

OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA

Season 3, Episode 35: More Harm Than Good

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

Mr. Crain was not having a good day. He had been riding around for hours, searching the hills and hollers and back roads of Bower County, WV, for a house that seemed to have disappeared out of thin air. His employer, Miss Barrow, was angry. Very angry. He could feel the force of her rage radiating through the car from the back seat, the chill raising the hairs on the back of his neck, like standing in front of an open icebox. It was making him nervous.

Mr. Churchman pulled the car around the back of the cabin the three had been using as a base of operations, and Crain hopped out quickly to hold the door for Miss Barrow. He was rewarded with a flat stare as she stalked from the Cadillac and proceeded through the kitchen door. Glass rattled as she slammed it behind her. Crain and Churchman shared a look and then cautiously followed her inside.

Polly Barrow stood stiff and silent by the kitchen window. She had poured herself a drink and set it on the counter beside her, but it appeared untouched. Her mouth was set in a grim line as she stared out the darkened window.

Crain gave his partner a subtle nod, and Mr. Churchman produced the map of Bower County they'd been using to locate their targets. He spread it across the small kitchen table. The two men peered at it as though it might somehow contain the secrets of the universe. Mr. Crain traced the route for what felt like the thousandth time, and shook his head. It just didn't make sense. He turned to Miss Barrow, who stood with her back to them, hand now held to her forehead as if fighting off a mighty headache.

CRAIN: Miss Barrow, if you like, Mr. Churchman and I can split up and—

Polly turned, rubbing her eyes, her tone measured and severe like a coiled bullwhip.

POLLY: And do what? Wander around in the dark until one of you finds a hole to fall into? That would be vastly preferable to what will happen if we go back to Barrow House without the weapon. Daddy is not a patient man, Mr. Crain. He's wondering why I haven't reported back to him about the Underwood family. I can feel his impatience weighing on me. He wants this done.

CRAIN: Does Mr. Barrow know that the child has been... misplaced?

POLLY: I believe the word you are looking for is *lost*, Mr. Crain. We have *lost* the child capable of bringing death and destruction to all those around him if not properly contained. We have *lost* the child who could do much more harm than good and throw many of my daddy's plans into disarray. And to answer your question, no. I don't think we'd still be standing here if he had any inkling the child was lost. So there's that.

CRAIN: I still do not understand what happened, Miss Barrow. My sense of direction does not fail. That house should have been right there. And a grand house it was too, big enough for a proper family, not some ratty old shack with one old Oma and her daughter, sending us into the woods another eight miles. It should not have happened, Miss.

POLLY: Agreed, Mr. Crain. I— What was that? ...Oh. I believe we have company. Would you be so kind as to welcome them, Mr. Crain?

["The Land Unknown (The Pound of Flesh Verses)" by Landon Blood]

These old hills call

For the blood of my body

A pound of flesh for a ton of coal

So down I go

Into a dark hell waiting

Where lungs turn black and hearts grow cold

And I'll take to the hills and run from the devil

Into the dying sun

Something wicked my way comes

And tread soft, my friend, into these shadows

Where the old ones roam

For in these hills we die alone

In the waning golden light of that autumn afternoon, as the sun began to kiss the tops of the trees, Marigold Underwood had stood in the kitchen of that grand house on Oak Mountain, sweeping the last few motes of dirt into her dust pan, and considering supper. It had been a long day, and she wasn't all that hungry really. She was thinking she might just lie down for a bit, maybe even turn in early. There was Tobias to consider, of course — he might come for supper tonight, as he had been lately, and maybe even stay over — but she could heat up the leftover chicken she'd made last night and leave it in the oven for him. He wouldn't mind. He was a good boy, her nephew.

Miz Marigold had dumped the contents of the dust bin into the garbage and gone to the sink to wash her hands when she heard the front screen door slam. Her daughter's frantic voice floated down the hall.

NINA: Mama! Mama, where are you?

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: Girl, you gonna slam my door right off the front of my house. You know better than that. What's wrong with you?

NINA: We got trouble, Mama. I just talked to Miss Moses down at the dry goods. She said her husband Franklin and Tobias and a bunch of them boys that have been trying to organize are going out to the back end of Pasco looking to confront people from the company about what happened to the Capriottis and all those other folks. Somebody said they saw a fancy black company car out near both houses before they found everybody dead. It's them, ain't it Mama? The ones that weren't... people?

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: I'm gonna skin that boy alive if something else don't beat me to it. Bring the car around baby, I gotta get some things together. Dang fools gonna get theyselves killed for nothing. What you waiting on — git!

NINA: Yes, ma'am!

Nina ran back outside to start the car, and Marigold took a moment to collect herself. She'd known they would have to do something about them company folks, sure enough, but she'd thought they had more time to plan. She'd told Nina they could sleep on it and talk things over tomorrow. But it seemed this day might never end. Marigold shook her head wearily. Then she squared her shoulders and stood up straight. She went into her workroom and pulled out her little basket again. There was no time tonight for contemplating options and carefully portioning out herbs and oils and tinctures. This was not the time for subtlety. She tossed in whole jars of anything she thought might be useful. And then she reached for her sickle. Its wooden handle gleamed with patina, worn smooth by decades of use. Marigold could feel the power of hundreds of workings coursing through it, lending her strength. Its weight was a comfort in her hand. As she walked into the kitchen, she gave it an experimental swing, a smooth and practiced motion, and it sang through the air.

Marigold smiled. Some days you get time to plan, and some days you just have to act. And Marigold Underwood had always excelled at thinking on her feet.

In another part of Bower County, just off the road that led out of Kayboro, a group of men crouched behind a thick stand of switchgrass and watched as a long black Cadillac slowed, then nosed its way through the weeds and up a narrow, rutted dirt track that led through the woods to a certain cabin known to be used by the company from time to time. The sun had just sunk behind the mountain, painting the sky in flaming streaks of orange and red, and the shadows of oaks and elms and hemlock stretched long across the ground. As the fancy company car rounded a bend and disappeared out of sight, Tobias Underwood slowly rose to his feet, motioning to the other men, and followed the disused path into the trees.

There were a dozen of them, all who worked in the mines, all men whom Tobias knew and trusted. Some were longtime friends — Franklin Moses, the eldest of the party, was married to a good friend of Nina's, and his brother was the pastor at Auntie Marigold's church. A couple of them had lost family in the strange and terrifying recent attacks — like Christophe Maso, the seventh of their group, who had yet to arrive. Christophe was supposed to meet them there

nearly an hour ago, with guns and lamp oil. A few of them had firepower — Franklin had his hunting rifle, and Tobias had brought his uncle's pistol — but not enough. In the face of the current economic crisis, a lot of folks had been forced to part with shotguns or rifles, sometimes passed down for generations, in order to put food on the table. As Tobias gazed into the trees, watching for some sign of Christophe, Franklin peered at his watch and sighed.

FRANKLIN: Tobias, where the hell is Christophe? How're we supposed to get anything done without some firepower? I know he's always late for work, but he can't even be bothered to show for *this*?

Christophe was a skinny white kid who worked in Pasco #3. He was a bit of a flake, always clocking in just a couple minutes late or forgetting his lunch or needing to borrow a spare shovel, and he always had some story to tell about how those circumstances had come about. The boy seemed constitutionally incapable of keeping his mouth shut, truth be known, and Tobias had at first hesitated to include him. But Christophe was a good boy, and he was useful — his granddaddy was a gunsmith and amateur chemist who liked to tinker around with homemade fireworks. Christophe's aunt and uncle had also been found brutally and inexplicably murdered in their home in recent weeks, and it hadn't felt right to deny him a place at their side.

TOBIAS: I know, I know, he shoulda been here an hour ago. I'm starting to get worried something might have happened to him. I told him to be careful, but you know how he is.

FRANKLIN: That man can't keep his mouth shut for nothing. He probably told his pastor he couldn't come to service 'cause he had a house to burn down. He gets caught, we'll all be hurting.

Tobias was considering the wisdom of leaving the group to go check on Christophe when, finally, they heard the sound of a panel truck chugging down the road. Tobias peered through the trees, and watched as the truck drove past the turn that led up to the cabin, and continued on down the road, just past a stand of trees. *Good man*, Tobias thought. He'd warned Christophe not to come up the narrow track that led to the cabin — its occupants might hear his truck. Better to pull off the road a ways down and come through the woods. A few minutes later, they

heard a rustling in the underbrush and the sound of heavy breathing, as Christophe Maso lugged a crate of guns into the trees. Tobias felt his shoulders slump in relief.

TOBIAS: Finally. Christophe, what took you so long? I— Auntie? Nina? What y'all doing here?

Tobias' eyes widened as his Auntie Marigold and Cousin Nina followed the skinny white kid into the clearing. Nina was helping lug a couple of jugs of what must be the lamp oil, and Miz Marigold carried a small woven basket over her left arm... and a familiar sickle in her right hand. Tobias turned to glare at Christophe.

TOBIAS: What are you doing bringing my auntie and cousin into this mess? What was you thinking?

CHRISTOPHE: I-it wasn't like that—

Christophe stammered.

CHRISTOPHE: They flagged me down, and... well... *you* try arguing with 'em!

Christophe threw up his hands and shrugged helplessly, his eyes darting nervously to the two women. Nina Jennings had set the jugs down and folded her arms over her chest, her mouth set in a grim, determined line — an expression Tobias knew all too well. Auntie Marigold raised an eyebrow.

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: The young man speaks true. Nina got word of what y'all were up to here, and came to me. Tobias Underwood, what were you thinking? What were *all* you fools thinking?

The woman known to all of Bower County, regardless of familial affiliation, as Granny Underwood cast a stern look over the assembled men, meeting each one's eyes in turn. Young and grown, black and white alike, they all eventually looked away. Some ducked their heads or shuffled their feet. No one said a word.

TOBIAS: Auntie, the men in that cabin... they're the ones responsible for all them folks been killed lately. They been spotted driving 'round in a company car nearby everywhere something happened. We know it's them.

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: Of course it's them, Tobias. I saw them as well. They drove by the house this morning, looking for *you*. They dropped that... delivery off at the house and they knew it's your address.

TOBIAS: Me? ... Oh.

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: Yes, *oh*. And y'all think you gonna just run up on folks like that and do what? Box their ears and send em packing?

Miz Marigold shook her head.

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: Use your head, Tobias. Them folks are dangerous.

TOBIAS: We got to do *something*, Auntie. We can't just let them keep killing folks!

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: Of course not! But you boys aren't going running in there half-cocked. If you do, you'll die. Hear me? You. Will. Die.

She cast her gaze around the group of men again, and slowly, they nodded. All but one. Franklin Moses raised his chin and spoke up.

FRANKLIN: No disrespect, ma'am, but why should we be listening to you? This is men's business. What do you know about it?

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: Franklin Moses, you old enough to know better! But here you are, encouraging these young'uns in their foolishness. What do I know about it? Pfft! You didn't question me when your grandbaby had the croup last winter. Or when you moved into that house that needed a good cleansing. Heard any more stomping footsteps in the night? Got cabinets banging at all hours?

FRANKLIN: Uh... no, ma'am. It's been a peaceful house since you visited.

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: Well then, don't ask me how I know, Mr. Moses. I *know*.

FRANKLIN: Yes'm. Fair enough.

Marigold nodded and turned her gaze from Franklin back to the rest of the gathering.

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: Now. If we do this right, we can run them company folks outta Bower County, and we'll all go home tonight. Y'all gather round now, and listen close. Here's what we gonna do.

Marigold Underwood nodded, satisfied, as she put the final touches on the hasty sigils she'd dug into the ground with the point of her sickle. It was sloppy work by her usual standards, but it would help to keep those company folks contained. And the fire would do the rest. She stood and stretched, working the kinks out of her back, then nodded to Tobias, who had followed alongside her as she worked her way around the cabin in the woods, filling the symbols she etched into the ground with a mixture of lamp oil and some of the more specialized herbs and flowers she'd tossed into her little basket, the sort of things she kept on a high shelf, out of the sight of prying eyes and the reach of curious fingers. They had been able to work in a tight circle, staying as far clear of the surrounding trees as possible, with the aid of her daughter. Nina was a deft hand with a cloaking spell. It wouldn't keep them hidden from anyone who looked directly at them, but it was handy to deflect a casual glance — out a window, say — and allowed them to move all but silently.

Now, Miz Marigold and Nina, Tobias and Franklin and the other men, gathered around the outside of that circle, one positioned at each of the thirteen sigils Marigold had carved into the ground. The men all carried guns, and as Marigold nodded to the youngest one, Christophe, he lit the torch he carried, and then those of the two men on either side of him. One by one, the assembled miners passed fire to one another. When the last of the torches had been lit, Tobias

silently raised a hand. Across the circle from him, Franklin Moses raised his as well, so that any man, from any point around the circle of wards, would be able to see the signal. At Tobias' nod, he and Franklin both dropped their arms, fingers pointing down, and every man lowered his torch to set alight the symbol etched in front of him.

Power thrummed through the ground as the sigils came to life at the touch of flame. It coursed down the double lines that connected each sign, gathering power and forming an impenetrable wall of magic-kissed fire. Startled, the men shuffled back a step or two, but Miz Marigold, Nina, and Tobias held their ground, and the others quickly settled, standing straight, faces set with determination. The blessed fire bathed their faces in a righteous golden glow, and their shadows stretched long behind them. Tobias opened his mouth — ready to give the signal for the next part of the plan — when the cabin's front door opened.

A short white man with with a scar over one eye and heavy muscles packed into a finely tailored suit stepped onto the porch. He gazed through the flames at the local men, with their guns and their torches, and the two women who stood among them, and smirked.

CRAIN: Well, well, well... what have we here? Can I help you gentlemen?

It was the smile that did it — the pompous expression on the face of the man who'd brought so much pain and heartbreak to Bower County. Tobias Underwood couldn't abide a smug bastard.

TOBIAS: Yeah, you can help us all right, you murdering sumbitch. We know what y'all did to the Capriottis and the pastor and all them other folks. You and your boys can come out here and face us like men.

CRAIN: Oh, I don't know about that. There are but three of us here. But I'll be happy to summon my... boys... because you are correct in one respect. We do contain multitudes.

Mr. Crain reached out before him, his palms turned toward the ground. He made an odd, grasping motion with his fingers, twisting his palms around and jerking his clasped fists upward. There was a brief moment where nothing happened and the gathered men simply

stared at him, unimpressed by the strange gesture. And then their own shadows rose up around them and attacked.

It was like fighting smoke — except the shadows carried an unaccountable heft and weight that defied the nature of such things. They twisted around the men's legs like vines, pulling them from their feet, then twisted away when the miners reached to pull them loose. The shadows threw punches like champion prizefighters, shattering jaws and cracking ribs, but faded intangible as a bad dream when the men struck back.

They were, however, no match for Nina Jennings. When her own unruly shadow rose up before her, she shook her head firmly, grasped it in one hand like a troublesome h'aint, and reached out with her gift. It was almost like banishing a ghost, but instead of sending the writhing mass of darkness away entirely, she focused on the power that animated it. It felt cold and slimy against her senses, and she shuddered at its touch, but then it was gone, and her shadow returned to its proper place at her feet. Nina hadn't been entirely certain it would work, but as soon as it did, she moved to her mama's side and did the same for her, leaving Miz Marigold free to direct the burning ward. Then she moved on to help the others.

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: Good work, baby! Keep it up!

NINA: Yes ma'am!

Nina worked her way through the swirling mass of shadows and bodies, banishing the writhing specters and helping her friends and neighbors to their feet where she was needed. She was so busy, at first she didn't notice the thin, towering form that emerged from the cabin. Mr. Crain smiled as his compatriot stepped onto the porch.

CRAIN: A little assistance, Mr. Churchman? That *girl* is a bit troublesome.

Mr. Churchman gave a stately nod, and turned his attention to the young black woman on the other side of the flames.

Johann Churchman had never been a man of words, and he had spent his life before joining the ranks of the Hollow Men spreading that silence. He had strangled over 200 men, women and children by the time he found his way to the halls of Barrow House. Some joked there wasn't much soul left to hollow out of the tall, silent man that some called Breathstealer. His hollowing had left him nigh voiceless and had altered certain aspects of his physical form in unsettling ways. He raised a single hand toward Nina Jennings and opened his mouth, which stretched considerably wider than any normal human mouth should. It looked as though someone had slit the corners of it and installed rows of thin bones to hold it open like a haunted well. His teeth were black and serrated, and a foul stench bled from the man as he drew in a deep breath. The air filled with the sound of a thousand collapsing windpipes and the hiss of a thousand more death rattles as he began to draw the air from around Nina Jennings. The fires around her died from the lack of oxygen and Nina swayed on her feet, her eyes wide with fear, as her lungs emptied and could find no air to refill them. Terrified, she reached out with her gift in panic.

NINA: Wh-who would speak for this man?

She gasped, reaching into the darkness around her, calling out to whatever spirits were tethered by destiny to the looming form above her.

And the spirits answered.

[Ghostly voices whispering accusations / making threats / crying out for help / etc.]

They came pouring through the darkness in droves, their wailing voices — restored to them by death — rising to a shriek in Nina's ears. The sucking pressure in her lungs disappeared, and she gasped, drinking in oxygen gulp after greedy gulp. She watched as the furious dead swarmed the tall man, surrounding him in a swirling, seething mass. They seemed almost to blend together so that it was hard to separate one from the next. Nina clutched her head as their cries filled her ears and visions of their deaths filled her mind. So many deaths. So many terrible, terrible deaths. She shuddered. This man had a reckoning coming.

NINA: I don't know who you used to be, mister, but I wouldn't want to be you the world. You better hope you live a good long time.

To her left, Nina heard the sound of breaking glass, and she looked over in time to see the next torch sail through the broken window. Another landed on the porch, and fire raced across the sagging, weather-worn boards.

Meanwhile Mr. Churchman continued battling the hovering ghosts, manipulating the shifting currents of air to direct them away from him. He caught sight of the young woman who had summoned the annoying spirits, and spread his jaws wide again, his eyes alight with unholy glee. Churchman watched in satisfaction as she clutched helplessly at her throat, swayed, and dropped, like a puppet with her strings cut.

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: Oh no you don't!

Marigold Underwood swung her sickle back behind her shoulder, and swept it around before her in a precise, furious arc. The curve of her blade gathered power before it, a whirling ball of air that combined with the flames before her and *grew*. At the end of her swing, a six-foot ball of fire whipped across the yard, barreling into Johann Churchman and blowing him through the front wall of the house.

Marigold sagged, panting with the effort, then turned her attention to her daughter. She spotted Nina on the ground, some fifteen feet away. To Marigold's relief, she was already moving — rolling to her side, coughing, and struggling to get up. She had taken one step toward her daughter when a bloodthirsty roar split the night.

A woman made of rippling flesh and shadow and bone stepped through the ruined front wall of the cabin. She was tall — nearly as tall as the skinny white man who had attacked Nina, Marigold could see now — and pale and her eyes glowed with amber light. Marigold could see her face in the firelight, and she was clearly the same woman they'd seen in the black car that afternoon. But where earlier she'd had dark hair styled in neat waves, a swirling mass of whipping shadows, like tentacles, now cascaded over her shoulders and down her back. The burned remains of her dress hung from her shoulders in tatters, and from the neck down, her body was covered in armored plates made of articulated bone and streaked with soot. Her hands

were encased in thick, studded gauntlets tipped with razor-sharp claws, her feet in more of the same.

She raced to the edge of the porch — much faster than anyone so encumbered should be able to move — and leapt to the ground, bringing her heavily armored fists down before her in a *whoosh*. A shockwave rolled across the ground around her, spreading in a wide circle that knocked the crowd of men and women from their feet. The bone woman stood, gazing around the devastation in her midst, and her eyes lit on Miz Marigold, already gripping her sickle and struggling to her feet. A cold smile spread across Polly Barrow's still pretty face.

POLLY: It's *you* — the old bat from the shack on the mountain. You puny, meddling mortal bitch!

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: The MOUTH on you! Why your mama oughtta tan your hide. Don't see her here, though, so I guess I'll have to do.

Marigold Underwood squared her shoulders and planted her feet. She swept the sickle before her, and the smoldering embers of her wards leapt into flame once more at her command. She smiled grimly as Polly Barrow stepped towards her, and in her heart she sent up a prayer, that Nina and Tobias and all the other good men here would make it home safe tonight. The bone-woman loomed over her, grinning, and pulled back a heavily armored fist nearly the size of Marigold's head—

And then, suddenly, she stopped, rocking back on her heels. She dropped her fist, her hands going to either side of her head as she cried out.

POLLY: *Ahhh!*

She stumbled to her knees, clutching her skull as she called out to... someone. Someone no one else could see.

POLLY: Daddy! Daddy, no, I've got this! I— *Ahhh!* What do you mean I'm not ready for... She's just a... Daddy... Daddy.... Noooooooooooo!

As Miz Marigold watched in fascinated horror, the armored woman seemed almost to flicker as her scream echoed through the night. There was a sharp, popping noise, like the sound of displaced air, and then she was gone — just gone, as if she'd never been.

From behind the cabin — which was blazing merrily along — an engine roared. A moment later, the black Cadillac swung around the side of the house and screeched to a stop. The tall man, his face a weeping mass of burned flesh and exposed bone, was behind the wheel. He reached behind him to throw the back door open, and the short, stocky man — who someone had shot in the leg, and good for them — staggered across the yard and threw himself into the back seat. The door slammed behind him, and the Caddy tore off down the dirt track and into the night.

Marigold Underwood sagged with relief, dropping to her knees right there in the dirt. She sent up another silent prayer of thanks. It was over. Thank God, it was over.

Nina Jennings carefully pushed herself to her feet, assessing herself for any broken bones or other serious injuries. She found only scrapes and bruises. She looked around, and spotted her mother on her knees several feet away. Nina leapt up and hurried to her side.

NINA: Mama! Mama, you ok?

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: I'm fine, baby. Just got the wind knocked outta me is all. Give your mama a hand, would you?

Tobias was on his feet as well, carrying one of the remaining torches to help him pick his way around the burning patches of grass, searching out each of his friends. Christophe Maso was dead. Tobias had seen the kid go down fighting the short man, had heard his agonized scream — a sound that would live on in his nightmares for the rest of his days. Another man had smothered to death under the influence of whatever hoodoo the creepy tall man had been working. Tobias shuddered at the thought.

As he helped a man with a broken arm to his feet, Tobias heard a low moan coming from a few feet away. He squinted into the shadows, holding his torch aloft, and spotted Franklin Moses lying near the smoldering remains of the cabin's front porch.

FRANKLIN: *[moaning]*

Tobias ran to Franklin's side, and dropped to his knees next to his fallen friend. Franklin had been caught in the fire. The dark coveralls he'd worn earlier had been burned away all along his right side, from the shoulder down. It was hard to see with just the torch, but the burns looked bad. Tobias reached out and laid a gentle hand on Franklin's chest, trying to avoid the injuries but keep the man still so he could get a better look.

TOBIAS: Franklin! Shh, hold still, man, let me get a look at this! Hold...

Tobias trailed off mid-sentence as the seared skin before him seemed almost to... shimmer. As he watched in disbelief, torn flesh knit itself back together and burns began to fade... then heal. As the pain faded, Franklin quieted, and took a deep, shuddering breath. He stared up at Tobias in awe.

FRANKLIN: T... Tobias? ...What did you do?

TOBIAS: I— I don't know, man, I was just trynna see how bad it was. I...

Behind him, Tobias heard footsteps, and turned to find his Auntie Marigold and Nina had joined them.

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: Well, Tobias. I always said you took more after your uncle than your own daddy.

TOBIAS: Auntie? What is this? I—

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: It's all right baby, you just got that hoodoo shit. Don't you worry, now. Everything's gonna be fine, just fine. There's some other folks here need your help now. Come on. I'll show you.

It took Misters Crain and Churchman a solid two days to reach Barrow, PA. The two men were injured and exhausted from their labors, and spent most of the first twenty-four hours after they escaped Bower County — may they never return to that foul place — parked under a bridge, one asleep in the front seat, the other in the back, allowing their wounds to heal. Then they had spent some time pondering whether it would best serve their interests to return at all. The Barrow family was not known for its tolerance of failure. In the end, they had determined that they would be tracked and hunted and die like animals if they chose that course, and so they turned the black car north and headed back to Barrow House.

Mr. Churchman steered the car that had belonged to their mistress up the winding drive that led to the front door, and the two men stepped outside. The night was silent. Not a cricket stirred, not an owl hooted. Nothing living lingered long in Barrow. The slap of their hard-soled shoes on the marble steps was the only sound as Crain and Churchman made their way up the steps to the front door of Barrow House, and let themselves inside.

They found Conrad Barrow waiting for them.

CONRAD: Welcome back, boys. Have a good time in West Virginia?

Mr. Crain said nothing. Churchman stood, silent and implacable as ever, at his side. Conrad grinned.

CONRAD: You two can head on down to the bunkhouse to wait for your next assignment. Miss Polly will be... indisposed for some time. Father isn't very happy with her at the moment. Not happy at all.

["Pretty Polly," performed by Landon Blood and John Lee Bullard]

Oh Polly, Pretty Polly, come go along with me

Polly, Pretty Polly, go along with me

Before we get married, some pleasures to see...

Well hey there, family. Welcome to the end of act one of season three of Old Gods of Appalachia, as we wrap up our time with Pretty Polly Barrow and the Underwoods. Thirty five episodes — that's a pretty solid milestone, y'all. When we started this thing, I was impressed we'd made it to five. So here we are, episode 35, the end of act one of our third season, "As Above, So Below."

I want to take a minute to say thank you to everyone who got in on the Kickstarter for the tabletop roleplaying game with Monte Cook Games. I don't know how anything that Cam and I have ever created raised just under 2.1 million dollars, but we promise we're gonna use that funding to make you all an amazing game. We're so excited, and Monte Cook Games is chomping at the bit to turn us loose. Y'all are gonna be able to make your own holler. "Make Your Own Holler Kit" — that should've been a stretch goal. But anyway, thank you so much for everybody who contributed to the Kickstarter.

And if you knew about the Kickstarter, that means you probably have completed your social media ritual, which you can do by heading over to [oldgodsofappalachia.com](https://www.oldgodsofappalachia.com). Tweet into the void with us on Twitter. Follow us on Facebook, Instagram. Join us on the Discord server — Cam and I stop by there every now and again just to socialize and be polite.

And also you can learn about our new collaborations and our new partnerships. For example, we did tea before. Now we're doing coffee! Goose Bridle Coffee Roasters is a coffee company out of Kentucky, and they are producing official Old Gods of Appalachia roasts — Old Number Seven and Morning Glory, the official coffee of Glory Ann Boggs. You can look down in the show notes for a link and learn all about it and get your hands on some brew.

Y'all, here's a bit of the hard news. We have ended act one of season three, which means we are taking a little break so that we breathe, finish the finale of Black Mouthed Dog, and come back refreshed with act two, which is gonna melt your brain a little bit, I promise you. We will be

returning on June 9th with the beginning of act two — June 9th. I hope you're listening to the post and not asking in the Facebook group, ok? June 9th is the beginning of act two.

And this is your every-so-often reminder that Old Gods of Appalachia is a production of DeepNerd Media, distributed by Rusty Quill. Today's story was written by Cam Collins and Steve Shell, with script consultation by DJ Rogers. Our intro music is by our brother Landon Blood. Our outro music started out with brother Landon Blood accompanied by John Lee Bullard, and we're finishing out with Stacie Sexton, with a version of "Pretty Polly." Speaking of Pretty Polly, the voice of Polly Barrow is Tracey Johnston-Crumb. The voice of Nina Jennings is Shasparay Irvin. The voice of Marigold Underwood is Stephanie Hickling Beckman. The voice of Tobias Underwood is DJ Rogers. And the voice of Franklin Moses — yes, you heard correctly, that was Dr. Ray Christian. And I'm gonna confirm right now, conspiracy red thread people, that does not mean Franklin Moses has anything to do with Bartholomew. I just wanted to sneak Dr. Ray in there. Thank you, Dr. Ray, I appreciate you, big brother.

The ghost chorus in this episode included Cam Collins, Laura Hampton, Manda Alley Leonard, Amerie Helton, Jordan Shiveley, Nathan Cavicci, Kelson Stallard, Tonya Woolard, Jason Strength, Fiona Chamness, Colin Bulla, DL Armistead, Mortellus, Eric Daniel Pavey, Renee Hill, Grant McCracken, Dayv Cole, Terhan McDaniels, Monique Bouchard, Tyler Childers (no, not that Tyler Childers, the other not-famous one), Jékksyn Ícaro, Joshua Huntsinger, Theresa Daniels, Sarah Leary, Dan Craley, Edwin Maldonado Jr., Nikki Nelson-Hicks, Layla Cruse, Lindsey Deel, with thanks and apologies to Billy Howell, Mayor Preston Blakely, D. Travis Brandel, Tonya Downing, Josh Roberts, Susan Fox, and anyone else off of my friends list who sent me a file after I started putting that together. Thank you so much for wanting to die for us.

We'll talk to you soon, family. Talk to you real soon.

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