



DATURA

Mabel Episode 4: Datura. In which a trail is followed.

[INTRO:]

MABEL: Hi, you've reached Mabel Martin. I'm not here to take your call right now, so please leave a message after the beep. Thanks!

[BEEP]

ANNA: Oh, this is a good one. "And 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". That is – Shakespeare, Richard the Second. My phone's falling, this book's too heavy.

[BEEP]

Dear diary. It's three thirty in the afternoon, and the relief carer Liza is here, making gingerbread in the kitchen, and I'm in the library looking at the reference books. Everything smells like molasses and old paper. I know you liked to read as a kid, Sally's told me. If I were you I never would have been able to leave this room. Belle in the Beast's castle, seriously. I'm looking for – here, D.

Datura, datura, datura.

The internet's so bad up here it takes ten minutes to load my email inbox, and I think it's been getting worse, these past few weeks. So I'm here,

researching by hand. I prefer this. It reminds me of school. Not high school, which was just as terrible as high school can be, but nursing school, which I liked. I know what they say about nursing students, but it was quiet, I was happy.

There, datura. "A genus of solanaceous plants, with large funnel-shaped flowers and a four-celled, capsular fruit. Synonyms: thorn apple, or moonflower."

Oh, good, I found an Encyclopedia Britannica, I'm going to look it up.

Have you ever been to therapy? This is kind of like what I imagine therapy is like. I talk to you, but you don't talk back. Maybe if you were my therapist you'd say "and how does that make you feel, Anna?" every so often. That's a pretty good question, right now. How does all this make me feel? All this – secrecy, all these hidden things? Unsettled, I guess. Like the ground could shiver out from under me at any time, with no warning. I don't know, it's easier not to think about it. Okay, D-A. There –

Wait. Where is the –

There's –

There should be an entry, here, but – the whole thing has been cut out. Carved out, and there's – I think it's an EP record. The label has been scratched off, I think – I think there's something written on it. It looks like –

Hold with the hare, it says. *Hare* like h-a-r-e, not hair on your head. I don't know if that makes it weirder, or...not.

I think Sally's got a record player around here somewhere. We have to listen, right? Don't we have to? That's our part in this. It's our duty. God, I haven't done this since my grandfather was alive. He had an old record player, too, a Pioneer with wood veneer he always kept shiny. He liked Simon and Garfunkel and Joan Baez and Elvis. When I was a kid we used to sing Hound Dog together, he had this special dance he made up and everything.

There.

[SONG]

What –

[BEEP]

The needle stopped, I think there's something –

[BEEP]

Mabel, there was something under the needle. I had to take off my earring and pry it out with the wire hook so I didn't snap the needle right off. It was lodged in behind the plastic arm: a little blue bead. Glass, I think, with a swirl of white through the blue like frost over a car window.

I think – I think I've actually seen something like this. There's a doll in one of the guest bedrooms upstairs, it's something Sally's husband brought back from – Venice, I think? She's a Columbine from the Commedia dell'arte, she has a white dress sewn with these same kind of glass beads. Murano glass, that's what Sally said.

Come on. We're going to look.

Sally told me that the room I'm staying in used to be her daughter's room. Your mother's room. Is that strange for you to hear? There are still traces of her in odd places – inside the closet door she carved 'Lily hearts Juniper'. Just a tiny mark, looks like she scratched it with a pin. And on the bed – the bed is beautiful, four-postered with a proper – what's it called, the panel on top – she painted an eye in white paint on the panel, just above where your head falls when you lie back on the pillows. At night, in the dark, it sometimes feels like the bed is watching me.

Sally doesn't talk about your mother much.

These guest bedrooms are funny. There are four of them, they're all painted different colours and decorated in the same colour they're painted – the Blue Room has blue curtains, blue bedclothes, pictures of blue flowers and blue skies on the walls. There's something a bit fairy tale about it. Everything in its place, everything of a kind. The Blue Room is where I am now, that's where the doll is. I thought I saw her –

Yeah, there she is. She's beautiful, I wish I could show her to you. Maybe you remember. Maybe you played with her when you were little. Her face and hands are porcelain, and I think her dress must be silk. She's smiling, but she

looks – I don't know, devious, almost. Like she could trick you without even trying.

Hold on, there – I think there's something under her dress.

Oh, my god.

It's the page from the encyclopedia, the one with Datura on it, but – it's been written over in what looks – is that blood? Jesus, I – I don't know if I can –

That's not blood. It's reddish brown ink, or, like, some kind of stain, maybe. Like dried beet juice or something. But – that's not the strangest part. Not by a long shot, not even close. Listen to what it says.

Knock once for the hound of the sun.
Knock twice for the hare of the moon.
Three times for the vigilant one.
Four times too soon.

The hound swallows stars on his tongue.
The hare eats the heart of the moon.
The queen's harp is never unstrung,
Never so soon.

Four times for the door in the hill.
Five times for the gold afternoon.
Six knows what she's done, and still –
Too soon, too soon.

I'm putting the doll back, but – I'm taking the piece of paper with me. My break's almost over.

[BEEP]

Mabel –

[BEEP]

It's late again. I just got off the phone to my mother. She's – she was at the doctor today, they're – she has this superstition that if you talk about something bad, you make it real, so I won't talk about it.

I asked her about that phrase written on the record. It sounded familiar, like something I'd heard a long time ago. *Hold with the hare*. Mom told me it's part of an old saying, or something: "hold with the hare and run with the hounds". It means – someone who takes a stance against something, but then goes on to do that exact thing. Kind of like having your cake and eating it, I guess. Another way of calling someone a hypocrite.

Why would that be written on a record inside an old Encyclopedia Britannica in Sally's library? Why would there be a glass bead inside the record player, and a poem written in red ink tucked inside a doll's skirt? Why are there hundreds of letters addressed to Sally down in the kitchen, and why hasn't she opened any of them, and why did the sight of them make her scream, and – why won't you answer me even though I know you can hear me? Why did that man come to the door three times and why did he tell me to get out? Why – why is any of this happening?

I didn't tell you this before, but you were in my dream last night. You as a little kid, the way you look in the picture of you on the mantelpiece downstairs. You came into my room, shook my arm until I woke up. We have to go, you said, Anna, we have to go look. I got up and followed you, though even in the dream I knew this couldn't be happening, it couldn't be real, you would never come here when you can't even bring yourself to call me. It was three a.m., I remember checking on the big clock outside Sally's room. When you took my hand you were ice-cold. Not ice-cold. Dirt-cold, like sticking your fists deep into soil. We went downstairs together. There were more stairs than usual, maybe five or six flights of them, and when we got down to the hallway, all the brass mirrors were covered with black cloth. I wanted to ask you why, but you kept saying, Anna, we have to go, come on, we have to go. So we went, out the garden door, out across the patio and down the garden steps, down to the clearing with the tree-swing, and then you pointed back at the house. I turned and looked, and saw it was covered with green vines. Not just covered, infiltrated. Vines roping over the gutters and around the downspouts, vines coming out of the chimney-blocks, vines trailed like snakes from every window, heavy and thick and – and threateningly green, the kind of glossy green that looks like it came from real wilderness, before there were people in the world to turn the air into smoke and the ground into ashes. Look, you said, isn't she beautiful? And then I woke up.

It's a weird feeling to miss someone you never even met.

[BEEP]
[OUTRO:]

4. Mabel is written and produced by Becca De La Rosa. The voice of Mabel Martin is [CENSORED]. The voice of Anna Limon is Becca De La Rosa. The record in the library was Tomb Song by Nora Keyes. The rest of the music in this episode was by Ars Sonor, Mathieu Lamontagne and Emmanuel Toledo, LJ Cruzer, Chris Zabriskie, AlteredCarbon, Avoidant, and (morse), and all of it is available to download on the Free Music Archive at freemusicarchive.org. For more information about Mabel, including a full tracklist for each episode, visit us online at mabelpodcast.com, or on Twitter, @podcastmabel.