



Mabel, episode 40: The Deterritorialization of Time. In which the wheel turns.

[INTRO]

[BEEP]

MABEL: It's cyclical. It - creates small caverns around us, pinpricks of light shining through the vast dark ocean. We swim. We swim so we do not sink. I had a dream the other night, that you were in the house with me, the house with its teeth and its vast gaping mouth, and we were in the Green Parlour, and you were stroking my hair, but then you pulled away, trembling, your mouth flapping open and shut like a fish, and you seemed afraid of me for the first time I can recall. As if I were not myself. This dream, like the one we're in now, was covered in gold and green, muted in natural tones. Is that how we're supposed to be able to differentiate between one place and another? I don't know that I can. I just remember your face. The stars running out of your eyes. Your empty, endless mouth.

If I concentrated, if I closed my eyes long enough, I feel I could remember everything back to the beginning of the universe. But there's no time for that, so this will have to do instead.

[BEEP]

[HILL SOUNDS, WALKING]

ANNA: This will work.

MABEL: Because it has to?

ANNA: Because I say so.

MABEL: [LAUGHS] You seem to have settled into that aspect of yourself.

ANNA: What? Oh. [TEASING, NOT MEANLY] Are you going to call me 'tyrant' again?

MABEL: Only if you want me to.

ANNA: You know what I want from you.

MABEL: Just me myself?

ANNA: Always.

MABEL: Maybe you won't like the implications of that word. Eternity is stretching longer than you think.

ANNA: No, it's not. I know what it looks like. I saw it. [PAUSE] Will you get sick of me?

MABEL: Not in any iteration.

ANNA: How can you be sure?

MABEL: I'm sure. You - you have to trust that I know myself, that I'm telling you the truth. [PAUSES] Allow your belief in me to override the doubt you have in yourself. That's all we can ask of each other.

ANNA: I know that. I do. I'm just asking, for the sake of hearing it again. It might not be the last time.

MABEL: [WHISPERING]

Ask me.

ANNA: Will you?

MABEL: Never. [KISSING SOUNDS!!!]

ANNA: [in between the KISSING SOUNDS]

Then stay. Stay with me. Stay forever, for ever and –

[BEEP]

[HILL SOUNDS: RUNNING WATER, WIND, BELLS IN THE DISTANCE.]

ACONITE: How kind of you to finally -

[RECORDER CLICKS. CULT RECORDING BEGINS TO PLAY]

ARTIFICIAL VOICE: Subject 6163, section 6, test 9

AURORA SILVER: State your name. It won't stop until you do.

[SCREAMING]

[STATIC BURST]

[EVERYTHING CLEARER, AS THOUGH ACTUALLY HAPPENING NOW]

ACONITE: I don't know! I don't know anymore!

AURORA SILVER: State your name.

ACONITE: I - Stop it! [SCREAMING, AGONY NOISES]

AURORA SILVER: State your -

ACONITE: [SUDDENLY CALM, HOLLOW] The black hound. The white hound. The red dove. The blood moon. The fertile sea. The barren forest. The old crow. The new starling. The king of the crossroads. The mirror of snakes. The prison of iron -

[SOME OF THE GATHERED GUILT MEMBERS BEGIN TO SCREAM. SOME LAUGH, AS AURORA SILVER BEGINS TO LAUGH, TRIUMPHANTLY]

[RECORDER CLICKS OFF; HILL SOUNDS GRADUALLY RETURN]

ACONITE: How did you - I -

MABEL: You were wrong about yourself. About all of your selves. [PAUSES] I know that it can be. Tiring. Looking out through a thousand different eyes. But you only convinced yourself of that - you draped yourself in costumes to compensate after you were - after they. Afterward.

ACONITE: I thought - I thought he -

ANNA: She wants him. She wants something *from* him, and she's done unspeakable things in the name of finding him. And she did unspeakable things to you, and I'm sorry for that.

MABEL: So...here is the only safe place for you. What Aurora Silver did was not your fault. But she will be looking for you. You succeeded in contacting....*something* where she failed, even if you didn't know that's what you were doing. [A LITTLE URGENTLY] If you leave, you will die. [QUIETER] I don't think you deserve that.

ANNA: [GENTLY] Do you want to know your name? It was easy to find out, once we knew what to look for.

ACONITE: I - yes.

ANNA: Your name is Ekaterina Roskova. You were born in 1975, in Belgorod, on the border between Ukraine and Russia. Your mother was a -

ACONITE: A teacher.

ANNA: Yes, a teacher. Your father -

ACONITE: He died, that's why -

ANNA: He was a political dissident who disappeared under mysterious circumstances. So your mother sent you to America. To a school called St. Olga's Preparatory, in Massachusetts.

ACONITE: She was there, she - is my mother - ?

ANNA: She died not long after you went missing.

MABEL: I'm sorry.

ACONITE: What - I do not know. What I should *do*, now. I should not have –

ANNA: You were working on the best information you had. You knew there was something wrong with the way you came to be here, you made a guess that happened not to be true.

MABEL: You were - tortured. It isn't your fault. We won't punish you for being abused, and you're welcome to stay. [PAUSES] I hope you do.

ANNA: So do I. You'll have a home here always, the same as anyone.

ACONITE: You were his favourite.

MABEL: What?

ACONITE: I may not have been his daughter, but I could observe. How he behaved when you were here, and when you weren't. You were a calmness, a – respite. [LAUGHS] Perhaps it made me envious.

MABEL: I - I don't know what to say.

ANNA: There's always room for *two* momentous occasions in one day. [IN RESPONSE TO SOMETHING] I'm *kidding*.

MABEL: [STARTLED HALF LAUGH NOISE]

ACONITE: You have given me a gift. One I did not think I would ever – I thought the best I could hope for was revenge on my – the king for abandoning me, on you for taking what I thought to be mine. But you gave me something else entirely. I have not been – real, or *true*, perhaps, even, in the longest time. You gave me back myself. I will never forget that.

ANNA: [SLIGHTLY AWKWARD] Oh. It's okay. We're glad. That we could help.

ACONITE: Your majesty.

[BEEP]

[COURT NOISES: WHISPERING, LAUGHTER, A ROOM FULL OF PEOPLE, DISTANT MUSIC. DOOR OPENS; FOOTSTEPS. THE COURT NOISES FADE.]

ACONITE: [CLEARLY AND CALMLY] I renounce my claim to the throne under the hill, to the kingdom of night. With no other claimant, the application of Anna Limon may continue unhindered.

[CUTTING FLESH; BLOOD DROPS INTO WATER]

[HILL NOISES, LIKE OMINOUS SINGING]

ANNA: What does that mean?

MABEL: Last chance to back out.

ANNA: [FIERCELY] Never.

MABEL: Do you accept me as your consort? For all eternity, and through the darkness after that?

ANNA: Yes. I do. For always. [BREATH] Do you accept me as your king?

MABEL: Yes.

[HILL NOISES RISE TO CRESCENDO]

[BEEP]

ACONITE: My name is Ekaterina Roskova. I was born in a city between borders; when my father was killed for speaking out against tyranny, I crossed the ocean in search of something better. This was what I found. The school was often cold, often unpleasant, but I had friends, I listened to music – I smoked a cigarette, I drank a can of warm, flat beer, I kissed a girl with hair the colour of fox-fur – and I was seventeen years old and did not want to die, and still she brought me to her office, said to me: *Ekaterina, what do you want most? Do you want to be an American girl, and marry an American boy, have three lazy American children and drink yourself to death from boredom by the time you are fifty-three, or do you want your life to matter?*

I did not know what I was meant to say. Eventually I told her yes, I would like my life to matter, to mean something. From this confused admission she inferred consent for everything they did to me. Every knife they used to furrow me, every poison they planted in me, every scream and prayer they wrenched from me, every single drop of blood. I remember chanting,

candles, herbs. There were dozens of them, white-robed. They held me down when I begged.

And I remember *it*. Not the King Under the Hill. Something else, cast in strange colours, in fractured fragments, multiple as a cell structure, many-in-one. No one else could see it. I fought against the arms holding me, tried to say *look, there, what have you done*, but my vocal cords had torn, I could only howl. They made me so ugly. Made a monster of me. Maybe that, more than anything else, was what it recognized.

It split the world into fractals. Reached for me, infinite. I stopped screaming. Stopped fighting. I think they thought I was dead. I think they thought I was dead. Was I dead? It pulled me by the scruff of my neck, the way a mother cat drags her kittens, and then – the world dissolved, like sugar. The world spun into gold, like straw at the hands of a fairy tale-trickster, and it reached into me, put something in the hollow box of my chest. And then it was gone.

And everything was gone. All memory. All context. Anything that might have made me what I am. My name, my shape, the songs in my head, the stories I told myself in the middle of the night. I was here, under the hill, and the first thing I saw was the hill's king; the first imprinted image on the blank of my brain. I thought that must make him my maker. When I built myself again I did so oddly, out of twigs and mud and rage and hollowness, like the heart of the hill. Like him.

What that thing gave me, I think it might have been its name. It called itself A– [DISTORTION]

[BEEP]

[QUIET. AWAY FROM EVERYTHING ELSE]

ANNA: What now?

MABEL: Now - now we do whatever you want. You're the king under the hill. [SLIGHT DISTORTION] What does the feel like?

ANNA: Multiplicity. [END OF WORD DRAGGED OUT IN A GLITCH] Mycelia, hyphae. What is it supposed to feel like? Always back to that: what if I do it wrong?

MABEL: Then we become better. Greater. We don't wallow in it. We stick together.

ANNA: That will always be true. [PAUSE; STRANGE HILL SOUNDS AROUND THEM] What would you sacrifice? For – us. To be together, to be this way. I don't think there's anything I wouldn't sacrifice.

MABEL: I think we've both sacrificed enough. [PAUSES] Everything we have - it's because of the collection of choices we both made. Every bit of harm we did to ourselves and to others, every open wound, every bad decision. And for you I would change nothing. I would make the same choices over again. I will always choose you.

ANNA: Even when I hurt you?

MABEL: Yes. We are going to hurt each other. Remember? [SOFTLY] The leash, pulling both ways? Vulnerability is never easy.

ANNA: No, it's not. [LAUGHS] We deserve some easy. But we don't get what we deserve, right? We just get what we get?

MABEL: I'm making do.

[THEY KISS; GLITCHING NOISES -]

[BEEP]

JANET: [WHISPERING] Fuck fuck fuck fuck –

[INTO PHONE] Hi, I'm – I'm out at the Martin house in – yeah, I – I need an ambulance, can you send an ambulance? My – I'm – it's Janet Kirk. No, I'm not hurt, it's not for – god – hello? Hello, can you hear –

[TO HERSELF] - shit.

[AUDIBLY PULLS HERSELF TOGETHER]

Hey, uh. Can you – are you okay? Do you need – I've got water, you want water? I called an ambulance in case you're – but they'll probably bring cops, so if you don't want – I don't know, if you've got a problem with cops, I just wanted to give you. A heads up, I guess. I'm not gonna make you stay, I'll – tell them whatever. Are you hungry, maybe?

OTHER WOMAN: [VOICE SCRATCHY, CRACKED] Yes.

JANET: I've got – [RUMMAGING THROUGH BACKPACK] um, Reece's Pieces? A kind of banged-up banana? Some old jerky my grandpa made from – oh.

[SNATCHING NOISES. SEMI-GROTESQUE EATING NOISES.]

JANET: ...okay. [UNCOMFORTABLE PAUSE] Jesus, your hand – you really should stuck around for that ambulance, you look – I mean, you look, just, maybe you're – it looks like it hurts. Is all. [REACTING TO SOMETHING] Sorry, what? Oh, the – right, the water. Here.

I'm not being – rude or whatever, but. How long have you been here? This place is – it's been condemned for a long time.

OTHER WOMAN: What's today?

JANET: What?

OTHER WOMAN: The date.

JANET: Oh. *Oh*. It's September 13th?

[OTHER WOMAN LAUGHS. SLIGHTLY HYSTERICAL, VERY CREEPY]

JANET: Oh my god. You're – I know who you are, hold on – ! [FUMBLES WITH BAG] They've been looking for you, everyone's been – it's been three *years* – you *are*, oh my god, you're – you're *Anna Limon* –

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, and the voice of Anna Limon is Becca De La Rosa. The voice of Janet Kirk is Dorrie Sacks. The voice of Ekaterina is Alexandra Serova. The voice of Aurora Silver is Meg Dixon.

The music in this episode was by Bob Roberts, VYVCH, Three Chain Links, ROZKOL, Haunted Me, and (morse), and all of it is available to download from the Free Music Archive at freemusicarchive.org. For more information

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