

## OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA

### Season 2 Episode 29: A Friend of the Family

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

Every town has a lover's lane. Some are remote backroads that snake back around a mountain's ribcage to where nobody but you, your chosen companion and the lord himself can see what you're up to. Others are places just off the road or back in the woods that you can sneak off to and not be seen if you pick the right night and time and nobody else got there first.

Young Bradley Gilliam and Vinetta Spears had just such a place in mind and had headed there instead of going to the church social out in Rogersville, TN. They had snuck out toward Caney Creek to do a little of the Devil's business in an old abandoned house that everybody of a certain hormonally driven age was aware of. As is the case with many old abandoned houses, there was a ghost story attached. It was said that if you went when the moon is full, or new, or half full or on the third Thursday of the month — the story changed depending on who was doing the telling — but if you timed it right, you could see a grisly murder replaying itself over and over right there on the front porch as the ghost of a betrayed husband butchered his wife's secret lover with a long hunting knife and took his time doing it. Mikey Noonchester said he'd seen it on a clear summer night. Said it was a long and gruesome affair. You took what the Noonchester boys said with a big old grain of salt, but still... the story spread.

Most couples that went to see this spectral drama play itself out on the stage of eternity were usually disappointed but managed to console themselves with a little roll in the proverbial hay, so to speak, or a tussle upon one of the dusty old mattresses inside the house if you were brave or stupid enough to try get in there. Bradley Gilliam had been that brave, and that stupid. Leaving Vinetta to wait outside while he made sure they had the place to themselves, he'd pried boards off the front window and crept on in there, wherein he immediately found that the house was not as abandoned as the stories said it was, however it was just as haunted. Vinetta Spears would later tell the police that she had heard Bradley start screaming and somebody else start laughing, and she'd run til she'd found a house with a porchlight on and a door to knock on.

I wish I could tell you, Family, that Bradley Gilliam was never seen again... but he was. Once. Two nights after Vinetta related her story to the local authorities, a young man very much resembling young Bradley walked into a church bingo game, calm as you please, and just straight up started stabbing people. Witnesses say he was cackling and laughing' the whole time as he wielded a long, long hunting knife like the angel of death himself. He'd managed to mortally wound three older folks and maim four others, and by the time anybody understood what was happening Bradley had bolted, blood smeared and belly laughing', into the woods.

The police searched the house out on Caney Creek, found neither hide nor hair of Bradley Gilliam in any of the rooms or on the grounds, and they boarded the place back up and moved on. They didn't have any reason to check the cellar as there was no evidence that anyone had even touched the padlocked door from the outside and there was no entrance to the small, dank room from inside the house. None that they could find. The room was there though, and inside it was a long wooden table where rested the remains of Bradley Gilliam, naked and bloody, every inch of his skin removed. If they'd bothered going out back of the house and going way out to the property line, right down by the edge of the creek itself, they would have found the rest of ol' Bradley, hung up to dry on a clothesline like papaw's overalls. They also might have found old Skint Tom waitin' for 'em there in the dark like he was, bloody and skinless and nekkid himself.

Bone tired after a good hard run at being somebody else for a day or two but always ready for a good time, Tom was right proud at how much he'd gotten done. He would've liked to have had the girl too — he enjoyed going home as a girl from time to time, he'd managed to butcher whole extended families that way before. They never saw it coming, and he'd have a whole goshdurn new wardrobe for a week or more. As Tom was admiring his handiwork and lamenting that he'd soon have to burn the skin of Bradley Gilliam soon before it started stinking', something moved in the trees behind him.

Tom's hackles went up. It was the deepest part of the night, and nothing told him anything living that he needed to worry about was nearby. Who in the world would be creepin' around in the woods interfering with his private time of reflection and relaxation? He heard the sound of a man — a big man, from the sound of it — coming through the trees, not making the least bit of effort to be quiet. Tom tried to suss out which direction his new plaything might be coming. Big or small, Tom was stronger and faster than any living man, so if he got to be a big boy for a day

or two, well hot damn — this might be the best week in a long time! The sounds were confusing though. They seemed to be coming from all around him, and before ol' Skint Tom could get his bearings, someone cleared their throat behind him and a rich baritone filled the clearing.

“Thomas, son of Patrick Who Fell into Shadow, Grandson to Doris, Who Tried and Servant of Those Who Sleep Beneath, I'm afraid we must speak.”

Skint Tom turned to find a man seemingly the size of a barn door staring down at him. He started to brandish his knife, or to change his shape, or to do something that might — if you'll pardon the expression — “save his skin”... and then he met the man's eyes and the world fell away. Skint Tom let his trusty hunting knife drop to the ground as he realized there was nowhere he could run, and nothing he could do to escape this man.

Tom swallowed hard. “Well... shit.”

[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...*

Esau County received more snow each winter than any other place in the state of Virginia — more than four feet on average — and in 1928, the cold mornings persisted well past Easter. There were crocuses and daffodils poking up through an inch or so of sparkling white snow as Delia Hubbard stepped from the cozy old farmhouse nestled into the heart of

Boggs Holler and headed across the yard to gather eggs. She'd had enough in the pantry this morning to fix breakfast for herself and her cousin, Indiana Boggs, but that had been the last of them, so now it was time to disturb the ladies of the henhouse once again. Her cousin looked after most of their animals, but he left this chore to Deeley. Indy didn't like chickens. He said they were mean — like to peck the skin off your hands — although none of Mamaw Boggs' chickens had ever pecked Deeley.

Today she found the Boggs Holler chickens as sedate as ever, and had no trouble reaching gently into their nests to retrieve the current bounty of fresh eggs. Most of these she would keep for herself — either for eating or for use in her workings — but she would set a few aside to send over the ridge with Indy for Miz Olinger, whose failing eyesight and increasing arthritis prevented her from keeping her own chickens anymore. It was high time Miz Olinger sold her house or passed it on to one of the young'uns, and moved in with one of the older Olinger siblings — Deeley had told her as much — but Betty Olinger was as stubborn as a mule and so far, she wouldn't budge. One day soon she wasn't going to have a choice about it no more, and Deeley hated to see that day come, but she didn't see any way around it. There was only so much she could do, and her handiwork could not stop the hands of the clock for the folks she looked after.

Since she had eggs to send over anyway, Deeley decided she might as well go ahead and mix up another batch of the ointment she made to ease the pains in Miz Olinger's gnarled hands. So she looped the egg basket over her arm, latched up the door to the henhouse, and turned toward the little shed where she hung up her herbs for drying.

To her surprise, she found a strange man had come into the yard in the short time she'd spent with the hens. He was sitting on a simple wooden bench under the old apple tree, with his legs crossed at the ankles and his fingers laced together in his lap. Seated or not, she could see he was immensely tall — quite possibly the tallest man she'd ever met — and just about as broad, with smooth brown skin and a thick, well maintained beard. He looked to be about her father's age, if her daddy had lived to see her grow up.

Deeley might have felt afraid, finding an unknown man on her property unannounced, if she were anyone else or anywhere else. But the wards set around Boggs Holler would not admit anyone who meant her or her family harm, of that she had no doubt. Beside that, this stranger offered her no threat. He sat quietly, calm and relaxed, on the bench. He exuded a sense of... well, of peace, that's the best way she could explain it. Moreover, the Green... filled him. He was *of the Green*, more surely than anyone Deeley had ever encountered. She wasn't quite sure how she knew that, but she felt it in her bones to be true.

"Morning, stranger."

"Greetings, young one. I came to speak with Glory Ann, daughter of Jean, granddaughter of Esther, Spine of the Mountain, but I see now she's passed on. You must be her... granddaughter?"

"Yes, sir. Deeley Hubbard. Pleased to meet you. Is there something I can help you with?"

The big man smiled, and it was like the sun breaking through a stormy sky. "Delia Hubbard, daughter of Mercy and granddaughter of Glory Ann and Waylon, Hope of Boggs Holler, I believe you'll do just fine."

Marcy Walker was exhausted, but it was the good kinda whupped that come at the end of a day when every fence had been mended, every critter fed, every floor swept and every chore crossed off the list. The sun had just begun to draw the edge of Bays Mountain into a lover's embrace as it sank into a cool East Tennessee spring evening. Marcy settled into an old rocker on the back porch of the Walker house and sighed contentedly. No, that's not quite right, Family. She *wanted* it to be a contented sigh, she did. She wanted to think about how Ellie would come back from Esau County for a visit and with good news. She wanted to smile at the thought that Melvin and Clara would be coming over for supper tomorrow evening and that Clara had promised to bring her green beans, that should legally be declared a pork product based on the amount of time they spent slow cookin' with a whole brick of fatback in the middle of them. She should have

been casting hopeful thoughts to the future, but she couldn't. She wanted everything to be all right and the work to be done, but neither of those things were true.

She could feel it.

She could feel *her*.

She'd felt it before Miss Belle turned up with the Absher boy and what was inside him. She'd felt it in her bones when one of the women who'd passed through the house last month told her about the poor camp up on Peters Branch and the sermons being preached there. Promises of a pale woman and her babe, walking through the hills dispensing what some would call justice and others would call vengeance — either way, they thought she was answering prayers and were glad for her.

Every child that grew up in these mountains with a gift in their family knew her. They'd been raised with stories of the Woman Who Walks, the Mother and the Babe — hell, some even called her the Queen of the Dead. Marcie and Ellie had been told of her the same way church folk taught their young'uns about the Rapture: that their generation might be the one to see such a rising, and they'd better be ready. She imagined that similar tales were passed among the Things that crawled the underbelly of these mountains too. She'd been face to face with her share of Things that liked to talk, and they feared the Walking Woman hard.

But it was more than just stories and legends to the families with the true gift. They knew what was at stake and thus took turns about keeping that door closed. Marcie herself had even taken part in the rites before, made the trip out to the nameless place that wasn't on no map and that she couldn't ever find her way back to unless she was supposed to. She'd stood beside Ellie and across from two other... Things that she tried not to think about and said the words and shed the blood to seal tight the tomb. She knew it was real, and she knew in her heart and in her blood that it had gone wrong and the binding was broken.

From what the sisters could discern, the Woman had been walking for the better part of the past year. She had no idea what she could do about it on her own. Hell, even with Ellie at her side, going looking for the Woman and Child was stupid at best and a deathwish in truth. The initial

binding was a legendary working. It had been held for over a hundred years. Some of the families that helped create and maintain it might not even exist anymore, spread apart as they all were now. She could write to some of the folks her Mama had knowed back home in West Virginia. Marcie was the oldest of Sheila Walker's gifted girls, so they'd be bound to answer. Some she'd known since she was little. Lucy Cronin and Barbara Churchman had stayed in touch over the years. Barbara had even visited once when they first had the house open, and if she wasn't thinkin' wrong, Barb was a cousin maybe by marriage to the Underwoods and that bloodline ran deep and old in the hills around Oak Mountain. It might be the best chance they had if any of them were still around.

The sound of heavy footsteps shook Marcy from her contemplation, which should not have been possible. The wards surrounding the house had not alerted her to anyone approaching, much less walking along the narrow, almost hidden path that led from the side yard to the back. Marcy was on her feet as quick as her tired bones would allow. Her walking stick moved from its resting place by the back door to her hand with half a thought, and she began to draw protection around herself. She held her breath as an enormous man she did not know rounded the corner and stepped into her field of view.

Marcy Walker was not a small woman. She was broad shouldered and tall, and she met most of the men in town eye to eye when they did business or traded goods. This man was much, much taller and twice as broad — he was big enough that Melvin would have to look up at him. He was dressed in a simple black suit with a jacket like a deacon or pastor, but he wore no neck tie or collar to his plain white shirt. His feet were shod in serviceable leather shoes, good enough for church but nothin' fancy. He was black and thickly bearded. His skin seemed to catch the dying light of the sunset and warm it to something greater. He was not young, but was far from old, more like a father in his prime would age magnificently into the kind of patriarch who could signal that it was time to say grace, or clear the table without a word. But right now, if you'd told Marcy this man had two school aged children and a beautiful wife waiting for him at home, she'd have believed it. As he moved fully to face her, he placed his hand over his heart and inclined his head.

“You have a lovely home, Marcia Lynn, daughter of Sheila, granddaughter of Beatrice, most blessed of your line still living.”

The man's voice washed over her like the water of a sun warmed lake, and the formal cadence of how he named her made her a little light headed. Marcy did not lower her guard and kept her staff raised. Who was this man? How on earth did he get past her wards?

"You can relax, Miss Walker. I'm an old friend of your family."

Marcy did not relax. She shook her head clear and really *looked* at the man, tried to place him as anyone Mama might have known. She squinted as she scrutinized his handsome face and took in his overall size and presence, and then she opened her senses to see what the Green would let her see — and it was like trying to stare into the sun. Her whole body was filled with the light and heat of a summer's day at the swimmin' hole when she was barely five, the joy of jumping off the rocks at Crane's Nest with Ellie when she was thirteen, the heart pounding surge of the first time she kissed Suzanne Worsham after lessons at sixteen, and finally the first time the Green answered her call and filled her with purpose and strength by closing a binding around a thing that had been hurting her best friend's mamaw. Her eyes filled with tears of wonder.

"You... you... you're..."

"Miss Walker, we don't have time for all that. We have to talk about *her*."

Marcy at long last let her staff drop all the way to the ground as she took a deep, shuddering breath, wiped her eyes, and nodded.

In the mountains of Virginia, not far from the West Virginia border, stood a rambling old two-story house that looked empty but was not. Its paint had long ago worn thin, and the weathered gray boards showed through. The tin roof was rusted and the porch sagged and the chimney leaned precariously away from its foundations. The downstairs windows were busted, and had been hastily patched up with thin plywood planks at some point, which now hung askew where they hadn't fallen off. The whole edifice was draped in a curtain of unkempt Virginia creeper that had been allowed to run ramshot over the garden, unfettered by any groundskeeper's hand, and was slowly devouring the house. The whole effect was not

unlovely, a melancholy beauty wrought in decay as the Green reclaimed this forgotten homestead for its own.

It was here, amid this glorious ruin, that Miss Lavinia and her present company of followers currently made their nest. There were five of them, three young men and two young women, who served the Beast currently — served her and worshipped her and bled for her and would kill for her if she asked it, although that was the sort of entertainment Lavinia usually reserved for herself. When they came to this house, though, they did kill for her, needing more bones to supplement the four skulls they had carried with them, wrapped carefully in burlap sacks and tucked away in the false bottom of a battered steamer trunk. In the big downstairs foyer with its sweeping (if crumbling) staircase and high, airy ceiling, they built her a makeshift throne out of bones and birchwood and feathers, with the four skulls situated one on each side of the back, and one at the end of each arm, where she could rest her hands comfortably. Then they consecrated it in blood — their own blood, a sign of their devotion — and draped it in furs so that she could sit comfortably, and ringed the whole thing in candles, which they lit nightly the moment the sun dipped below the horizon.

It was a gaudy bit of theatre, but Lavinia had always thrived on drama.

The candles had all been lit, their glow seeping through the cracks between the boards on the windows and spilling from the glass panes in the front door, as a tall, broad man stepped from the trees and approached the house. The night had grown cold, but the chill didn't seem to faze him. The porch swayed and creaked under his weight as he stepped up and rapped lightly on the door. Through the glass, he could see Lavinia, sprawled naked over the bone chair, her legs over one arm, her elbow propped on a pillow, a bottle of what looked like homemade wine in her hand.

Moments after his knock, the door was opened by a gangly kid with a mass of curly brown hair in a second-hand brown suit at least two sizes too big for him. Piercing blue eyes blinked owlishly up at the man on the porch from behind a pair of thick, round spectacles. He couldn't have been much more than twenty. "Uhhh... Miss Lavinia?" he called back over his shoulder. "There's a man here." He swallowed nervously. "A, uh... a *big* man."

Lavinia sighed and rolled her eyes. “Aww. Let him in,” she said in a bored tone, snapping the fingers of one hand at him in an impatient come-hither gesture. As he stepped into the foyer, she looked the broad-shouldered man up and down and smirked. “Nice suit. I suppose you’re here about... ooh! *Her!* She’s off wandering ‘round the hills... terrorizing the taxpayers... and you want my help.”

He nodded, frowning. “The last ritual failed due in part to your negligence, child. It will not happen again. You *will* do your part as you have sworn.”

“Negligence! The humans made it clear they didn’t want *my* help. Call themselves witches! They’re nothing more than a bunch of self-righteous old god botherers. So offended by seeing a pair of titties! Hmph. As if *real* witches didn’t run skyclad through the night since the first woman raised her head from the dust.”

“They are humans. Sometimes we must make concessions to their... quaint ideas. And you will make them, Lavinia Thrice-Damned, Beast of Lonely Creek. You will put your dress on and come to the appointed place on the new moon to do what you have pledged to do.”

Lavinia glared at him obstinately for a good minute, but his face was impassive, resolute. Finally she sighed. “Fine. Fine! You fuzzy-faced old nag. But you’d best remind those old biddies who they’re dealing with. If they don’t mind their manners, I may demonstrate why they call me the Beast.”

Between this world and the next there are nooks and crannies, folds and pockets — places where myths and legends, monsters and gods go when they are no longer needed or not currently bent on shaping this world to their will. It is to such a place our broad shouldered stranger must go next. Through to the boundary and past Mingo Falls where there is no road to follow, and after a while no stars to plot course by. In this darkness waits an ancient thing: a creature of the first people, whose name is not spoken for fear that she might hear it and come to see who calls.

There are many hungry things loose in the world family, things that want nothing more than to fill their bellies with the flesh of all they find solely on instinct. Very few of those act on malice or out of vengeance, but the creature our intrepid traveller must call upon would only act out of such. The land these stories are told upon, and the land that was “settled” by my ancestors, was stolen and paid for in blood and deception. The legends of a people betrayed and butchered by landthieves and liars are bound to be angry and boiling with a thirst for retribution.

He finds her resting beneath what might pass for a tree on our side of the veil. She is stonesskin and thunderstep, shifter of shape and bearer of one long, spear-like finger. Once she’s entrenched herself in your life, she cannot shift her shape while being seen, but being seen here is different. To our new friend’s eyes, she is all at once the shadow of a mass grave one moment and the kindest grandmother you’d ever meet the next. She is a river wrought with blood and also the person you would embrace first at the family reunion. She is brooding hate and purple bruise void. She is a people betrayed, and even those people feared and loathed her. She breathes. She waits. She looks up at his approach.

“It has been a long time, and though I loathe to disturb your rest, I find I must. The binding has broken, and she walks. We need one as feared as you to bring thunder and stone to put her down. Will you come?”

*[ The sounds of thunder grinding stones communicate her assent.]*

“Thank you, old sister. Until the new moon then.”

There are bloodlines in Appalachia that run back to the settling. There are lines that disappear in one place and reappear in another as coal boomed and busted its way through the early part of the century. Mostly men would go where the work was. Immigrants from overseas and black folks from down south came and settled and moved on and settled again all across Appalachia. Hell, over by Dorchester there used to be a whole section of town called Hunktown where Hungarian immigrants bloomed a whole community into being, building their bread ovens and

seasoning the pot of southern Appalachia in their own way. Same thing with the Italian folks who came over to that same area and necessitated the building of one of the first Catholic churches in Esau county. Go a few years up the road and the West Virginia side of the border had more coal to dig, better pay, more land to sell, and those folks just up and moved north. Hunktown and St. Anthony's faded away into the wide spot in the road that Dorchester would eventually become, and West Virginia would get the pepperoni roll. T'wasnt fair, Family. T'wasn't fair at all.

But in Bower County, WVA, lived the Underwoods. The Underwood family's roots ran so deep in fact they were an object of both reverence and fear. Being Black in Appalachia is not something I can speak to, Family, but from what I've been told, and read and tried to understand, I know that it is the furthest thing from easy. Take a culture built on coal camp survival mentality. Introduce racial segregation as the base level of living, then make sure one side of the equation fully understands that they are considered expendable, will only be given the jobs down in the deepest dark where the fewest damns are given about whether they come back up or not. And if they don't like it, they can just git, but they'd better not let the sun go down on them in this county as they go.

With all that, other families moved up north as part of the migration. The Underwoods stayed. Lee and Marigold Underwood got their names on a parcel of land about half way up Oak Mountain and wasn't about to let it go. They'd found their place and their place had found them. The Green ran strong in Marigold's side of the family. She had walked that scrubby little patch of land the agent didn't want to sell them and marked its margins herself. She didn't need any man's help telling her where she was supposed to be. The Green told her. Miss Marigold was a gifted healer, a seer, a midwife, and spoke with both the buried and the not buried as easily as she did with her neighbors, and her husband Lee was a diviner and a healer. Doc Underwood, they called him, though he never set foot in no medical school. If you was Black and your baby was sick, you took 'em to see Doc Underwood and Miss Marigold and chances were, they'd be all right. Hell, some white folks brought their kids there too. At night. In secret. And were willing to pay to make sure nobody knowed they'd been there.

When the bulk of the Black community took off for the mining towns of southern McDowell County, the Underwoods stayed put, the last holdouts in a sea of Scots-Irish whiteness for the most part. So of course they had trouble. But trouble never had them, if you follow me.

Bunch of Klan boys came through and burned down the Underwood house... or thought they did. Because when the sun come back up, it was still there. So the next time they stayed through the night, made sure it burned to the foundation. But two days later there it was again, this time on the other side of the hill, and somehow even bigger and grander than before. The Underwood place must've been "burned to the ground" ten times before word got around that the place was cursed or the devil kept it or something. Either way it's been a goodly while since a credible arson attempt happened. Other forms of harassment had tried and failed over the years to dig the Underwoods out of Bower County. There'd been violence and fire and threats of rope, but every time, something came between the Underwoods and that old black door.

One time two men jumped Marigold while she was walking home visiting with an ailing family up on the mountain and broke her arm. Would've done a whole lot worse if the ensuing struggle hadn't sent them tumbling down a hillside and into a big old nest of hornets. The two men — brothers, it turned out — were highly allergic to bee stings and died right there on the spot, puffed and violently swollen. Marigold suffered nary a sting, and Doc was able to treat her injuries in the way that he was specially able. This kind of thing would stop and start over and over again through the years, but it became clear that you could not uproot the Underwoods.

Doc and Marigold had kids of their own, all girls. The two older girls, Regina and Jessie, had moved up north with a miner and steelworker, respectively. The three younger girls stayed to help their folks maintain the house and keep up with the demand for their parents' services until Doc passed away about ten years ago, and then that focus shifted to taking care of their mama and the house. Those duties had intensified over the last year as their usually hale and spry mother had begun to wane.

She'd lost weight. Her sleep was erratic at best. The dreams had been coming hard, she said. Told them that their Daddy had come by a few times to see her too. She didn't tell them what he said — that there was bad happening all over, and the heart of it was down in Tennessee in the place with no name. She knew she had to do something, tell somebody, but lately she'd just felt

so sickly and lost. To top it off, today was her birthday. Seventy years she'd walked this old world, and until this year she thought she might do another seventy, but that was starting to feel like a longshot.

She'd told the girls she didn't want no celebration, just a quiet dinner with just them and the grandbabies. Tilley's husband Victor and Tamara's husband Perry both worked down the mountain in the town of Kingston. Victor was a teacher at the Black school, where he taught reading and writing to eager young minds ten years and older. Perry was an apprentice butcher working under old Arn Shepard at Shep's grocery. They'd both be home from work right soon, and they'd bring the littl'uns over, and that'd perk her up a little. Right now it was just her and Nina, her youngest, and it was quiet.

"Baby, I'm gonna go in the back bedroom and lay down for a minute. Just let me know if you need anything."

"All right mama. You get some rest and don't worry about nothin'. We got today handled."

She had just laid down for a minute to rest her eyes. Granted, resting your eyes at her age often meant an accidental nap, but she was willing to take that risk. Marigold felt herself start to slip into a nice, gentle afternoon snooze. Then in the distance she could hear someone doing that thing where they think they're talking real low so as to not disturb someone trying to rest, but in fact they are being loud enough that they are preventing the actual rest they are trying to protect. But she pushed that to the side and kept her eyes closed. She flexed and stretched her bones as best she could and sighed. Oh my, this had to be a dream because her joints had stopped aching. The rheumatism in her hip that never let up was practically gone. She was doing her best to keep her eyes closed and hang onto this lovely dream when she heard Nina's voice cut through the cracked front door clear as a bell.

"I done told you, my mama's not well. She's resting' right now, and I won't have you bothering her. It's her birthday! Come back tomorrow if you need something from her. ...No. She ain't seeing nobody that ain't family."

Marigold smiled in her sleep. Oh her sweet baby, trying' to let her mama rest while being loud enough to wake the dead. When whoever Nina was arguing with responded however, the warmth of that voice sank into her like a sunbeam.

“I assure you, sister, we are all family here.”

Marigold's eyes flew open and she practically leapt from her bed. Realizing what she'd done, she winced, expecting her bad knee to give out, her hip to scream, and to see the bedroom floor rushing at her face, but... none of that happened. It hadn't been a dream. Her body felt renewed, the way it would when her husband would use his gift on her before he died. But that wasn't possible. Sure, she still saw Doc sometimes, but he couldn't do nothing like this. Then the voice from the porch came again.

“Nina Marie, daughter of Marigold, granddaughter of Judith, Brightest Heart of Her Line, please. I need to speak with—”

“It's all right, baby,” Marigold called as she entered the living room.

“Mama, no! You don't need to be tending to people today of all days. Besides, we don't know him, do we? Is he some cousin I ain't met?”

Marigold Underwood opened the door to her home fully and smiled up at the man who needed to bend down a little to grace her threshold as his broad bearded face returned the smile tenfold.

“Marigold Jasmine, daughter of Judith, granddaughter of the one they named Tee-Tee after they stole her, and Fire of the Mountain, it is good to see you.”

Marigold closed her eyes for a moment and shivered as the power of the naming washed over her and laughed softly. The silly old bear still knew how to make a girl tingle. “Well hello, Brother Bartholomew! Won't you come in?”

[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. My, my, my, my what a ride. What a ride season two has been, and we don't have much further to go, my friends. We have one more episode, and I think you know where we're headed. We've gathered the Weavers and the Wool and everything in between. We've got Brother Bartholomew to guide us, and the answer to that question, before you even ask it, is yes. One more to go this season, family. Won't you join us? I think you will.

Please, please family, in these times as we wrap up this season, join us and complete your social media ritual. Head over to [oldgodsofappalachia.com](http://oldgodsofappalachia.com). Follow us on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, all those pertinent places. Join us on the Discord server. Gonna be lots to talk about real soon. There's a ton of stuff that's coming up this summer. Patreon is gonna be popping with a ton of new programming — [patreon.com/oldgodsofappalachia](https://patreon.com/oldgodsofappalachia). Build Mama a Coffin is there. Porchlight's gonna be starting soon, Black Mouth Dog probably closer to the fall. It's gonna be a full house as we work through the summer and rev up to season three, which we will have information on when that's coming in the very near future.

Old Gods of Appalachia is a production of DeepNerd Media and is distributed by our friends at Rusty Quill. Our intro music is by Landon Blood. Our outro music is by Those Poor Bastards. Today's story was written by Steve Shell and Cam Collins. The voice of Brother Bartholomew was Ray Christian. The voice of Granny Underwood was Stephanie Hickling Beckman. The voice of Nina Underwood was Shasparay Irvin. And the voices of Lavinia and Deeley Hubbard were of course Cam Collins. Special thank you to DJ Rogers and Kataalyst Alcindor, our new cultural sensitivity consultants and additions to the writing room. Family, we've got one left, and we'll see you soon. We'll see you real soon.