

OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA

Season 2 Episode 28: Paradise Lost

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

Ambition is a funny thing, family. It can drive you to achieve amazing things, if you harness it just right and ride it with skill and finesse. Or ambition can ride you, driving you to pride and greed and sometimes all manner of even worse sins. And ambition is tricky. You might think you have the reins firmly in hand, only to have it snap back around and bite you the moment you let your guard down. Tommy Adkins was doing his best to harness his ambition, and he thought he was doing an admirable job. His ambitions weren't prideful, or motivated so much by his own self-interest. He just wanted to build a good life for him and Ginny. But we all know what they say about good intentions, don't we family? Yes we do.

It had been near six months since Tommy had seen his sweetheart, Miss Virginia Estep, onto a train bound for California. Mr. Fields, the man who'd offered to help Tommy and Ginny after they'd been robbed upon arrival in Paradise, had been as good as his word — he'd met Tommy and Ginny for breakfast at a little diner the morning after they'd struck their bargain, and handed Ginny an envelope that contained a new train ticket and enough cash to replace her stolen things — and then some. She'd purchased a new suitcase and some clothes, and even had enough to buy a nice Sunday dress, a fine hat, and a pair of good shoes to wear to auditions. Ginny had been overjoyed — and very grateful.

"Now you take good care of Mr. Fields," she'd admonished him as they stood on the platform at the train station, looking radiantly happy in a new green dress and her fine hat and shoes. "He's been so kind to us."

"Yes, ma'am," Tommy had promised, and snuck another kiss in for good measure. Then he'd handed her up into the train car, and she'd waved from her seat by the window as the engine carried her away into the future, toward the Golden State. And Tommy had stayed behind, carried into his own future by a man currently known as Mr. J.T. Fields, of Paradise.

[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...

Mr. Fields — or Jack, as he'd insisted Tommy call him "seein' as we're going to be good friends, Tommy" — had put Tommy to work that very afternoon. He'd set Tommy up with a room in a boarding house that he happened to own, which was managed by a lady about his mamaw's age named Miz Booth and which was desperately in need of a good handyman. Tommy spent that first day repairing busted door latches, stuck drawers, and other minor household inconveniences, and his new landlady rewarded him handsomely at the end of the day with her own home cooking — corn bread, butter beans, and a delectable pork chop.

The next day, Jack had appeared bright and early, as Tommy, Miz Booth, and two of her other boarders sat around the breakfast table. After joining them for bacon and eggs, Jack had taken Tommy around town to introduce him to the various other tenants — another boarding house, a haberdasher downtown, a few small single-family homes — who might call upon him for property-related matters. Miz Booth's place had a telephone in the kitchen, and anytime a pipe burst or a kid playing baseball broke a window, the tenants would call there, and if Tommy was out, Miz Booth would take down a message.

Tommy was given free reign to use the telephone — a privilege not afforded the other boarders, to whom she charged a nickel — which was handy, as it allowed him to keep in touch with his parents. His mommy and daddy weren't too thrilled when Tommy had called to deliver the news

that he'd be staying on in Paradise, a hotbed of all manner of sin and iniquity, according to his mother Emma. (And to be fair, during his short time in the bustling border town, Tommy had seen quite the breadth and variety of sinning.) Boyd Adkins was a bit more circumspect in his disapproval, though he did ask who exactly was going to help Emma on the farm now — the farm that Tommy himself had insisted they should expand? That question at least was fairly easily resolved. Tommy had written home to his longtime friend, Greenie Kiser, to see if Greenie might help out his mama around the farm a few afternoons for an extra dollar or two a week, and Greenie — who loved Emma like she was own mother — had been happy to help out.

Thus Tommy's parents grudgingly accepted his sudden departure and new vocation as handyman, errand boy, and sometime chauffeur to Jack Fields. Over time, as Jack learned to trust Tommy's judgement and came to rely on him more and more, the variety of chores and responsibilities Tommy was tasked with had become... interesting.

The first of his more unusual tasks involved a plot of farmland outside of town, a long, narrow stretch alongside Bear Creek that was choked with stinging nettles, thorny vines, locust trees, and briars. Knowing Tommy's experience with farm work, Jack had asked that he clear that patch of land, which he thought would make a fine spot for growing some tobacco. So Tommy had taken his truck out there early one morning, just as the sun was peeking over the hills, pulled on a heavy pair of work gloves, and set to ripping up vines and nettles. Once that was done, he'd fetched a hatchet from the truck, and started chopping down the spiky little locust trees and briar bushes. It was a long, hard day, and Tommy had to work into the early evening, but by the end of it, the brush was cleared and the land was ready to plough. He'd returned to Miz Booth's, ate the plate of supper she'd saved for him, and had fallen into bed exhausted.

Couple days later, he'd stopped by Jack's office with the rents he'd collected from various tenants, and Jack had asked him casually, "Didn't you tell me you cleared the Bear Creek land on Monday?"

"Yes sir," said Tommy. "Cleared out all them old briars and such just like you asked."

Jack chuckled. "You sure you didn't clear some other farmer's plot by mistake? I was just by there this morning, and it looked just the same as ever."

Tommy's brow furrowed. "I'm pretty sure it wasn't. Your land has that old oak in the southwest corner. It's an easy marker to find."

Jack shook his head. "Maybe you just missed some. You give her another look and see what's what, eh, Tommy boy?"

The next morning, Tommy lit out even earlier than before, well before sunup, and drove the truck back over to Jack's plot on Bear Creek, armed this time with a full size axe and — having been stuck pretty good the last time he'd come to this property — a pair of thick leather work gloves that reached his elbows and a tough canvas work coat. Just as Jack had said, the land was once again knotted with all manner of thorny vines and prickly scrub brush, as if Tommy had never laid a hand to it. So Tommy spent yet another long, hot day chopping down nettles and sticking vines and barbed trees, and at the end of it, he piled all the discarded brush up and burned it for good measure.

Next morning, Tommy went down to Jack's office first thing after breakfast to let him know the task was done.

"Why you never!" Jack said. "Boy, I passed by there this morning, and it was just the same as it always has been."

Tommy didn't much appreciate being called a liar, and so he suggested Jack meet him there the very next day 'round sunup. He'd see for himself that Tommy was doing the work — or if, somehow, Tommy had cleared the wrong plot of land (which he knew for sure he had not), then Jack could correct his course and the whole misunderstanding would be resolved. When Tommy pulled the truck up to the same piece of scrubland he'd already cleared twice the next morning, he found Jack waiting for him, and the man confirmed that this was, indeed, the right spot.

"Well then," Tommy said, "I hate to say this, Mr. Fields, but I believe you got yourself some cursed land here."

"Cursed!" Jack snorted. "Ain't no such thing. That's fool's talk, Tommy Adkins."

Tommy sighed. “Well all right then, Jack. I’ll do the work this one last time. But I want you to meet me back here at sundown. You’ll see the work’s been done, and then I want nothing more to do with this place.”

Jack allowed as how that was fair, and so Tommy set to work clearing that same parcel of land again. By this time, he was good and mad at it, and he chopped the locust trees and briar bushes and nettles down with a vengeance. By the time Jack returned at sunset, Tommy’d already piled up the remains of all that brush and lit a sizable bonfire, which blazed away merrily, giving Jack a good, clear view of a flat, bare stretch of farmland.

“This looks good, Tommy,” Jack said. “You do mighty fine work. I don’t suppose I could convince you to come back tomorrow and get to work tilling, could I?”

“Hell no,” Tommy said, and spat on the ground at his feet. “I appreciate all you’ve done for me, Mr. Fields, but I’ll not set foot on this ground again.”

“All right then,” Jack said. “Fair enough.” And the two men stepped into their respective trucks and parted ways for the night.

Two days later, Tommy passed by the little stretch of land on Bear Creek on his way down to Bakers Gap to deliver a package — which he strongly suspected might contain moonshine — to the local hardware store. He was not at all surprised to see that same tangle of brambles and vines choking the parcel again, and some other poor fool hard at work trying to clear it for Jack Fields.

Not long after, Jack had called over to Miz Booth’s to summon Tommy down to his office again.

“Tommy, I want you to know I’m real sorry about that farmland,” Jack began. “I shouldn’t’ve doubted your word. I see now you’re an honest boy.” Jack stuck out his hand. “No hard feelings?”

“I appreciate you saying it,” Tommy said, and shook Jack’s outstretched hand. “No hard feelings.”

“I’ve got another little chore I’d like to hand over to you, if you’re willing.”

Tommy allowed as he was, and Jack proceeded to tell him about a certain farm he owned a good ten miles outside of Paradise proper, where he kept a flock of geese. The old man who had formerly occupied the farm house on the property and tended the geese in exchange for a significant discount on the rent had recently died, and driving out to take care of them every day was sorely taxing Jack’s time and resources. Now that they’d become such very good friends, Jack felt he could trust Tommy with the care and feeding of this very special flock of geese that were so dear to his heart, at least until such time as he found a new tenant whom he could trust with this awesome responsibility.

Now geese, as anybody with a lick of sense knows, are ill-tempered and violent creatures at the best of times. Tommy could not imagine why anyone would want them anywhere near their property, much less invite them there on purpose. Nevertheless, he figured a short drive out in the country to feed some geese wouldn’t take up too much of his time, and Tommy’d always been an animal lover. He couldn’t stand the thought of any poor critter going hungry, even if it was a goose.

Tommy’s first visit to feed Jack’s geese went pretty smoothly. He had a busy day ahead, so he was out at Jack’s old farm before sunup. He found the goose pen just as Jack had described it: a wide, square area behind the house that encompassed a man-made pond and some small trees for shade, surrounded by a high fence topped with netting. There was also a structure similar to a chicken coop, where Tommy imagined the geese must nest. At first Tommy didn’t see any of the occupants, early as it still was, but as he began tossing a mixture of corn, various seeds, and grasses over the fence, they came running, honking and flapping as geese are wont to do. They didn’t pay Tommy much mind, focused as they were on fresh food, and all seemed normal enough.

It wasn’t long before Tommy discovered just what had so endeared the cranky birds to Jack Fields. Tommy had been busy all morning, with one thing and another, and it was mid-afternoon before he could make it out to the farm to tend the geese. He was scattering Jack’s special recipe goose feed through the fence, when the bird nearest him suddenly fluttered her wings and

emitted a slightly startled squawk. Tommy heard a soft thump, and when he looked down, he saw the glint of gold shining in the sunlight at his feet.

An egg. To all appearances, the goose had laid an egg made out of gold.

Now Tommy was no thief, but he thought he must be seeing things — it couldn't possibly be what it appeared — and he just had to inspect the object for himself to figure out what exactly was going on. It wasn't far inside the fence — it was just within reach — and so Tommy knelt down and reached inside to pluck the egg-shaped object from the grass.

Mama goose let out an enraged hiss, and a gout of flame erupted from her bill as her head darted toward Tommy's outstretched fingers. Tommy yelped and jerked his singed knuckles back, falling hard on his backside in the grass outside the pen. As the hissing, flame-spewing goose advanced, he scuttled quickly backward on his hands, safely out of range. He held up his hands in surrender — "Sorry, Mama. No harm intended. I'll let you be" — and quickly retreated to his truck. Thereafter, Tommy made a special effort to get to the farm early in the morning, when the geese seemed quieter, and to avoid that particular goose entirely.

Awhile after Tommy had taken charge of the geese, Jack called him down to his office again.

"Tommy boy, you've done real good work here," Jack said, leaning back in his chair and stretching. "And you've proved yourself trustworthy. You ain't even tried to steal my eggs," he chuckled. "Now I've got another special favor I need to ask you. I know I've been keeping you pretty busy, but this only has to be done every other week, so it shouldn't be too much trouble. You see I've got another little... I've got a friend I need you to take care of. Name's Tiny. He lives way up on the mountain, place called Leary Cave — I'll draw you a map — I just need you to take him a side of beef every other Friday. Think you can take care of that for me?"

Tommy had shrugged. "Sure, Jack." He delivered packages to various and sundry places for Jack every day. It sounded easy enough. Of course, it was slightly more complicated than Jack let on.

First, it couldn't be just any old side of beef. Jack, it turns out, had imported a herd of cows directly from England specifically for this purpose. Tiny, it seemed, was a very picky eater, and

Tommy had to drive twenty miles out of his way to pick the beef up from the butcher who prepared them special for Jack. Second, Jack explained, Tiny had very sensitive eyes and couldn't much stand the sunlight, so Tommy had to arrive just at dusk for Tiny to come out and meet him. While these requirements made the whole chore somewhat inconvenient, the map Jack drew for him was clear and accurate, and Tommy had no trouble finding his way up the narrow, twisty mountain roads to the location marked clearly with an X.

Tommy had imagined the area he was visiting was simply named for a local landmark — the eponymous Leary Cave. He was not expecting to crest the top of a rise and find himself not pulling into the yard of some mountaineer's cabin, but coming to a stop before the mouth of the cave itself. Sitting in his truck, Tommy stared, dumbfounded for a moment. Leary Cave was massive. And it was sealed off with what appeared to be a large, sturdy iron grate, although the spaces between its bars looked large enough for Tommy to walk through easily. Tommy guessed they might have been installed for structural integrity rather than to keep people out. From deep within, he could see the flickering of firelight. Heaving a weary sigh, Tommy climbed from the truck, pulled the side of beef from the back of the truck and slung it over his shoulder, and made his way toward the cave.

Tommy had barely reached the grate before the firelight he'd glimpsed was suddenly cast in shadow, and a deep voice boomed from within the cave:

"Fee fi fo fum! I smell the blood of an English... cow!" Tommy heard a deep snuffling sound. "What's this!? Not Jack?" In the gathering gloom, Tommy saw an enormous, hulking figure step from the shadows to peer out the mouth of Leary Cave, a body so large its owner had to hunch to keep from striking his head, and suddenly Tommy realized the grate had not been intended to keep anyone *out* at all. "Who's this, come calling at my home this night?"

"Um... my name's Tommy. Tommy Adkins. Jack sent me to, uh, bring your delivery. That is, if you're Mister... uh, Mister Tiny."

The booming voice chuckled. "So old Jack's found himself a new errand boy, eh? Well, boy, bring me my dinner. See there, just pass it through the bars for me."

Tommy couldn't say he'd mind to relieve himself of his burden — a side of beef is mighty heavy, even for a strong young man — so he did as he was asked, shrugging the dead cow off his shoulder and moving to set it down inside the grate. Moving faster than Tommy would have believed anyone that large could, the giant snatched at the beef, his enormous hands gripping both the cow — and Tommy's coat sleeve — as he grinned. Tommy leapt back, wiggling out of his coat, and watched it disappear through the bars along with the meat.

The giant winked. "Jack likes to use a pitchfork to pass it through," he said conversationally as he began tearing into the side of beef with his bare hands and teeth. Tommy thought with a shiver how sharp the thick yellow nails and gleaming white teeth must be.

"Well, uh, Mister Tiny, I... I guess I'll be going," Tommy said finally. "I'll... see you in a couple weeks?"

Tiny grunted. "You tell your master, boy: he can send all the hired hands up this mountain he wants, but the day's comin I'll grind his bones to make my bread."

Tommy had taken the giant's piece of advice to heart, and stopped by the hardware store for a nice, long-handled pitchfork — as well as a shovel, just in case he needed to smack those enormous hands — before his next trip up the mountain.

Tommy had been living in Paradise, fetching and carrying and delivering and fixing things for Jack for nigh on half a year when, one warm afternoon, Jack called him down to his office and invited him to sit a spell, and poured them both a drink. "Well Tommy," he announced as he settled into his chair, "I don't know if you've been keeping track — and I sure have appreciated having your help — but I allow your debt to me is paid by now. I seem to recall telling you I could help set you up with a good job — I mean, one paying a little better than this one, so you can get out to Californy to join Miss Ginny — am I right?"

Tommy took a tiny sip of the moonshine Jack had poured him, tried not to cough, coughed anyway, and finally answered, "Yes sir, that's about what I recall too."

Jack clapped his hands together. “Well, that’s all good then. If you’ll meet me tomorrow morning at the railway office, I’ll be pleased to introduce you to my friend from the railroad and give him my glowing recommendation. I’ve knowed him since he was a boy, and he’s done right well for himself as the railroad has grown. If you get the chance, compliment his suit. The boy dresses like he walked out of one of them fashion magazines Miss Ginny likes so much. ” And he passed Tommy a business card on which he’d scribbled the address.

So Tommy had pulled out his best Sunday clothes, and paid Miz Booth an extra two bits to wash and iron ‘em special, and found himself waiting outside a tall office building the next morning. Jack arrived promptly at nine, as promised. He spoke briefly with a young blonde woman with glasses before they were directed upstairs, into a spacious office decorated in fine, polished hardwood furniture and plush carpet. Behind the desk sat a much younger man than Tommy had imagined to meet — tall, broad-shouldered, well dressed, with dark hair and a fashionably thin mustache.

“Tommy, I’d like to introduce you to Mr. Nathaniel Locke. Mr. Locke’s family owns the en-tire Locke Rail Company, and one day all of this —” he gestured extravagantly around them “— will be his.”

Nathaniel Locke grinned, and walked out from behind the desk, reaching out to shake Jack’s hand. “Mr. Fields! Always good to see you!” He spoke in a warm, rich baritone that seemed to fill the room. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“Hoping for a favor. Or,” Jack chuckled, “perhaps I should say I’m here to do *you* one. This young man is Mr. Tommy Adkins. Tommy here is looking to get into the business. He’s been serving as my assistant — handyman — really any damn thing I need, for a good while now. He’s a quick learner — smart as a tack — and I assure you, you won’t find a harder worker.”

Nathaniel Locke turned his gaze on Tommy. His eyes were a bright, sparkling green — and as cold as any reptile’s. Tommy felt a sudden, deep chill, and the hairs on the back of his neck rose. For a moment, he felt a sense of vertigo, and the strange, cold sensation he’d sometimes gotten when he had to go help his daddy down in the mines. He almost thought he heard that same strange whispering he’d heard down there in the dark. Of course, that couldn’t be possible,

could it? Not in the middle of town on a sunny morning. But it was as clear to him as day that there was something... not right... *deeply* not right... about this man.

Somehow, Tommy found himself mechanically returning Nathaniel Locke's cold smile. He managed to force himself to shake Locke's hand, which was cold and oddly clammy in spite of the warm spring day. After that, there was little for him to do. He sat quietly, smiling and nodding along and answering questions when prompted, and listened to Jack and this terrifying stranger seemingly plan out his whole future, with very little input from Tommy himself.

Tommy kept quiet until they'd left the Paradise offices of Locke Rail, walked away into downtown Paradise, and were seated behind closed doors in Jack's office again.

"Well, Tommy boy, looks like you've made a great impression," Jack said. "Mr. Locke wants you to start next week. You'll be on your way in no time, I'm sure of it."

"No," Tommy said. "No, I won't."

"No? What do you mean 'no'? This is your big chance, son!"

"Jack, I... I can't work for that man. There's something — I don't know — something not right about him. I can't explain any better than that. I won't do it. I can't!"

For the first time Tommy could remember seeing, Jack frowned. "You can and you *will*. I think you misunderstand the situation here, Mr. Adkins. You're *my* boy, and you'll stay *my* boy, and you'll do what you're told. Next week, you will walk into the offices of Locke Rail with a smile on your face and make yourself invaluable to Nathaniel Locke. Fetch his dry cleaning, keep track of his appointments, hell polish his shoes with your spit if he asks you to. And in the evenings, you'll see me for dinner at Miz Booth's. And you'll tell me everything you see and hear. Where he goes, who he meets with, everything that happens in that office."

"Or what? You can't make me take a job I don't want."

Jack's expression darkened. The glare he turned on Tommy was full of fury. Suddenly Tommy had the inexplicable, isolated feeling like he'd wandered into the deep woods, far from hearth and home and the sound of mama's voice at supper time. He heard the distant screeching of cicadas in the summertime, and the smell of copperheads rose in the air. "Or I will make sure you never see pretty Miss Virginia Estep again. I do know people in Californy, Tommy. I can make sure of it."

Tommy stared at Jack in shock. "You wouldn't! You wouldn't hurt Ginny just... just to punish me!"

Jack smiled, and it was far from the warm, cordial expression Tommy had grown used to. "No, of course not, Tommy. I wouldn't... *hurt* her. I'd just... throw a few obstacles her way. Maybe some Hollywood pretty boy to just —" he snapped his fingers "— snatch her right out from under you. It could happen easily, Tommy. She's young and pretty, and you're very far away right now. As for you, though... well, there I can't make you any promises. Accidents happen, Tommy. They do."

Tommy felt cold. It seemed his life had spun suddenly and sharply out of control, and he had no idea how it had come to this. "How..." Tommy licked his lips nervously. "How long is this supposed to last? You promised me you'd help me get to Ginny faster. You're threatening to keep me away from her, but it doesn't seem like I'm going to be free to go to her."

And just like that, Jack's expression was all cheerful smiles again, the traces of his previous coldness gone in a blink. "Aw, not so long, Tommy boy. Just until I get the information I need. Who knows? If you work hard, Mr. Locke might transfer you to their Californy office, just like you want."

Tommy nodded, feeling numb. "All right then, Jack."

Jack stood up and clapped him on the shoulder. "You're a good boy, Tommy!" And he reached into the cabinet by the desk and pulled out two glass tumblers and a bottle of his favorite 'shine.

As they sat quietly, drinking and watching the sunset through Jack's office window, Tommy found the courage to ask the question that was preying on his mind. "What... what is he, Jack? Do you know?"

Jack shook his head. "Don't you ever ask that question again, Tommy. Especially outside of this room. Don't you ever let on that you know anything is wrong, understand?" He sighed. "To be honest, boy, if I'd known you'd be able to see it, I would've picked somebody else for this job. But it's too late now, and we gotta play the hand we're dealt. Just ignore whatever you see or... feel or... whatever it is people like you do. Act like everything is normal. It'll all be fine."

And that is how Tommy Adkins found himself standing outside the Paradise offices of Locke Rail Company on a bright, sunny Monday morning, brushing off his clothes and trying to steel himself for the ordeal to come. As hard as he tried, it seemed he was never meant to escape the dark things of this world. He'd run far from the mines of Esau County, yet all his ambition and planning and hard work had still brought him to the same place: headed into the belly of the beast.

[I Cannot Escape the Darkness by Those Poor Bastards]

*There is a curse upon my every waking breath,
And I cannot escape the darkness...*

Well hey there, family. Welcome to the end of our time in the fine city of Paradise. We'll leave Tommy Adkins here on his new mission from Jack, and who knows when Jack will call that marker due? But I promise you it'll get back around at one point or another. But not right now, because right now we have reached the true home stretch — hell, I wouldn't even call it a stretch. We have reached the end of season two. There are two episodes remaining — two episodes remaining — and they do not involve our time in Paradise. We have unfinished business, that's all I have to say about it. You are not gonna want to miss episodes 29 and 30 of Old Gods of Appalachia, so please come on back with us, family. You'll come back, won't you? I bet you will.

Family, we want to give a shout-out to everybody who has completed their social media ritual, and by that I mean joining us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, on the Discord server. All the things you can find linked over at oldgodsofappalachia.com, including a link to our Patreon, where if you want to gain access to the 17 part epic of Build Mama a Coffin, the two part peanut butter smoothie and horror wonder that is The Door Under the Floor, and the exciting new series Steve Reads wherein I read everything from backs of boxes of cereal to the instructions on cat harnesses to even teaching lesson plans that I taught as a high school teacher, just so y'all could have my voice. Maybe to fall asleep to, maybe to work out to, hell what you do with it is your business but it is available to all patrons for the low low price of \$5 and up.

That's available at patreon.com/oldgodsofappalachia, and pretty soon — once season two is over — that Patreon is gonna be hoppin' with the Porchlight flash fiction anthology series; the upcoming full cast production of Black Mouth Dog, which is a prequel to Build Mama a Coffin; and a lot more exciting stuff still to come. We have our brand new three part miniseries from Jordan Shiveley that will appear sometime between seasons two and three this fall. There's so much coming from the Old Gods family. We want you to be part of it, and being part of the Patreon gets you advance access — ad-free access, I might add, though I hear my Hello Fresh ads are pretty entertaining from what people tell me. But regardless, patreon.com/oldgodsofappalachia will let you join us on a whole new level.

Old Gods of Appalachia is a production of DeepNerd Media and is distributed and marketed by Rusty Quill. Today's intro music was by our brother Landon Blood, and our outro music is by Those Poor Bastards. Today's story was written by Cam Collins and performed by Steve Shell. See you soon, family. See you real soon.