

OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA
A Once-Told Tale: The Wolf Sisters Part Two

Old Gods of Appalachia is a horror anthology podcast and therefore may contain material not suitable for all audiences, so listener discretion is advised.

[The Land Unknown by Landon Blood]

I walk these hills, leave these dark valleys,

Where I can't stay in the land unknown

In these hills that I walk so often,

I can feel the winds now on your ghost...

Heloïse Walker had to pass through Baker's Gap proper to get to the Walker House and so she had taken it upon herself to scout the area around the Clutch to see what she could see.

Her sister Marcie's man Melvin had shown up with a letter detailing the happenings in Baker's Gap and she knew she'd be more likely to find signs of what had gone awry with the women of the Clutch on her own. She loved her sister dearly and would rather have no one else at her back in a tough spot, but Marcie's gift was... blunt in some ways. Now, Marcie Walker was brute force strong with the true gift and could work a protection charm or a binding with the absolute best in the world, but the fact that her focus was a

long, carved walking stick as thick as a small man's arm and Ellie's was a razor-bladed hunting knife couldn't be more apt.

Ellie's gift came in fine, lacelike details. Connections had always revealed themselves to her since she was a girl. When she stilled her mind she could see the Green, reaching out in all its forms through rain and wind, flower and pollen, tree and root, and she could sense the places those connections had been broken or corrupted. She could smell the rot that rose up from beneath, trying to break those holy connective tissues that held the body of this world together – when she was with her sibling, their combined gifts were things to be feared. But the brightness and... *loudness* [heh] of her sister's presence could make the finer things hard to find.

So here she stood on her own on the birn looking down on the entrance to the Clutch and you'd have to go down into the holler about a quarter of a mile before you'd see any signs of life, and she wasn't going down that gullet on her own. But she could sniff around, reach out.

She stilled her mind and her heart. Relaxed. Breathed slow with deep, let herself open to the Green. At first it was like pouring ice water across dirt-covered stones; watching and feeling the cool flow as the layers of this world were stripped away. She could see the life in all its shades pulsing and reaching out like a vast web across plants and trees

great and small and she could feel her heart swell with the old magic that slept here... and that didn't sleep here.

She could feel the women who did have the gift's workings here, could feel their calls for good fortune and protection, for healing and for farsight. She could also feel their fear, and their anger, and their rage. The protective fury of one woman in particular; pushing beneath that, she – she could taste blood. She could taste the blood of the hired man the women had killed, she could taste the blood of the other men they had judged and found wanting. She found that the dead blood had formed its own web. That cold ichor reaching into the earth toward something else, something deep. Something old.

She drew herself back into the present moment before she could be pulled down that particular rabbit hole and slowly she made her way around the edge of the Clutch keeping her actual eyes out for anyone who might see her. She stopped pursuing the blood path, but she found she couldn't *not* see it in the path of the Green. Like a foul line of rot ruining a perfectly good piece of fruit, she could follow it, she could sense where it would lead her, and her heart sank.

Her sister needed to know this. So as quietly as she could, she made her way back to the main road where Melvin would be waiting with the cart and the horses. Now, Melvin was a big-bellied man of middling years and had been one of the original doormen for

Pleasant Evenings when her sister had opened that ill-fated venture a while back.

Melvin, for reasons of his own, was fiercely loyal to Marcie and thus to her by extension.

She found Melvin standing by the rear of the cart, shotgun in hand. Eyes narrowed in suspicion at the surrounding brush.

“Miss Ellie, get back up on the cart, now. Uh, I don’t think we’re welcome here.”

Ellie extended her senses out into the woods and found the source of Melvin’s trepidation. Three women with moderate to lesser gifts, watching them from the opposite side of the road from the entrance to the Clutch. They were, in fact, wearing the shapes of women and not wolves. She pressed harder with her sense and found what she thought she might. These three relied on the workings and presence of another to change their shape, but daylight probably wasn’t helping them either.

She could feel their want, though. She could feel that they wanted nothing more than to eat them both up and crack their bones and lick out the marrow, but they dared not. She could sense this much about them: with as middling to small as their gifts were, well she must look like a raging bonfire to them. Their minds were addled, though, she could feel that much; they weren’t seeing or thinking clearly and she could feel them eyeing Melvin. They might not come for her but Melvin was a man, and a man without any sort of gift at all.

Melvin, however, wasn't stupid and he had worked for Marcie Walker for a good while now. Melvin reached inside his shirt and pulled out a small pouch bound to a leather thong.

[Melvin's low, gruff voice:] "Oh, it's that kinda thing, is it?"

She audibly heard the women in the wood back up.

"Oh that's right, you better back it up! The other Miss Walker herself made me this here charm bag, and if any of y'all wanna see what's in it, I'm happy to open it up for ye!"

Ellie knew that this was not smart on Melvin's part; the bag Marcie made for him was real enough, but it wasn't gonna ward off a half-crazed, half-starved woman with a rock or a knife who believed she was gonna turn into a wolf at any given moment. So she reached to her belt and unlaced the sheath of the hunting knife there and drew it partways out. Enough for the silver inlay and beautiful filigree to show in the afternoon light.

The sound of the women running full-bore away through the woods followed shortly after and before Melvin could notice Ellie shoved the knife back down and retied the loose knot that held it in place.

“YEEAAH! That’s what I thought, y’all! C’mon, Miss Ellie, your sister’s a’waiting.”

They made it to the Walker house just before dark. And after the bone-crushing hugs and commentary on how long her little sister’s hair was getting and how did she stand it and oh Ellie you smell like you fell in Momma’s jar of Old French Madame and how in the world did you make it here without every Dick and Jane trying to get your britches?

And Ellie responded with how good the house looked and how in the world did Marcie get strong enough to haul all those planks for the new part of the steps she added, and how good the wards on the porch were coming along. It had been a few months since Ellie had been to the house, and it was good for the sisters to see and love each other. Marcie had cooked up a big ol’ mess of soup beans and corn bread with greens and kale with bacon grease on it, mm! And it was just the three of them, as the House currently had no residents occupying its private upper floors.

Ellie was glad for that. If the women from the woods had followed them here, they didn’t have to worry about any collateral damage – hell, if those three in the woods had

followed them here, there were about fourteen different traps and wards that would have stopped them cold before they even saw the house. Marcie caught Ellie up on the full details of Juble Tucker and his wronging of one of the women in the Clutch, while Melvin sat, face buried, in an enormous bowl of soup beans.

“But, you say that girl’s gone? Like she’s not one of the wolves?” Ellie asked.

“Nope. She and that baby got took out of here long time before they ever killed Juble. We’re dealing with somebody else either being hurt on that girl’s behalf or there’s something else at play here.”

Ellie sighed. “You ain’t wrong. I had Melvin run me out there when we got to town today. It’s hate. And it’s vengeance, alright. Somebody wanted way better for that girl and her baby, somebody wanted her to have what she couldn’t have.”

Marcie pondered. “The girl had a cousin out there. Older woman, she was the one that got her here and helped her get set up at the Tucker’s.”

Ellie shook her head skeptically. “What I felt was more than a cousin grudge, but – Marc, it’s worse.”

Marcie took a deep breath. [Slow sigh.] “Them?”

“Them,” confirmed Ellie.

“The ground on the back side of the Clutch is all et up with it, something got in through the barrier, it’s – it poisoned the soil. In fact, I think something might be living out in their garden.”

Marcie tensed. “You mean to say they been *eating* it? Something is tainting their food?”

“Worse.”

“Worse how?”

Ellie thought for a second and then just launched ahead, “It’s not just the food they grow out there, it’s their herbs, the plants – everything they been doing workings with is tainted. Their very craft is mixed up with whatever is eating and shitting in that garden. You mix enough of that with hate for menfolk and more powerful worker’s need for vengeance and you got yourself nothing but a whole lotta dead men.”

“And that comes back to a whole lotta dead women.”

“Exactly.”

“So what do we do?”

“Well, first thing we gotta see what’s in that garden after dark and that’s easier done if we know they’re not at home and definitely if they’re not off killing anyone else.”

“So uh, you’re saying you’ll need bait, then?” asked Melvin, finishing the last of his beans. The big man stood up, killed the last of his buttermilk in one long pull and then wiped his mouth. “Hell, I guess. Tell me what to do and where to go, Miss Walker. Let’s get this done.”

The moon was nowhere near full as Marcie and Ellie Walker made their way into the woods of the Clutch and soon found their way to the three-quarter circle of cottages and shacks that made up the communal living area.

Everything stood empty. Firepit was cold. Houses were empty and undisturbed. The shared yard space, though, was a nightmare. Severed and well-chewed limbs were strewn about. Skeletal remains both man and beast were everywhere. The area was rank with the musk and markings of a pack of wild animals.

There wasn't a living soul to be found, Melvin had seen to that, because on the other side of the Gap he had started a bar fight with a man that was well-known for making his own wife and children's life a living hell, and Melvin had always wanted an excuse to take a swing at Larry Sizemore and this was as good a time as any. The sisters had figured that much violence and booze and bad company would draw the attention of the pack and they were not to be disappointed.

The men had been tossed out of the Lucky Yell and had vowed to continue their fight in the church parking lot on the other side of town, which was – which was just deserted enough to make it too good for the pack to resist. And resist, they would not, but we'll come back to that. Y'all just pray for Melvin, though, alright?

Back in the Clutch, the sisters had made their way behind the main living quarters to the garden where the women grew their food and their herbs. In the light of day – and even in moonlight – it looked like any other garden might: tomato steaks, rose from

taters, turnips, sweet taters, the usual lot. To the eyes of the Walker sisters, though, this was not the case.

Marcie stepped back, her heavy walking stick at the ready as Ellie untied the sheath and drew out the hunting knife her long-dead daddy had left her when she was a very little girl.

About this knife, though. The handle was bone. And what sort of bone, Ellie Walker could not say because it didn't feel human and it didn't feel like any animal bone she had ever carved, and Ellie Walker had carved her share of bones. There were knives and hand mirrors and combs out there in the hands of working girls all around these mountains made by Ellie Walker. Each one providing some form of passive or... aggressive protection for the girl they were given to.

Some might make a customer realize his time was up by making his eyes stop working if he started being too rough. Others with the right touch or word might render a customer impotent if he got too disrespectful, and by 'impotent' I don't just mean unable to rise to the occasion? I mean depleted. Too weak to move, much less anything else. Still others, particularly the mirrors, were known to show a man what he truly was and make him face it, and sometimes that might be metaphorical and psychological but

other times folks said they saw a man dragging what looked like his twin brother out of the brothel and into the darkness. And usually didn't see neither one of them after that.

Regardless, the handle of this particular knife was unidentifiable to Ellie or her ma. The blade that it was fit to was even more mysterious. The edge was ever sharp. It had never known a whetstone in all the years Ellie had had it; it was paper-thin and dangerous to touch. Hell, looking at it might cut you. Above the edge proper, the metal was etched with a filigree of lacey intertwining whirls and knots that seemed to constantly change or rework themselves. She'd stopped trying to copy them or learn them long ago. Her momma called the knife Moonbone, 'cause she said that was the name it told her. Ellie called it Welling Wound, 'cause that's what her daddy had called it in the letter he left with it. The knife was as much a part of Ellie and her own gift, and she could use it for a variety of purposes. Like the one she brought it here for tonight.

She drew the knife and held it aloft in its pale white glow and illuminated the garden and immediately Ellie covered her mouth and nose.

"Oh god, this is bad!" She managed barely without gagging, "Oh, this is so bad!"

The stench of decay and rot carried a tooth-breaking sweetness that would flip the stomach of the undertaker and make the butcher's boy cry after his carving lessons. The

plants that were in neat rows by order in sun and moonlight were withered and rotten and pulpy fleshy goop by the light of the blade. But tomato steaks were smeared black with offal and gore, organs from the slain men impaled upon them, viscera and human waste coated a goodly part of the ground. It was a cesspool of desecration and violence.

This land was tainted, alright. Even beyond the mess they could see, the ground was poisoned by a thick black fungus that flowed from the central point of the garden right where a scarecrow would be. By the witch-light, there was no scarecrow. What stared back at them was almost a woman. She looked clearly dead, or at least unliving. Her face was smooth and pale in the light. Part woman, part wolf in shape, as if caught halfway between transformation. Her throat was a halo of bruises in the shape of a man's hands; below her collarbones, though, her body was lean and furred with a sandy reddish coat and she was naked. At her feet lay a wolfskin and a pot of rancid rendered fat.

[A calm, pleased, low, animalistic, growling voice:] "Oh, sisters..." the wolf-thing began, seemingly fighting back teeth that wanted to erupt through her gums. "It's so much worse than you can imagine."

And in the distance, growing closer... the howling of wolves.

[I Cannot Escape The Darkness by Those Poor Bastards]

There is a curse upon my every waking breath,

And I cannot escape the darkness...

Good evening, family. How's everybody doing? Thank you for coming out to hear the second produced episode of The Wolf Sisters; special thanks to everyone who packed into Discord again for the second weekend in a row to hear about the next chapter in what has become a three-part story. We will be wrapping everything up in a big old finale next week live on Discord – actually, this weekend on Discord. This'll be Thursday when you hear this and the following Saturday, part 3 will be live on Discord at 9 PM on Saturday, and then we'll have a fully mixed and produced version available on the following Thursday.

Prayers for Melvin, everybody, I asked y'all to pray for Melvin. Melvin seemed to take on a life of his own on Twitter after the live show. Uh he's a hit recording artist and a lovely singing voice from what I understand, so prayers for Melvin, everybody. We'll find out his fate next time around.

Thank you to everybody who continues to support us during these hard times during the pandemic. We have had people ask, 'Hey I want to donate or I want to help but I can't commit to a monthly pledge and I don't really need a t-shirt.' If you want to hit us up for a one-time gift, family, we've set it up where you can go [Paypal.me/OldGodsPod](https://www.paypal.com/oldgodspod) and you

can make a one-time or a however-many-time donation you want to make, and that goes straight into the Paypal that's going to help pay people's rent, to buy groceries, uh and to help keep the show running. We can't do this without you, and of course if you would like to become a patron you can head on over to Patreon.com/OldGodsOfAppalachia Build Momma a Coffin just released its creepiest episode ever with Granny White, and we're going to be following up on that at the end of this week. And after that, we will meet Miss Delia, the final character that you will meet and then the narrative action episodes start and Build Momma a Coffin will roll on to its climax and its finish.

I love y'all so much. We appreciate you on levels we can't put into words. Just to make sure we plug everything, if you are looking for Old Gods merchandise – t-shirts, mugs, stickers, apparently shower curtains, and velour throws – you can head on over to OldGodsOfAppalachia.Threadless.com Again, all those – all money that comes in that way goes to help out our two staff members who are still currently unemployed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Y'all it's dark times, but the dark can make family out of anybody. We'll see y'all soon.

And I cannot escape the darkness...