



UNUSUAL HUNTERS

Mabel, episode eighteen: unusual hungers. In which the moon has a dream.

[INTRO:]

ANNA: – Anna Limon –

AUTOMATED FEMALE VOICE: – is not available. At the tone, please record your message.

[BEEP]

The house is shadowed. I wonder sometimes if it is me. There is a pallor to it, as if encircled in a shroud. Shadowed and white all at once, white like the death color. There are changes happening. I am speaking to you from the inside of some great and terrible cocoon.

A long time ago you asked me about Luna. Luna-moth, Luna-pet, Luna Thorne. My grandmother's promise; her last failed attempt at anything worthwhile.

Luna Thorne is dead. Long live Luna Thorne.

[BEEP]

[WHISPERS] Once - once - once

upon a [GARBLED]

[BEEP]

[POTS CRASHING]

God - godammit -

[SCREAMS] Why won't you take care of me now? Are you faithless too? Are you? Are you as *disloyal* as *them* with their goddam *dirt* hearts - give me something to -

[BEEP]

Once upon a time. Once upon a time there was a girl, and a mirror, and the moon, and her reflection on the water. Once upon a time there was no moon, and the sky wept in darkness every night.

Even the dark needs things to eat. To love. Is there a difference? We consume what we love, its purpose and sustenance. We feast on its glory and sedate ourselves with its beauty. Anyway. The dark was hungry. The dark is always devouring, always searching for the light that defines it in opposition. Do you understand me, Anna? They are subsumed by their relation to one another. There is no existing outside of it.

But light and dark are not so stringent categories. They infringe on each other's territory quite frequently, and with great childlike glee. Fire that burns. Earth that nourishes. [LAUGHS] You know how it is. You can't make anything stay within its guided path, when you want it to. They always find a way to walk differently, to subvert your will in small, incremental ways until the end result is nothing like what you ever wanted. What was I saying? They test each other, the light and dark. They are testing each other still.

The dark craves. It is ever encroaching and inevitable. The light nourishes. Some kinds of light, anyway. I have only anecdotal evidence for this, but it's true nonetheless. Have you ever looked up at the moon and thought to yourself, *Why, I can see everything. The hill over the sea, every right flower, the trail in the woods. I can see it all.* Remember the glowing stones from the story of the cannibal witch, the one with the house made of gingerbread? Those rocks lit their way by virtue of the moon. She helps with that. Luna helps. What I am trying to say, Anna, is that Luna has always had something that was wanted, that was *needed*, and oh, she resented that. Wouldn't you?

Wouldn't we all? I would not give one inch of myself, not one stitch. By what virtue must we sacrifice ourselves for the pleasure or even necessity of others? By what truth does that virtue then become unvirtuous? I don't blame Luna for rattling the bars of her cage. I only blame her for constructing another.

I blame her.

[BEEP]

Even the dark needs to eat. Isn't that what I told you?

The house is rebuilding me, Anna. I thought I would be the sculptor of its new age but it is instead restoring me painstakingly, piece by piece. I am not changed. I am...cleaned, I think. The years of debris, of patina, being scrubbed thoroughly. It doesn't hurt. [LAUGHS] Well, nothing hurts me.

I tried to make...food, I guess. It didn't go well. [WATER RUNNING] Can you hear it? The water? It does what it wants. There's no power in this house anymore, there's no...there's no reason anything should run as it should, I suppose. My touch has always ruined everything, hasn't it? The pantry was full of overripe figs, somehow. I tried to cook them with honey but they – [LAUGHS, HYSTERICALLY] they turned to flowers in the pan. Isn't that funny? Isn't it? [CRYING]

[STRANGE NOISES]

What's...what the - oh my - oh *hell*, oh, *red devil*, Anna, I have to go -

[BEEP]

[TEARING NOISES, LIKE LEAVES]

[EATING NOISES]

[LAUGHING]

[BEEP]

I don't wonder if you can hear me. I know you can, Anna. Your will and mine - they override all else. I think it might please you to know that there is one last thing in this world that loves me. The house - I couldn't eat. And you know, I

- I might not need to. But need - need does not satisfy me in itself. I wanted something, Anna, and I got it, asked and devoured, through the sheer force of my desire. The house unwound its banisters and its high beams and grew a tree for me here, in the living room. Can you hear it? I stuffed myself until I couldn't move. I wonder if I might get you back the same way - through the power of wanting.

But anyway. I was telling you about Luna.

My grandmother - you know by now she was a weak woman. She took her greatness and held it in her hands and killed it, slowly, gently, the way all cowards kill something. With a kiss. With kindnesses.

I don't doubt she loved her. Luna, I mean. Sometimes that's not enough, for them. Look at me - now my own family is *them*. Us, them, Us, them. I am an unfamiliar creature in every world. All is perpetually foreign to me. No, that's not true. My grandmother was a lot of things but she was - god, she was so *understandable*, so mind-numbingly, *mundanely* understandable. People are not half as complex as they believe they are, Anna. I can unpick them like loose stitches. It has never been difficult to see what someone is made of - I'm sure you can guess how popular this made me as a child. Anyway.

Anyway.

My grandmother loved Luna, but she did not love her in the way that begets understanding. She could never pin her down, keep her in place; she could never understand where Luna came from, what she was made of. To my - to Sally, Luna was all light and all flowers and all song. Those things are true, but they aren't...true in exclusivity. They are not true only for themselves. Light can burn, song can madden. Flowers can poison. You knew that, right Anna? Sally was like you. She thought she was the heroine and thus, absolved of all her actions. She couldn't keep her promises, but that was alright, wasn't it? She ran away back to the real world and hid behind her money, her name, her *husband*. They were her vanguard against the strange and unknowable. But we all know how well that worked for her. The vines crept in. The hollow ground won out, as it always does. [LAUGHS]

You must think I am a monster, to have no pity in me. The truth is, people make their own choices, and they must stick by them, or else commit a sacrifice of self. Choose your weakness: pride or vanity. Or hold fast and true and keep all your promises. Sally had all the options in the world and she still behaved like a coward, a *weakling*. Burrowed in against a *man* and kept that

bulwark of respectability against, heaven forbid, disapproval. How stupid. I am a lot of things - oh, I am a *lot* of things but I have never once been weak. Do I have any pity in me? The truth is, Anna: I don't.

[BEEP]

A long time ago. A long time ago, I think - I believed Sally was a kind of innocent. Naive, maybe, sheltered from the cruelty of the world. I think I believed she was a bit of a child, and thus was more able to trust her when she told me, *Luna Thorne is the hare of the hound. Luna Thorne is a font of blood. Luna Thorne is the villain of this story.*

Well. I think we both know projection when we hear it. Sally was not a child. Sally was an adult, who was petulant, and bitter, and cringing, who was used to getting her way, and who was too feeble to honor the love that was given to her, the love that she felt, because it would have been *inconvenient*. I'm not sorry she's dead, Anna. I think she got to keep more than she ever deserved. Sometimes I think about burning this house to the ground. I wish she could see what was left of her estate. But it's yours now, isn't it? It all belongs to you. Maybe I'll burn it even still. That wouldn't free either of us, I know. Just another of my *rages*, as Sally called them.

I feel...distantly sympathetic for her. For Luna. Sometimes when you are strong, it is an excuse others use to treat you indelicately. *You can bear it*, they say, *you can bear anything. You are made of stone. Your heart is like diamond.* Would you ever say those things to me, Anna? Would you ever be rough with me, for being too much? I don't think so. You do not understand, Anna. You are human, with human emotions. But you are good. Through all the detritus, you are good. This I know of you, if I know nothing else. Sally was not good. Luna, with her hooks in me, with her back to the king, with her heart in her mouth, with her hair like the moon - Luna has thundered and rampaged too much to be good, even if she were not above such things. She has left a wreck of hauntings in her wake. I am only a ghost, to eat at the tatters of her. We are similar creatures, she and I. We share a reflection. She is not iron and bone, and she is not leaf and glamour. She is something...other. That I know for sure.

This is a fairytale. That is all it is. That is all anything worthwhile is. There are women, and devils, and the ocean, and the vast greenness of home. There are all the makings of a terrible virtuoso, smug on knowledge of the black and the earth, but there are no heroines. Only the story, the path like an awful thing of great unfurling. These are the choices we've made. These are

the choices we live with. If we can cleave to any victory, if we can wring out any joy from the pit of blood; if we can carve out a space for ourselves by any means necessary, we will. We live. We [girls](#), we women, we witches, we creatures of macabre and strident moonlight, we sirens and harpies and sphinxes and banshees - we tear out of every cage we are thrown into. We will never let anything immolate the entirety of us. We scream and we rage and we thrive and we make wild hosts of all who would defy us, deny us, try to cut down any small or meagre portion lacking the whole. In death we and only we will swallow up victory, burn pure in all things, into the end, into eternity. We are ocean and earth and stars. We are ever bright and searing. There is no world that is kind to us, Anna, to any of us. But we do not need kindness to win. We only ever need *ruthlessness*.

[OUTRO:]

This is Becca De La Rosa, one of the co-creators of Mabel, and before I read the end credits I have a special message for you: because you all constantly amaze us with your interest, your talent, your analytical skills, and your dedication to the show, we have hidden somewhere within season three a secret message. The message will not be complete until the season is finished. The first person to send us the finished message in full through the messaging system on our website will receive a substantial prize, and one we both frankly want to keep for our own. More details will be made available soon, but for now, all you need to do is keep consuming the show.

Mabel was created by Becca De La Rosa and Mabel Martin. This episode was written and performed by Mabel Martin, and produced by Becca De La Rosa. The music in this episode was by Ars Sonor, FRAIL, Nest, Ophir Ilzetzki, Anne van Schothorst, Sea of Aland, i AM esper, 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.

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