

OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA

Season 2 Episode 19: Where the Sun Never Shines

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 sun was just peeking over the mountains, and Marcie Walker was already up. Had been up, in fact, for a good while now. She'd fed the chickens and collected eggs. She turned the horses out in the backfield and mucked out their stalls. She'd walked the property line to check the wards, and just now, she was settling in at her kitchen table with a biscuit, a cup of coffee, and the newspaper.

Thus began every morning at the Walker house, barring some sort of special circumstance, and Marcie liked it that way. She liked this quiet time to herself before the day really got going, and she never knew what life might bring to her door. This day brought trouble early just as soon as she opened the paper, in fact.

There on the front page was a face she recognized, Coralee Tilley, juxtaposed next to a photo of the monster she'd married, underneath the headline, **LOCAL WOMAN QUESTIONED IN HUSBAND'S MURDER.**

Coralee? She couldn't possibly, Marcie thought. A year or so back, Bonnie Ward had brought Coralee to the Walker House for sanctuary. Surely, no one really thought that young woman had murdered her husband. As she read through the gruesome details of the crime, a grim suspicion began to form in Marcie's mind. When she finished reading

the article, she folded up the newspaper and went to the phone and dialed the Sheriff's Office.

"Andy, this is Marcie Walker. I just read in the paper about what happened to Frank Tilley."

"Terrible crime. Yeah, I assure you, the Sheriff's Department has the matter firmly in hand, Ms. Walker," Sheriff Hodge replied.

"I'm sure you think you do. Uh, the reason I'm calling is, I'd like to know the current disposition of Miss Tilley."

"Excuse me, ma'am?"

"Coralee Tilley—it says here that she is now—how do they phrase it? Oh yes, 'being questioned as a person of interest' in the murder of her husband."

"I don't see how that's any of your concern, Marcie—"

"You know very well that the well-being of the women in this county is always a matter of my concern. Andy Hodge, is Miss Tilley in your custody at this time? I will—"

"You know I'm not at liberty to give out that sort of information."

“I’ll take that as a yes. Has Miss Tilley retained an attorney?”

“Why? Well, damn it, she ain’t asked for one, and she’s not under arrest, not—not yet anyway. Now you see here, Marcie, you just need to stay out of this. This is police business.”

“I thought that might be the case. Thank you, Sheriff. I know someone who can help. There’s a lawyer over in Boone who I think I could convince to represent her. Owes me a favor. You should expect a visit later today—tomorrow morning at the latest. You tell Coralee not to worry about a thing.”

[The Land Unknown: Hollow Heart version by Landon Blood]

Her cold wind calls

And so I follow

No time to rest these weary bones.

I hear her song

And my heart goes hollow

Best not to walk these woods alone

Best stick to the roads

Stay out of the shadow

Best get on home

Best to leave them ghosts alone...

It would take the rest of the morning and the better part of the afternoon for Melvin to drive over to Boone, North Carolina and fetch the attorney Marcie hoped would come all the way to Baker's Gap to represent Coralee Tilley. D.L. was an accomplished criminal defense lawyer who also specialized in divorces, and Marcie happened to know that D.L. was also licensed to practice law in Tennessee because she had called upon that esteemed barrister a number of times to assist the women who pass through the Walker House in divesting themselves of their unwanted husbands. But although Marcie had provided a fairly steady stream of clientele, their relationship was not on as solid a footing as she would have liked. There was history there. She didn't especially look forward to their meeting today. There was nothing for it, though—Frank Tilley had managed to inflict one last indignity upon his wife with his death, and now Coralee needed the type of help that only skilled legal counsel could provide.

And so, Marcie aired out one of the spare bedrooms, changed the linens, and brought in some fresh firewood. She swept and mopped and generally kept herself occupied, so she didn't think too hard on this meeting, until she judged Melvin would be returning with the lawyer soon, and started making lunch: ham and biscuits, soup beans, and cornbread. She timed it right, as she always did—everything was ready and warm on the stove, and Marcie was setting the table when she heard Melvin's truck pull into the driveway and around back of the house.

A couple minutes later, she heard Melvin's heavy footsteps on the stairs as he and their guest came in the kitchen door behind her.

"We're back, Miss Marcie. Uh, where you want these bags?"

"Put them up in the blue bedroom, please, Melvin," Marcie told him. "I've got it all ready."

The attorney, known as D.L. Walker (which stood for Douglass Lillian, one of Sheila Walker's three youngest girls) followed Melvin into the kitchen. Having no interest in the family business, D.L. had gone off to read the law with an attorney who had once been a client of their mother's as soon as she was old enough to leave home. Sheila was only too happy to see her daughter into a career in the legal profession. In her business, one occasionally had the need of a skilled attorney, and one who wouldn't try to refuse her cash in favor of an alternative means of payment. Sheila firmly believed in paying for services received and operated a cash-only establishment. As she always advised new customers, "This is not a lending institution honey. We do not offer credit. You pay your tab before you leave... or you don't leave. Not on your feet, anyway."

By the time D.L. had passed the bar, of course times had changed for the Walker sisters, but Marcie found she still had need of her sister's services from time to time. Relations

between the two had grown somewhat strained in recent years, but it was good to see her all the same.

Today, D.L. had pinned her long, red hair up under a brown, felt hat and wore a tweed vest and tie over a white blouse, brown skirt, and sensible shoes under a fashionable cape jacket—from her hat to her shoes to the serious expression on her pretty face, she looked every inch the stern legal professional, and Marcie, being her big sister, couldn't resist teasing her just a bit. Marcie grinned. "Hey, Douggie."

D.L. narrowed her eyes at the use of the childhood nickname, but she didn't rise to the bait. Instead, in typical Douggie fashion, she got right to the point. she lifted the newspaper she was carrying—a copy of the same paper Marcie had been reading that morning, which she had helpfully sent along with Melvin.

"Marcie, what is this? Why am I here?"

Marcie held up her hands in surrender. "Why don't you sit down? I'll explain over lunch."

D.L. rolled her eyes, but she took off her hat and coat and hung them up on the coat rack in the corner. She fetched herself a glass of sweet tea from the icebox and sat down at the table. A few minutes later, Melvin joined them, and Marcie began to tell her sister about the young woman she had brought her here to represent.

Coralee had been born Coralee Trent to a small, and very poor, family with a tiny farm out in Lee County, Virginia. Frank Tilley was a local man who worked in the rail yard and ran moonshine up north on the side. And if it weren't for the bootlegging, he never would have crossed paths with that unfortunate young woman. but Frank had met her daddy buying grain for some of the moonshiners he worked with. He saw the man's pretty, young daughter on the farm the first time he visited, and after a few visits, he'd asked for her hand. Coralee's daddy, knowing nothing of Frank's reputation back in Johnson County, and possibly thinking the match might help improve his business connections, had given his blessing. Coralee hadn't exactly been forced to marry Frank—her parents weren't that sort of people. But she keenly felt the relief it would provide them to lift the burden of one more mouth to feed. So, she got along with what her daddy seemed to want.

The two were married, and Frank had brought his 18-year-old bride back to Baker's Gap with him seven years ago. It had been seven years spent in hell for Coralee. Frank Tilley had dropped any veneer of civility or decency by the time she crossed the threshold of the ramshackle farmhouse on the edge of the pine woods. She had lived in constant, well-reasoned fear. Frank rarely allowed her to leave the property—only to attend church on Sundays, which they did without fail, carefully layering makeup over bruises or wearing a hat with a veil—not that it did much good. Everybody knew what was going on in that house. But no one said a word to Frank or lifted a finger to help that poor girl. At least not until last year, when Coralee didn't appear at church one Sunday,

and Bonnie Ward, the wife of the man who ran the local illicit drinking establishment, had taken it upon herself to drive up to the Tilley farmhouse and check on the young woman. To her great fortune, Marcie was sure, Frank was not home at the time—who knows what might have happened if he had been? Bonnie found Coralee in a terrible state, bruised and battered and sore, barely able to leave her bed. And she had convinced the girl to allow Bonnie to drive her to the Walker house.

Marcie and Ellie had taken care of Coralee for a day or two—tended her wounds and dried her tears—and over the course of that time, they'd heard the whole long, sorry tale. It was a story with which they were already quite familiar, if not in its particulars, at least the broad strokes. they'd heard it from many of the women who passed through their doors, some of whom D.L. had also helped obtain divorces, which was no easy feat.

“But she went back to him?” D.L. asked, frowning.

Marcie sighed. “Coralee was not one of our success stories, I’m afraid. Frank found out where she was, and somehow, and come looking for her. She didn’t think we could protect her. She didn’t understand about the wards. And I guess she thought all we could do was shoot him?” She shrugged. “You have to understand, Coralee was raised a real good, Christian girl. She didn’t understand the other ways we could protect her, and she didn’t want any part of killing a man, even him, she was quite clear on that. And he told her what they always do—’it’ll be worse for you if you don’t come now,’ and

threatening me and Ellie, too, and all that. And so she went. I hadn't seen her since I saw her picture in the paper this morning."

"Well, Marcie, no matter what she might have said, then it wouldn't be the first time a woman reached the end of her tolerance for a bad man and just... snapped." D.L. suggested gently,

"Did you read the details of the crime? The man was 6'4 if he was an inch. Not to mention, it sounds like his head was ripped clean off. There's no way that little gal could have physically done this, no matter how mad she was, much less make the rest of his body and most of a train crew disappear."

"I'll give you that—the circumstances are strange."

"It's more than just strange, Douggie—"

D.L. held up a hand. "Stop. I've told you before, Marcie, I don't want anything to do with haints and boogers and other mystical nonsense. I deal in things I can prove."

"I know, and I've done my best to respect your wishes. but listen to me, Douggie. You need to hear this. I don't think you can help your client if you don't understand what's happening here. I wouldn't ask if I didn't think it was important."

D.L. rolled her eyes again inside. “Fine. Go ahead.”

“It’s the seventh year, Duggie—not just of Coralee’s time in Baker’s Gap—it’s the seventh year of the cycle. And this year, we’re told, the ritual failed. She walks. I know you haven’t forgotten what I’m talking about, and you won’t find this in the newspaper, but Andy Hodge’s sister told me the witness they mentioned—the one who said he saw a dark-haired woman kill Frank Tilley?—was babbling something about the Dark Earth when they found him at the scene. So was Coralee when she stumbled out of the woods.”

“So, gossip and ghost stories. That’s supposed to help me in some way?”

Marcie said, “Just keep it in mind. It may help you and me make some sense of the things you hear. I need you here, to help Coralee stay out of prison. I know this town, Duggie. This is an ugly matter that’s brought to light a lot of things they don’t want to talk about. They just want to sweep it back under the rug, and if they have to railroad this poor girl to do it, they will. She’s got no family here. We’re the only ones who will help her.”

“Fine. I’ll go speak to Miss Tilley. But I can’t make you any promises, Marcie. She may refuse my help, you know. And that’s her right.”

“Fair enough. I appreciate it.”

The Johnson County Sheriff's Office in late autumn of 1927 was not a large affair. It was situated in a former storefront with wide windows facing the road. Two desks out front, and a small cell in back, which functioned mostly as a drunk tank on those occasions Andy Hodge deemed necessary—mainly when somebody got too rowdy over at Bill and Arnie's, and Andy reckoned they were better off not inflicting that foolishness on their poor families. Frank Tilley had spent some time there, though maybe not enough, in hindsight. As had the witness to his last moments, Jeremiah Silcox.

It was late afternoon, golden light and long shadows slanting through the street-facing windows, when D.L. Walker stepped through the front door. The Sheriff sat at his desk, painstakingly filling out a report regarding everything Coralee Tilley had told them, which didn't amount to much. That would later be typed up for him by his wife, Sherry Hodge. She sat at the second desk, where she answered phones, assisted with paperwork, coordinated schedules, and generally kept the office running in semi-organized fashion.

D.L. walked up to the receptionist's desk and presented her business card. "Excuse me. D.L. Walker to see Mrs. Tilley—I believe I'm expected."

Sherry Hodge raised her eyebrows at the business card and then called out, "Uh, Sheriff? That lawyer you said to expect for Coralee is here."

Andy Hodge glanced up from his paperwork and blinked. D.L. had gotten used to this reaction. Even if people knew to expect a woman, it seems they never quite expected her. She wasn't sure what they were expecting, but it clearly wasn't confident, iron-willed, pretty Douglass Walker—more fool them. “Pretty” was a weapon, and growing up in Ms. Sheila Walker's house, D.L. had learned that it was one of the strongest in a woman's arsenal, even if her chosen field of battle happened to be a court of law.

“Oh, can I... can I help you, miss?” The Sheriff stammered.

“Yes, you can. D.L. Walker, attorney at law. I'm here to see Coralee Tilley. I understand you have her in your custody. Concerned friends have asked me to represent her.”

Andy Hodge frowned. “I'm not sure if—”

“If what, Sheriff? If a woman can practice law? I assure you we can—the first woman was admitted to the bar in this country in 1869, and in your fine state in 1897, although y'all didn't let her actually practice for another decade. And although I live in Boone, North Carolina, I am, in fact, a member in good standing of the Tennessee state bar myself. I—”

“I was saying I'm not sure I can let you see her now. It's getting late in the day, and we gotta head on home.”

“Are you denying her counsel, Sheriff Hodge?”

“I assure you, I am—”

“How long has Miss Tilley been in your custody? When was the last time she was offered food or water?”

“I—”

Finally, in a rare public display of impatience, Sherry Hodge intervened. She was usually careful of her husband’s position. She never wanted to be seen to undermine his authority. But this was ridiculous. “Oh, Andy, stop being so obstinate for the sake of it,” she sighed. To D.L., she explained, “I’m gonna assume you’re Marcie’s sister, right? He just thinks she stuck her nose where it don’t belong.”

The Sheriff gave his wife a sour look, but he sighed and reached for his keys. “Fine,” he said. “Yes, Miss Tilley is in our custody, and you can speak with her if she agrees to speak with you. She’s not asked for a lawyer herself, mind, and if she says no, that’s it. Her friends can send you to offer but they can’t make her accept.”

“Yes, of course. Is Miss Tilley under arrest at this time, Sheriff Hodge?”

“She is not. She’s merely being held for questioning and for her own protection. If Miss Tilley is a witness to this crime, I’m concerned that the perpetrators might seek to do her harm, Ma’am. I understand her friends’ concern, I truly do. But believe me when I say I’m doing what I think is best here.”

D.L. could understand his position, though she certainly didn’t agree with it. From the Sheriff’s perspective, in keeping Coralee locked up, he was either protecting the community from a vicious killer or protecting a valuable witness who might be eliminated by a vicious killer or killers. That didn’t make what he was doing right—or legal, and she planned to do whatever she could to get the young woman out of here.

As she followed Andy Hodge back behind the desks, past the cell, and down a narrow set of stairs, the room Coralee had been confined in must have served as storage at some point. It was small and cold with no windows and only a bare bulb overhead to provide light. It held a table, two chairs, and a cot. And when Andy Hodge opened the door, they found Coralee curled up on the cot under a quilt. At least they provided her that, D.L. thought.

“Miss Tilley, this is the lawyer Marcie Walker sent word about,” the Sheriff told her.

“Are you willing to speak with her?”

Coralee surveyed D.L. from her position on the cot. Her dark eyes were haunted, and she looked exhausted. But she smiled.

“A lady lawyer, huh? Well, ain’t that a kick. Sure, I’ll talk to her, sheriff.”

“Do you need to use the lavatory or need to drink water or anything else first?” D.L. asked her, wondering how long she’d been locked up down here alone. But Coralee just shook her head.

“You’re sure you’re all right alone, ma’am?” The Sheriff asked, but D.L. assured him she’d be fine.

”All right, then, just knock if you need anything.” And Andy Hodge backed out the door, closing and locking it behind him. D.L. held out her hand.

“I’m D.L. Walker. I’m an attorney from Boone, but I’m also licensed to practice in Tennessee. Marcie Walker is my sister. She asked me to come speak with you.” Coralee nodded and shook D.L.’s hand hesitantly. Then she pulled herself from the cot, wrapping the blanket around her shoulders before settling into one of the chairs at the small table. D.L. took a seat across from her.

Coralee was very pale, and D.L. could still see the ghost of a bruise on one of her cheeks. She could also see why her sister had argued that Coralee could not have physically committed the crime. She was too small, too thin—and not with the wiry sort of strength you found in farm girls. Coralee looked like she might blow away in a strong

wind. D.L. didn't like to speculate about why, but she knew she might need those details and more before all this was over.

"How are you holding up?"

Coralee chuckled. "Well, they haven't been at me with rubber hoses, if, if that's what you mean."

"Well, that's good to hear, although Ms. Tilley, if they haven't charged you with a crime, they can't hold you indefinitely. I'm not sure if you know that. If you'd like me to represent you—and that's your choice, you don't have to say yes just because Marcie sent me—I can work on getting you set free."

"I don't think you want to represent me."

"Well, I don't see why I shouldn't. I don't like seeing innocent people sent to prison, and my sister assures me you wouldn't have murdered your husband, and I trust her judgment. Why don't you tell me what happened?"

Coralee gave another sad little chuckle. "You wouldn't believe me if I did."

D.L. settled into her chair and turned on the charm. It was her own special gift—perhaps not as exciting as those of some of the Walker women, but it had served her

well over the course of her career. You see, Douglass Walker was the kind of person people just loved to spill their secrets to. And she always knew if they spoke the truth.

“Oh, I believe a lot of things, Coralee. You know who my sisters are. I know you know the family reputation. Why don’t you try me?”

Coralee looked at her for a long moment, seeming to search her face for something—some confirmation that D.L. could be trusted. And then she told her everything.

[I Cannot Escape the Darkness by Those Poor Bastards]

There is a curse upon my every waking breath,

And I cannot escape the darkness...

Hey there, family. And thus concludes the second chapter of Act Two of Season Two, wherein we meet D.L. “Douggie” Walker, attorney at law. We told y’all on the Discord and in a few different places y’all would be meeting a new Walker sister this season, and lo and behold, here she is. Not sure if she’s what you’re expecting, but—promise you, she’s one of my favorite characters, uh, to roll out of Cam Collins’s evil head in a minute, so I’m really hoping y’all are enjoying this so far. We have a whole lot of exciting things almost ready to emerge into the light, and if you want to keep up with those, head on over to oldgodsofappalachia.com, where you can join us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, even jump on that Discord server—which is not limited to Patreon

patrons, it's open to everybody—and if you want to become a Patreon patron, you can unlock secrets on the Discord.

And speaking of the Patreon, if you would like to toss your tithe up on our altar of birch and elm in the darkest woods, you can do that over at

patreon.com/oldgodsofappalachia. We just dropped the second part of The Door Under the Floor, an exclusive, brand new, two-part series written by Cam Collins, featuring the voice talents of Aliya Johnson, Brandon Sartain—Episode One has those two fantastic folks, plus Allison Mullins and Betsy Puckett as well, and speaking of all those folks—all 17 episodes of Build Mama A Coffin are still available on Patreon for patrons subscribing at \$10 and more. We are working our hardest to create new digital programming—some new non-fiction programming and exciting things coming to the Patreon, and we are now partnering with some suppliers, who you're going to hear about in the very near future, to help us get some goodies into your hands in the very near future. If you follow us on Twitter, you know about Squirrel and Grub, who you can find at squirrelandgrub.com, who are going to be making some snazzy custom stuff for us. And then another partnership that you may or may not have heard about earlier in this episode that has some exciting things coming for you. That's all I'm going to say there. patreon.com/oldgodsofappalachia, any amount helps. it all makes this dream possible.

Old Gods of Appalachia is a production of DeepNerd Media. Today's story was written by Cam Collins and performed by Steve Shell. Our intro music was by our brother

Landon Blood—keep feeling better Landon—and our outro music is, of course, by Those Poor Bastards. We'll see you soon, family. See you real soon.