SORT] Do you have a champion, bird-that-was-not?

ANNA: I do.

THE KING: Name them.

ANNA: I name Mabel Martin, the burning girl. My right hand, my revolutionary, my defender, my queen.

[RABBLE RABBLE]

MABEL: *King.*

THE KING: I am shocked.

ANNA: And you? Do you have a champion, or do you fight in your own name?

[STATIC]

ANNA: This is the point where everything disintegrates into its most entropic form. What do you know about rules, about roles? What do you know about kingdoms? About time? About sovereignty? If I were to tell you *there must always be a king under the hill*, what would you say? How much of anyone is made up of the space they inhabit in the world? Are you defined by the roles you fill? Sister, wife, mother, boss, client, daughter? When those titles have taken from you what they require, what is left?

MABEL: Women know this better than men. To be limited by imposition. We wear it better, I think. Don't you agree? We wear freedom better, as well. That's what I think.

[STATIC]

THE KING: I have a champion.

[STATIC]

ANNA: We find ourselves in loops, echoing, returning to the same footprints again and again. A phone call never returned. A captor, a prisoner, the hill with its endless night. A riddle: what is the difference between a crown and a collar? Only a few inches of skin. A few inches, nothing else.

[STATIC]

THE KING: Saint Anna. *King* Mabel. My champion.

[STATIC]

He said, *This is my champion. Defeat it if you must.* And from his black, bleak throne, made of white, scarred bone, he threw down the world. The tiniest, most compressed version of any world, from which all else grows. Ballads have been written, ships and homes and coffins built. That which calls lightning. We know about strike termination, don't we? We know about *compression*, isn't that right, Miss Silver? Do you remember when you told me that I would be subjected to immense pressure? Picture a black hole. Were you listening, when I talked about light bending? Density.

Incomprehensible density. I think *you*, white death, are incomprehensibly dense. You don't understand him at all. You don't understand anything about the way the fundamentals of reality work. The weaving of it. The nothing under the flesh.

What the king threw to me, Mabel Martin, the right hand of god, the woman in black, was an acorn.

[STATIC]

THE KING: It has been eons. It has been centuries. It has been [LAUGHING] dull. *I would not have set foot on Irish soil, if not for love of thee.*
[CONTINUES LAUGHING]

ANNA: [UNDERSTANDING] Oh.

VERATRINE: I had a plan, you know, I wouldn't have -

[LAUGHING BECOMES TOO LOUD, MORPHS INTO MABEL LAUGHING]

MABEL: [GLITCHING] I am become death, destroyer of -

[BEEP]

LAST CULT MEMBER LEFT : ... We lost it.

[BEEP]

ANNA: Since I was a child I have been trying to diminish myself in one way or another. Trying to take up less space, to make less noise. Since I was a child I was taught - by every Disney movie, every magazine article, every commercial, every adult voice - that the best thing a girl can be is delicate. Is fragile, is frangible. I learned that the only important synonym for *ladylike* is *breakable*. Be smaller, Anna. Be quieter. Be less. Don't eat that, you'll get too big; don't say that, they'll know you're - different. Wrong. Hold yourself rigid, never let yourself spill, you'll make a mess, ai, mija.

Oh, Anna.

Because of the mutability of time, because we rule over its echoes and tautologies if we rule over anything, I can go back and say to her, my younger self:

Be big. Be more. Be loud. Show yourself. Do not be afraid of your own strangeness, your own abnormality, the dents you make in the world around you. We are not here to pare ourselves down. We are here to magnify, to amplify; we are here to be the dragons in our own stories. One day there will be darkness, firelight, flowers and song. One day there will be a girl who puts her hand on your cheek and turns you into water. She will look at you and you will see reflected in her the fullest potential of yourself, and it will be big as the skies, big as the cosmos, bigger than worlds, and you will see yourself so vast and fathomless and you will not be afraid at the size of you. Not when there is the whole underworld spread out at your feet. Not when she is there beside you, her hand in yours, smiling and smiling.

Do not deny her. Say her name, then yours, hear them ring like bells. Do not deny her when she turns to you in the darkness. Do not deny yourself. This is you. This is you, undiminished. Look at you.

[BEEP]

VERATRINE: [PANTING] Wait, wait! Don't go, I wouldn't - I had a plan, I was going to use - I wouldn't have left the girls -

LUNA: [SOMEWHERE BETWEEN HYSTERICAL TEARS AND LAUGHTER]: Can you see me? Here, can you feel me?

VERATRINE: I - yes. You are here, I promise. I thought - no. It's not important. Here you are. Right here.

LUNA: It has been - for years, for longer than - I am real to you, twig-girl? Briar-god, briony-god? I am whole, here - and here - and here?

VERATRINE: Yes. Yes. I promise, I swear it. On my lack-of-blood, on my name. You are real.

LUNA: I was the light by which the dark defined itself. I was the seed he wrapped his arms around. I gave him his shape, and so he gave me mine, and without it - what am I? What am I? What am I, Veratrine?

VERATRINE: You are - you are yourself. I cannot tell you. Only you know.

LUNA: You have been weeping, too, twiglet. What has your heart so broken?

VERATRINE: I felt it. Your - I felt your cage around you, around them, around all of us, even - even him. I still feel it. But mostly I was torn apart by your lack. The *absence* of you. What does that make me?

LUNA: You have always been a portion of my heart.

VERATRINE: I was born from you. That means - is this a debt you must repay? Are you beholden to me? [GETTING WORKED UP] Is this another cage that -

LUNA: No. [LAUGHS] And yes. What was it the snake-eyed barrow-girl said? Love is a leash that pulls both ways? [PAUSE] Where will we go, when we leave here? What will we do?

VERATRINE: What does it matter, as long as you hold my leash?

[BEEP]

[WALKING; NIGHT NOISES]

ANNA: So. That...happened.

MABEL: You're in shock.

ANNA: Maybe. Can dead girls go into shock? Never covered that in my Acute Care class.

MABEL: Sit down. [PAUSES] You can't really think you're still dead.

ANNA: I'm not alive, either. Neither of us is, not really, not anymore. Mabel, listen. There's something I should have - [SIGHS] you aren't under my control. I can't command you, the way I can command this space, these - you are independent of my will.

MABEL: What - what do you mean? By you saying it, that means it's...?

ANNA: Now we're both in shock. Here, sit beside me. [SHUFFLING] Isn't what I say true? Don't you tell me I have the voice of god?

MABEL: Yes. Yes. [LAUGHS] It would be a step backwards, wouldn't it, to thank you for - freeing me? Especially now.

ANNA: It's not something I did out of - graciousness. Or kindness. It was necessary. We could never -

MABEL: We couldn't have got on like that, I know. I know. Though sometimes it was fun. [PAUSES] When you're...a thing, an object. A piece of art, a beloved wind-up bird. You don't have to think. Even my rage was always reactionary, in that regard. But that's...you can't build selfhood on reactionary views. Or behavior. You'll just trip over your own feet. Growth is the only real constant, for...I don't know. Individuality. Separation from a forced collective.

ANNA: I never wanted to force anything from you.

MABEL: I know, I know, I - I'm talking about them. Everyone else, who bartered and beat me into shape. You're a lot of things, Anna, but. You're not unkind.

ANNA: Not to you. I would have killed him, if I had to.

MABEL: That's just survival. Instinct. Sometimes survival is murder. [PAUSES] You're protective over me.

ANNA: It's not survival. Survival is past tense. It's not - feeling protective over you, either. It's just. It would have been fair. He hurt you. Doesn't that mean he deserves to die? No one - no one should ever hurt you. Sally did. I had no idea how much, I never knew - but I'm glad she died the way she did. I'm glad she saw his face, the last thing she saw. I'm glad she waited for hours in the cold before I found her. Does that make me unkind?

MABEL: No. Not to me. It just means that - you meant what you said. Before.

ANNA: What did I say?

MABEL: Are you really going to make me say it?

ANNA: *I had to!* Isn't that the point, *equality?*

MABEL: You'll follow where I lead, then? *That's* your dynamic, *Saint* Anna?

ANNA: How do you want me to answer that? I can be polite or - less polite.

MABEL: I was raised half-feral and half...well. Faeral. I don't give a shit about polite. I only care about honesty.

ANNA: Good. [NOISES]

MABEL: I love you, too -

ANNA: I love you. Only you. Nothing else matters.

MABEL: Good, that's. Good. I'm selfish.

ANNA: Come on. Let's go settle our debt with the house. I have a feeling things are going to get - busy, down here.

MABEL: Is this - we're not out, yet, are we? We're still. Not in - underhill, hell, wherever, but - someplace. Right? It feels - different. [PAUSES] Maybe it's just a lack I'm sensing. There's too much that's happened, I. I don't know how to process it.

ANNA: We're not quite here or there. I think that's - us, the nature of us. We realign the rules of the world. Just by - being. I do know we owe the house something, and I don't - I feel sorry for it, you know? I *feel* for it. I don't want to leave it waiting for us, not again.

MABEL: Just another thing someone abandoned, left to rot. [SIGHS] I know. It's gone...inside out, somehow. Everything. Even though we escaped, even though we're. Free. What does that mean? Anna Limon. Girl with god in her throat. What have we done?

BRANDON: Mabel Martin?

MABEL AND ANNA: [TALK INCOHERENTLY]

BRANDON: Mabel Martin. Mabel Martin. I'm going into the ground for you.

MABEL AND ANNA: [PROTEST, DESPERATE AND TALKING OVER ONE ANOTHER]

[GUNSHOT]

[BODY FALLING]

[BEEP]

[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 voice of Aurora Silver is Meg Dixon, and the voice of Brandon is Ty Fuhrman. The music in this episode was by Kai Engel, Axletree, Evgeny Teilor, Alex Mason and the Minor Emotion, Sergey Cheremisinov, Kai Engel, Borrtext, and (morse), and all of it is available to download from the Free Music Archive at freemusicarchive.org. For more information about Mabel, including a full tracklist and transcript, visit us online at mabelpodcast.com.

Thank you so much to everyone who has supported us, and continues to support us, throughout the four seasons of Mabel. We will return in the New Year with season five – which we are incredibly excited for, and which will introduce new characters, new settings, and a whole host of new difficulties. In the meantime, if you want to access continuous, exclusive content, visit our Patreon at patreon.com/mabelpodcast. Our tiers begin at just a dollar, and range from secret blogs, to boxes full of puzzles and magical supplies, to short-story versions of the episodes, to a brand-new collaborative riddle with multiple parts shared among your fellow patrons.

From me Becca, and Mabel Martin herself, we offer you our best wishes for happy holidays and a splendid, strange new year.