



Mabel, episode 39: Reverie. In which the girls - in which the girls - in which the girls -

## INTRO

ANNA: Oh! Shit, voicemail. Hi, this is Anna Limon, we – met the other day? I was the one who knocked over your – you probably remember that. About that article, the one I was telling you about, I was wondering if –

[PHONE JOSTLING]

MABEL: Hello?

ANNA: Oh, you're - hey, is this - Mabel?

MABEL: Yes. Anna?

ANNA: Yeah, you remembered. I wanted to know - are you free later on? You promised me a good story, so I –

MABEL: Yes. I did. I keep my promises. I'm not doing anything at the moment. Are you - ?

ANNA: Yes! Yeah. Do you know that coffee shop down on –

[BEEP]

[TAPE RECORDER CLICKING; BACKGROUND NOISES - COFFEE MACHINES, MUTED VOICES]

ANNA: So, this is interview one with Mabel Martin for the Urban Legend series. Mabel, would you mind telling me what you do?

MABEL: I'm a florist. I talk to flowers and fit them together in ways that please us both.

ANNA: I'm – interested in the ways that urban legends and fairy tales intersect, you know? Oral traditions, magical realism. It sounds like you live in a fairy tale already. [PULLS SELF TOGETHER] You were telling me about your old house, the one where you grew up.

MABEL: The Martin House, yes. [PAUSES] Houses are good at narrative cohesion. Intersection, I mean, they are - they are landmarks. The gingerbread house. The princess's castle. The quintessential, immediately recognizable "haunted house". They're a good crossroads.

ANNA: My cousin's nephew's dentist's girlfriend lived in a house where a crazed murderer once lived. Right. It's all just "once upon a time".

MABEL: Mmhmm. [SIPS SMTH] This is good cocoa.

ANNA: I know, they use real cacao. The ancestors knew what they were about. So why is the Martin House special?

MABEL: It isn't, really. It's an...intersection of time and space the way all houses are. [LONG PAUSE] My last name is Martin. *Martin*, if you listen to my mother. Why would you think we had the same ancestors?

ANNA: You look like an Aztec statue, a little bit. Am I wrong?

MABEL: [OBVIOUSLY PLEASED] No. Although I think you're a little bit psychic.

ANNA: I wish. Mixed kids recognise mixed kids, I guess.

MABEL: [LAUGHS] It must be the overcompensation. I still think you're psychic. [PAUSE] The house is. An odd place.

[STRANGE SHUDDERING SOUND]

ANNA: Can you hang on a sec? This thing tends to -

[BEEP]

[HILL NOISES]

[BEEP]

MABEL: --- in the strictest sense, about a haunted house. I don't think there are any typical ghosts that inhabit it, unless your definition of ghost is...different. It is a more fluid place than that.

ANNA: What's your definition of a ghost? Not...something that used to be alive, and isn't anymore?

MABEL: I don't think so. Then everything is a ghost,

ANNA: Am I?

[LONG PAUSE]

MABEL: [LAUGHTER] What was I saying? Right. I think ghosts are mostly just. Imprinted memories of repetition.

ANNA: Are people the only things that make ghosts? If not, is there anywhere that isn't haunted? Everything is repetition. Seasons, migration patterns, orbit. Are we all just ghosts meeting endless echoes of our former and future selves? ...I'm sorry, I was asking you about the house you grew up in. I've heard some whispers about the Martin House.

MABEL: It might be easier to show you.

ANNA: You wouldn't mind?

MABEL; No, not at all. [PAUSES] We might have to sneak onto the property because I am....not currently allowed to live there.

ANNA: Please, I even wore my trespassing boots. You aren't allowed to live there, or - you aren't allowed there at all?

MABEL: There's nothing legally preventing me. I've just been cut out of the family.

ANNA: Why? For – no, I'm sorry. That's none of my business.

MABEL: No, it's fine. [MAKES NO MOVE TO ANSWER HER]

ANNA: One of the stories I've recorded talks about the Martin House being full of witches.

MABEL: Do you think witches are real?

ANNA: Are you asking me if I think magic is real?

MABEL: I suppose I am.

ANNA: [LAUGHING] I'm Mexican, is that enough of an answer for you?

MABEL: [LAUGHS] Maybe. I find most people have a ...very abstract idea of what they are willing to believe in, and that abstraction does not stretch very far. It usually ends at any kind of physicality, it's alright to be religious, of course, just so long as you don't leave food out for saints or claim that they're speaking to you. There's something similar that happens with belief in any kind of magic, or manifestation, or whatever you want to call it - it can't get too real, too close in its scale, or else you're not religious, you're not spiritual, you're not a witch, you're not any kind of inexplicable otherness, you're just a crazy bitch, and once you have been designated crazy bitch, nothing you say will play host to any meaning or weight. You've been shuttered forever, pigeonholed into obscure obsolescence.

But this is mostly a WASP perspective I'm speaking of.

ANNA: This is mostly a WASP town. It doesn't take much to be labelled *crazy bitch*.

MABEL: What would it take for you to think of someone like that? Would they have to be loud, or screaming at invisible creatures? What would they have to do?

ANNA: For me? I don't know. [DISTINCTLY UNCOMFORTABLE] One person's crazy is another person's - Tuesday. Everything we do is crazy if you

view it through a cynical enough lens. Or, not cynical, I guess, just - detached. Why do we, I don't know, paint our faces? Give each other metal rings to symbolise commitment and monogamy? Chant things at sports games, bequeath our children fixed names, count days in groups of seven? All of it's. Esoteric and bizarre. Were you asking generally, or do you really want to know my specific answer?

MABEL: Everything can provoke the creeping horror of the unknowable if we look at it long enough, you're right.

[EATS SOMETHING] And. Both. You're interesting. I'd like to know what you think and why you think it. Do you mind if I get another scone?

ANNA: Why would I mind? Wait, can you get me –

[STATIC]

- saying? Oh, what it'd take me to call someone a crazy bitch. [LAUGHS, BITTER] You want to know the last time I actually called someone that?

MABEL: Yes. I do.

ANNA: It was my sister. She legally changed her name from Mónica to *Mohn-ica*. I called her a crazy bitch for that. I don't know, it seemed insane to me. Abandoning your history, just because of - I don't know, embarrassment. She called me a crazy bitch, too, for all the shit I pulled when I was nineteen, so I guess we're even.

MABEL: Mm. Differences in perception, I suppose. What kind of *shit* did you pull? Typical teenage self loathing stuff, or something else?

ANNA: Both. Aren't I supposed to be interviewing you?

MABEL: Are you?

ANNA: Differences in perception, I suppose?

MABEL: [LAUGHS TOO HARD] I am learning a lot about you. I'll tell all my flowers.

[PAUSE] Is it alright if I order more cocoa?

ANNA: You don't have to keep asking, you can get whatever you want. What are you going to tell them? Good things, or bad?

MABEL: People usually comment on my appetite. I thought I'd leave an opening for you, just in case.

ANNA: What do people usually say? "You're going to give yourself diabetes?" Enjoy it while you can, once you turn thirty it'll all catch up with you?" "I wish I could eat like that and stay thin?"

MABEL: [LAUGHS, STARTLED] Something like a combination of all three. Or highly affected concern. "Are you sure all that food is good for you?" In any case I'll be thirty in less than three years, so. I wonder how people will police me then. [A BIT SLYLY] Do you want any? I think I ate all the scones but there's a chocolate muffin left.

ANNA: They'll find something. Trust me. And no, thanks.

MABEL: I do trust you. Not a fan of sugar?

ANNA: You trust me? Even though we've only met - twice, once-and-a-half? What if I - turn out to be a murderer, or - boring?

MABEL: You say that like you think the latter is worse.

ANNA: It is, isn't it? You can explain, if not excuse, most murders. There's no good explanation for being boring except a lack of imagination.

MABEL: A lack of imagination is a kind of cowardice, I think. That's the worst thing I could ever call someone, anyway.

ANNA: I bet you were the queen of truth or dare.

MABEL: [LAUGHS] I was! Although it wasn't entirely fair, as no one ever liked my truths. [CONSPIRATORIALLY] Once I was surveying this ravine for a particular species of orchid that I wanted - I wasn't supposed to be there because I'd been put on bed rest but someone dared me that I - well, anyway, I ended up falling down the ravine and losing the flowers. I was bruised from head to toe.

ANNA: Wait, why were you on bed rest? And what did they dare you? Wait. Who dared you to go - survey a ravine when you were supposed to be resting?

MABEL: That's not the right question. Ask me if I won.

ANNA: This is a trap. You're trapping me. [SIGHS ELABORATELY] Did you?

MABEL: I went back the next day and fell down again. My flowers were at the bottom. I brought them back with me and replanted them in my garden. So yes, I won.

ANNA: What kind of orchids were they?

MABEL: [LAUGHS]

[BEEP]

[DIFFERENT BACKGROUND NOISES: CRICKETS, FOOTSTEPS THROUGH TALL GRASS, AN OCCASIONAL OWL AND FOX]

ANNA: - how likely are we to be shot doing this, exactly? Not that I want you to call me a coward, I just like to be prepared.

MABEL: I wouldn't call you a coward. There's no one who'll harm us in the house. Sally's terrified of guns, anyway.

ANNA: Who's Sally?

MABEL: She's Lily's mother. [BRUSH SOUNDS] I can get us a key for the bottom floor, it's under the opium poppies. She won't wake up.

ANNA: Lily is - your mom?

MABEL: She's nothing now. She died a long time ago.

ANNA: I'm sorry. Here, I got that. [DOOR CREAKING]

MABEL: Don't be. [NOISES] She won't hear us down here. I could live inside the walls of this house, all its secret spaces, and she'd never know. It's too big.

ANNA: That's another one of the stories I've heard about the Martin - about this house. That there are people who live in the walls, whole generations of them, there long enough to turn white and blind like those - what are they

called? Troglobites? Like cave spiders who evolve without eyes, translucent and – [STUMBLES] ouch.

MABEL: Be careful. [A LITTLE PERTURBED] Things move.

ANNA: I'm really not trying to destroy some priceless artifact and get you in trouble. I have an old knee injury, sometimes it acts up.

MABEL: I know. I was telling you to be careful for your sake. I don't want you to get hurt. [PAUSES] None of the...stuff in here's really worth anything. It's just stuff.

ANNA: Oh. [BEMUSED] Thanks, then. Sorry.

MABEL: Why?

ANNA: For - I don't know. [PAUSE] You said you wanted to show me something.

MABEL: There's something - [SMTH WEIRD CUTS IN] Did you hear that?

ANNA: Yeah, where - where was that coming from? It sounded like - [WEIRDY CUT IN AGAIN]

SALLY: Anna?

ANNA: Did you – did she just – did you tell people I was going to be – ? Is this, did you – what the fuck is going *on*, Mabel – ?

MABEL: [PANIC NOISES] No, I - come with me - let's go to the library, there's - there's a space -

ANNA: No, wait, I need - I need you to look at me, please, and – tell me. I'll believe you, whatever you say, I – did you bring me here to fuck with me?

[WEIRD SINGING PULSING IN AND OUT]

MABEL: No. No. No. No. No.

ANNA: Okay. Okay. Where's the library?

MABEL: It's to the back - follow me, sort of hard to explain. The house wasn't designed meticulously.

[HURRIED FOOTSTEPS]

ANNA: I didn't imagine it, did I. She - she called my name.

MABEL: Yes. [MORE COLLECTED] I think so, anyway. I'm sorry for panicking. I - Sally and I don't get along.

ANNA: Are you - you seem - what did she do to you?

MABEL: [LAUGHS] No one's ever assumed myself to be the wronged party before. How do you know I didn't do something?

ANNA: How did you know I'd injured my knee?

MABEL: [LONGEST PAUSE IN THE WORLD] I just. Knew.

ANNA: Yeah. Me too. Like. I don't think you ever told me - you never told me your father's name, but. I know what it is. It's Thomas, right? Not Thomas Martin. Something else.

MABEL: Yes. It's. An overfamiliarity. [RUMMAGING] Somewhere in here there is - here it is. Lily's old journal. [PAUSES, FLICKS THROUGH PAGES] There's no light here, I'm sorry - I think we should be fine now, Sally is - old and medicated. There's light from the veranda that comes through the kitchen, just - [WALKING NOISES]

This is part of what I wanted to show you. For the article. [PAUSES] I never asked you why you got into your job. Or what you get out of it.

ANNA: It was actually - my uncle, he disappeared before I was born. It's not an interesting story. No one ever found him. It gave me that - the sickness, the need to know. Always hoarding secrets. Never know when they might come in - what does it say? I can't really - let me get my phone.

MABEL: I understand. I empathize. I was four when Lily died and the way it happened - she was not a good person, of that I am sure. And I do not think she loved me. But I still feel the need to piece together the inexplicable happening of her death. I'd always rather know.

ANNA: I'm sorry. I'm sorry that happened to you. Do you at least know, now?

MABEL: I have an idea. [FLIPS PAGES]

ANNA: [READING]

"You'll die alone, she said, and she wasn't crying anymore. You'll die watching your own blood seep out over goldenrod and bluestem, clutching the broken bones in your throat, and you'll remember, then, that I might have saved you, that I loved you enough to try. Even if twenty years have passed from this moment - "

Didn't - I thought you said this was your mother's journal.

MABEL: It is, it's - she wrote that when she was much younger. A teenager.

ANNA: Is. Is that what happened to her?

MABEL: Yes. It's interesting, isn't it?

ANNA: I wouldn't necessarily –

[GRINDING, SHUDDERING SOUND]

What *is* that?

MABEL: Old houses. They settle. What I really wanted to show you was - where is it? Did you move the journal? It was right on the counter -

ANNA: Where'd you put it? Did you drop - [SUDDEN PAIN NOISES]

MABEL: No, it was - are you alright?

ANNA: I can't – my *head* – Mabel?

MABEL: Are - what can I do? Do you want - I never kept painkillers in the house, but I can make you some tea -

ANNA: No, no, it's okay, it's like - can you hear that?

MABEL: It's - listen. Anna. You really believe in this stuff, don't you?

ANNA: I – stuff? Like what you were asking in the coffee shop? Do I believe in magic? [PAUSE] Yeah, I – I do.

MABEL: [A BIT SADLY] I don't want to be called a crazy bitch.

ANNA: I'm not going to call you that.

MABEL: I agreed to your interview because this house....I do not know what's wrong with it. It is not haunted, it's - a haunting, in a way. No thing inhabits it. It haunts you, the inhabitants. I do not know how to explain it in a way that's - concise, or rational. I probably should not have involved you at all, but I felt - I feel like we've known each other for awhile.

ANNA: I – feel – ah. [PAIN NOISE] I feel that too. You really can't hear it? There's – I keep hearing – things in waves, in layers, it's. God, I had a dream that was just like this once, I was in this weird house full of mirrors and I could hear echoes, and there was a woman with these scars on her face -

MABEL: I can hear it. I just didn't know you would be able to. Not everyone can. [PAUSES] I think it is the sound of the world collapsing on itself.

ANNA: Collapsing into what?

MABEL: I don't know. [SIGHS] How much stock do you put in your dreams? In the scarred face woman?

I have had a dream, or a nightmare, or a vision, or whatever you will call it, over and over again. As long as I can remember. I am inside this house but it is not a house; it is a black hole bending light around it.

Everything....compresses and bends and twists into new forms. It's excruciating. There is a terrible sound, the way there would not be if this dream were true. But then, I think our fundamental understanding of the world is flawed. I don't think anything works the way we think it does. Do you?

ANNA: No. We try to make everything run on linear tracks, but it doesn't. Like that mud pit in California, the one that's moving. No one can explain why.

MABEL: I've been there. The Salton Sea. Its shores are full of bones. It's the only honest ocean. [PAUSES] Will you still interview me? Would you rather know, or be safe?

ANNA: I'd always rather know. It's the - [LAUGHS]. The sickness. Hang on. Let me - [FUMBLES WITH RECORDER] Okay. Mabel Martin, what do you see in the heart of the collapsing star?

MABEL: This house. [VOICE GLITCHES SLIGHTLY] The kingdom beyond the firmament. I saw you. I saw you. I saw you.

[END]

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.

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