

**OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA**  
Season 1 Episode 0.5: The Witch Queen

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

And in these woods there are two queens. Notice I said woods and not forest? No one says forest around here. These are the woods and you damn well know it! Anyway... the queens. The elder of the two knew the ways of the wild and used them to live far beyond her years... to bend half the land to do her bidding. They say her dwelling sits in the middle of a valley so overgrown that men cannot walk it without being torn to bits by sticky vines and brambles, their blood leaving an easy trail for the greater things that serve her.

Her part of the woods smells of the rotten cucumber of copperheads, and the air carries the sound of bears poppin' jaws and every other warning that these woods are not safe. Hanging food from a tree branch will not save it *nor you* if you are foolish enough to try to camp here! Both will be scented, found, and taken. She watches you here. She is snake bite and mauled bodies. She has never known death and probably never will! Yours will only feed her and make her even younger and full of sap. She is not to be stopped, and we call her The Witch Queen.

[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 wind now on your ghost...*

Long before there were towns in the stretch between Kentucky and Virginia, there were settlements and camps. Handholds dug into the side of a mountain scramblin' for purchase. Desperate church camps and abandoned doghole mines that more often than not dried up and passed back into the dust without anyone noticing. The end of this story *starts* in a place like that.

They called her a witch. They'd found the signs and the books, and they'd asked her the questions, and she was as guilty as anyone ever was. Problem was that the good people who'd set out to found a religious settlement in what would eventually be Jacob County, Kentucky called themselves The Blessed Folk of His Unending and Undying Gracious Love... well, they didn't have the heart for hangin' or burnin', so she was allowed to gather her things, load them into a cart, and be driven into the wilderness to be abandoned to God's unflinchin' justice. They put a bag over her head to keep her from knowin' where she was goin'. They spun her around twelve times, once for each disciple, to make sure she was good and dizzy before they loaded her up, and done the same when they unloaded her... this time sayin' The Lord's Prayer.

See, they expected her to be one o' them. A Bible-beating sheep that would surely wither and die outside the comfort of their godly encampment. *But she was not.* She had been raised by her mothers, who'd brought her across the ocean as a little girl, and she - like her mothers - knew the ways of the stars in the sky, the plants in the ground, and the song of the earth. And like her mothers, she could make a poultice that could close a wound, a draught that would ease your head, and she could make sure more babies made it into this world safe and whole than any physician could. Now this last and most valued skill would

be what sent her family West.

Scandal had erupted on the Virginia coast when the two pretty dark-haired sisters successfully delivered twins to a local official's wife, who had lost three children in childbirth under the watch of the well-known and respectable local doctor. The doctor, in the time-honoured tradition of men who had been exposed as incompetent, had promptly called them both witches and called for their blood, and thus Edith and Kathryn Dooley had taken their daughter and set out to find a quieter life in the mountains far from the good folks of Williamsburg.

They'd found a caravan of kinder and significantly poorer folk makin' their way to the Cumberland. A week into the mist and rain of the long trek, Edith took sick. Her skin went sallow and her breathin' grew wet... finally she was dead not long after. Upon her death a pall fell over the whole company. She'd been a bright light on a hard road. Meals were somber and talk was scarce for days after they buried the bright-eyed girl that everybody called Edie. Kathryn, her wife, broken-hearted and malnourished, pressed on with the rest of the party, and her despondency only deepened as she ate less and less, and on the darker nights could be heard havin' full conversations with her beloved Edie, many of which would end with incoherent pleading and sobbing, and when her daughter would run to the place where her mother lay, why she'd find her dead to the world. The mark of the shadow was clearly on her though, so when they found Kathryn's bedroll empty the mornin' they were to begin the last push of the trip, no one questioned where she'd gone. There were cliffs and steep drop-offs that were easy enough to get to. They'd never find her body. They just hoped that she was at peace and with her Edie.

An' the company moved on, taking the pair's almost adolescent daughter with them. A quiet, intelligent girl... quick with chores and with gray eyes that saw through most people. Now you've doubtless noticed that we've not said the daughter's name, even though this pretty much is her story. It's not that we don't wanna tell you, we... well, we can't. No one ever wrote it down, and nobody ever passed it down. There's no family bible, and where this story's goin'... that's probably for the best. So bear with me now.

The Monroe company, as their little caravan was called, never made it to the Cumberland Gap. Attacks by the inhabitants of the surrounding mountains and sickness picked off the rest of the troupe, except for the Dooley's little girl and an old man named Marvin who wouldn't make it much further than that. They made it almost to the Gap though when they met up with the Good Folk, who were on their way west to claim some of that land of tomorrow for themselves. And after Marvin passed and was given a Christian burial, young daughter Dooley was taken into the fold where she lived for a year, before they found out how she made Miss Dorothy's leg better with just words and ointment.

They found the charm she carried in the bag, and the mysterious books that they could not understand. And when the pastor's boy had tried to kiss her after prayer meeting one night, and he come home all scratched up like he met a cattywampus, babblin' that that girl could change her shape, and she was gonna hunt him down and kill him in his sleep because he wouldn't kiss her when she wanted... well things took a turn. The boy was a liar of course, as many boys are. She wasn't gonna kill him and she didn't change her shape... that much. She just needed him to know that she was not for him.

So the next mornin' the church elders came for her and named her a witch. Now this of

course was somethin' she already knew about herself, but it was nice to have it out in the open. She was left to fend for herself in a deep valley far from a known trail. Some say it was on the eastern side of the Cumberland, closer to what ended up being Glamorgan, Virginia in (Eassau) County. Others would argue it had to be on the western side in Jacob County, closer to where the Kind Folk were thought to have died horribly by their own incompetence. Some say you can't find the place where they left her. Some say that place will find you if it wants you there.

She had brought with her the two trunks of books and stores that her mothers had packed, and what clothes she had. When they'd come to her and asked her about the things that they couldn't understand she had answered their questions honestly and without fear. Since that day though, she had not spoken. She stepped off the cart, her head still hooded, and listened as they unloaded all those things into the pitiful little shack they'd built for her. See the Folk were not cruel, and in fact it broke their heart to put her out, but they were faithful, and superstitious, and stupid. So they did their part. And to their credit, they did not try to keep any of the fine clothes or jewelry from her mothers' chests, nor did they try to burn or destroy any of her books. They feared witchin' far too much for that.

So here she was left, and here she set about makin' a life for herself, alone in the deep wilds of the valley. For a year and a day she fished, she grew a small garden... she knew the ways of the wood and the ways seemed to know her. As rustic livin' went she did alright. The big predators seemed to give her little shack a wide berth... the markers and totems she set about her property doing their job quietly. She sang and she worked, and crafted, and danced beneath the moon. Solitude suited her it seemed. She burned quietly and brightly with the powers her mothers left her and taught her. An' like all life that burns,

eventually she was seen. Oh, was she seen!

The first night was just after the winds had shifted and the nights started cooling. The moon stood half full when the girl woke to the sound of someone calling her name outside. Lighting a candle and stepping into the darkened yard, she saw a figure walking just outside the boundary she'd marked. At each corner of the land they'd cleared for her domicile she buried small glass jars, each filled with three nails from each side of her shack rubbed in a mixture of her own blood and a few other things we won't talk about. She knew what or whoever this was, it would not be able to cross.

"Hello my love," said mama Edie from the other side of the property line. "It's good to see ya."

Mama Edie's voice held on to a little bit of the old country, and it made her heart ache to see her first mother's face, but she knew that dead was dead and this was not her ma. Whatever this was though, it thought it was clever.

"Oh hello ma! Been gone a while, have you not?"

"Yes child. We've missed you so, your mama Kathryn and I. We..."

"Oh you've got to try harder than that!" she said, cutting off whatever this was as attempted being her first mother. "Ye never called ma Katie anything but Katie since I was born. Pssh! Kathryn! What are ya, her priest? Try again, spirit."

And then she turned, went back into her house, and went to bed.

The next night the wind blew colder, and a waxing crescent moon peeked in and out of the passing clouds as the noise at the edge of the yard came again. Again she went to see who was there. Ma Katie was sitting beside a fire set right outside of her wards.

"Oy, smartass! Come over here and help me put this meat on the fire." Sure enough, Ma Katie was struggling with a haunch of spitted meat unlike anything they'd had since she left the Chesapeake.

"Oh, I wish I could Ma, but I've been living hard out here since ya left me! My feet and me back are all achy and stiff! Why don't ya come in and set a spell? I could make us tea..." she smiled archly at Ma Katie, who glowered at her. "Are ya completely stupid, spirit? I made sure to think about how Ma Katie would love nothing more than to roast me a bit o' lamb all day, and lo! Here ya are! But you don't know her at all, do ya spirit? Ma Katie couldn't abide lamb. She couldn't have it, couldn't smell it! Made her so sick she'd shit out a Bible, she could. Come back tomorrow. Show me your true face, or don't come at all."

The fire went out. And the lamb and Ma Katie were gone.

The next day the girl took to doublin' the number of jars and the lines around her home. She marked the doorframes with iron nails and dabbed herself with oils from her mothers' stores. The next night the moon was new. No wind blew. No leaves stirred. She came out of her house and looked toward the dark green of the valley. The dense tangles of briars and brambles, pickers and stingers, swampy bits with snakes and looming tree shade thick

with spiders.

The woods stirred. The sound of something large came to her from deep within the wood. Louder and louder it grew until the largest buck she'd ever seen pushed out of the trees. Its coat was black as soot. Its hooves were wet with a viscous smearing brown. Its eyes burned with a foul blood-colored light. But the things she could not look away from were its antlers. They were amber. Translucent and honey-colored, pulsing with a low poisonous smolder, bits of ash falling from them here and there. It came to the edge of her boundary and reared and snorted, its wet hooves snappin' against the invisible barrier, and after a moment it settled and met her eyes evenly.

"Hail, spirit," said she.

The voice that came to her tasted old. "HAIL, WITCH." And then, "I AM NO SPIRIT."

"Hail, demon then," she answered.

The thing laughed a laugh that sounded and smelled like drowning. "YOU HAVE NOT A NAME FOR WHAT I AM," it purred. "SOME WOULD CALL ME..." and then the thing made a sound that might have been a word but felt more like a blow, and she flinched away from it. "I COME TO OFFER YOU MUCH, LITTLE WITCH. WE SEE THAT YOU HAVE KINSHIP WITH THIS LAND. WE SEE IT FEED YOU. WE SEE IT KEEP YOU SAFER THAN THE FOOLS WHO PUT YOU HERE."

"Aye," she nodded. "Then you know who and what my mothers were, and what I am. I'm

just fine out here, and I've drawn my lines and set my house so there's nothing I need from you. And don't offer to let me see my mas again! They're gone! Playing mummers with their faces is just cruel and it won't get you anywhere. You said you had an offer, so say true or begone, beast!"

The great stag paced the line of her marking. "YOU SPEAK TRUE, LITTLE WITCH. DEATH IS DEAD IN THIS PLACE, TO THE POINT THAT YOU SPEAK AND UNDERSTAND. BUT WHAT IF YOU NEVER HAD TO KNOW ITS STING?"

"You sound like the church people," she said. "You want me to read your Bible? Sing in your choir?" she teased.

The black buck pawed the earth and snorted derisively, its voice rolling back into her head like rancid milk. "THERE ARE MORE BOOKS THAN YOU COULD EVER READ, LITTLE WITCH, AND WE COULD GIVE YOU ALL OF THEM AND MORE. WE HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF AGES. WE HAVE POWER. WE HAVE TUTORS WHO COULD TEACH YOU THINGS YOUR MOTHERS COULD NEVER KNOW. MORE IMPORTANTLY, WE COULD GIVE YOU THIS LAND."

"I got land, beast. Don't you see my fine palace and my sprawling manor grounds?" And she gestured grandly at her humble holdings.

The beast chuckled. A vulgar and carnal sound that made her tingle and blush. "YOU HOLD THIS PATCH FOR NOW, CHILD. THESE LINES YOU'VE DRAWN ARE IMPRESSIVE FOR ONE SO YOUNG, BUT THEY WILL FADE WITH TIME. ALL

THINGS DO, AND ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS WAIT. AND WE ARE THE VERY BEST AT WAITING. WHILE WE WAITED THOUGH, WE WOULD WATCH YOU DIE. WHETHER FROM AGE AND TIME OR FROM THE WORST THINGS THAT ARE COMING TO THIS PLACE, THINGS YOU CANNOT EVEN IMAGINE. ALL THIS SPLENDOR. ALL OF THIS BEAUTY GROUND TO ASH AND BLOOD. WE WOULD GIVE YOU ALL OF THIS LAND TO KEEP FOR US! OR WE COULD GIVE WHAT WAS LEFT OF YOU TO THIS LAND, AND JUST WAIT FOR ANOTHER LIKE YOU TO COME. IT MIGHT BE A WHILE, BUT AS I SAID WE ARE VERY GOOD WITH WAITING. BUT KNOW WE WILL NOT OFFER AGAIN!"

She began to sweat then. Her gut told her she was dealing with more than any forest haint, and while that might have tried to trick her at first it was not lying now. It could wait a thousand years if it needed to. But it wouldn't. "What would I have to do," she asked, "to live forever and keep this land?"

"COME CLOSER," said the thing whose name sounded like Hornet Head, but was not.

"LET US TALK... OF MANY THINGS."

[Outro Song - God's Dark Heaven by Those Poor Bastards]

We hope you've enjoyed this first full foray into the world of Old Gods of Appalachia. It'll be while before we return to these woods, but we hope you keep our young witch friend in mind as we move forward.

Old Gods of Appalachia is a production of Deep Nerd Media. Our intro music is written

and performed by Landon Blood. Our outro music by Those Poor Bastards. Today's story was written and performed by Steve Shell.

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