

OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA

Season 3, Episode 40: The Well of Remembrance

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

Belle Calloway could not breathe. Her breath had hitched somewhere between her own memories and the words in her Mamaw Sheila's diary. The breath she sought to draw came from the lungs of a little girl who'd had every adult she'd ever trusted to care for her either die or turn into monsters — actual things that wanted to gobble her up or tear her to pieces for reasons she'd never fully understand. Her mama was dead, her daddy and uncle had been turned into creatures of fire and burnt flesh that shambled through the woods to fetch her to jaws of the unseen abominations that had torn up their house and befouled their land. She'd gotten away, though. She'd run and run until different monsters found her, and thank the stars her mama's sisters had turned up to snatch her from the jaws of death. Now here she was, more than a decade later, staring into the three faces that had haunted her dreams since she was a child. The Gray Ladies, house-matrons and watchdogs of the orphanage they called the Home, where she'd nearly been eaten alive by a thing masquerading as a preacher. These women had brought him his prey, had kept watch over his flock so he'd have the tenderest of meat to fill his belly and make him strong. If what she'd read in her mamaw's diary was true, they were just as unnatural and dangerous as their master.

“Oh yes, we remember you quite well!” cried the first of them, mock-surprise blooming across her pretty face.

“It's been a while, but look at you... all grown up,” continued the second, her voice dripping with the sugary pride of a maiden aunt who hadn't seen you since you was knee high to a grasshopper.

“But we'd know you anywhere, Miss Sarah,” crowed the third, her eyes alight with the naked joy of a predator who has its prey worn down and cornered.

“As I said,” the first began again, “we didn't expect you at all.”

“The master was hoping for that nasty old bag, Marcia Walker, truth be told,” said the second, smoothly finishing the thought of her sister.

“Or that pretty Miss Heloise would have been the best of all — a powerful witch and a pretty knife all wrought in blood and bone, but finding you here—”

“—is a lovely surprise, Sarah. Why don’t you—”

“—come off the porch so we can—”

“—catch up?”

The women flashed glowing smiles that were far too full of teeth for comfort. The air around them seemed to shimmer and bend, their shadows stretching into shapes that did not match the forms of the three lovely gray-clad women who stood on the walk below. The ladies themselves did not move. They blinked, one after the other, and their eyes showed black and glassy like the skin of something from the bottom of the sea that would never see the light of the sky. Before her eyes, Belle could see their pretty faces begin to shift subtly, taking on the sharp, predatory angles of things more adapted to hunt by the light of the moon.

Belle did not answer them, but instead turned to the door of her mamaw’s house and tried to open it. It was locked — more than locked, the knob wouldn’t budge at all in her hand. She looked back over her shoulder at the three women. They still had not moved. They waited at the edge of the second concrete slab, where Belle had stood when she’d recited the incantation that allowed her entry. The wards. Her mamaw’s wards weren’t letting them get any closer. Strangely, they didn’t seem to be trying to get any closer. She’d seen h’aunts and boogers and things test the boundaries of witches by sniffing, prodding, even tasting where wards had been laid, but these three just stood there, watching her frantically try to open the door of the Charm School.

“Come on... I’m sorry for threatening to tear you down, house, just let me back in,” she muttered. Again and again she twisted the knob with all her might, and when that didn’t work she threw her full weight into the door, which did not budge at all. It was like ramming your shoulder into

a brick wall. She tried to call to mind the litany of names and qualities that had unlocked the door the first time, but in her rapidly rising panic, they fled from her mind.

“Oh my—” came the voice of first.

“—having trouble dear?” crooned the second.

“This is just awkward,” said the third.

“Locked out of your granny’s own house? Tsk.”

“What kind of witch are you anyway Sarah Avery? Didn’t your—”

“—mama teach you any better?”

“We thought you had Walker blood, but I guess—”

“—we’ll have to spill some and find out for ourselves.”

But before anyone was able to find out anything, a tremor shook the backroads of Tourniquet, and the mountain itself shivered. Belle looked up and saw that the house was shaking, shutters from an upper window rattled, shook loose and crashed to the yard below. The glass in the main windows shattered as it was pulled inward as if by a great sucking breath. The porch beneath Belle’s feet began to crack and crumble. The rocking chairs fell to pieces, disintegrated into a mulchy pulp, and slipped through the widening crevices of the porch floor. The quaking of the earth grew stronger as Miss Sheila’s Charm School for Well Instructed Ladies began to collapse in on itself and sink into the ground.

[“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*

Sheila Walker's house did not go quietly into that good night. Boards broke, stones and concrete shattered, and the earth gnashed its teeth and gave a great groaning rumble. Miss Sheila's Charm School for Well Instructed Ladies, its mistress gone, its secrets passed on, gave itself over to the way of all things and returned to the dust from whence it was raised. Billows of smoke and debris filled the air as the great house collapsed into the mountainside, and Belle Calloway used the cover it provided to do the one thing it seemed she'd excelled at her whole life.

She ran.

She pounded past Harper's and past Old Patty's place. According to the diary, Sheila had sold her aunt's house to one of the girls there and opened the Charm School a few lots down the road. She had written about not wanting to be reminded of Patience Carson's murder nor any of the other horrors that took place under her roof.

Belle reached the end of the lane and looked for Melvin's truck. He had parked in the shade right at the edge of the narrow track. She should be able to see him by now, or hear him. Surely Melvin would come running when he heard the commotion back at the Charm School. She listened for the sound of the truck's engine, or Melvin's voice calling for her, but neither one came. She called out for him and looked up and down the road. Her blood froze when she finally spotted the truck. It sat thirty yards from where it had been parked and had been spun out into the road as if it had been struck. The rear left tire was shredded. The passenger side door was gone. The windscreen was cracked as if the driver's head had been slammed into it hard.

And there was blood. Not a whole lot, but there was blood.

“Melvin!” Belle cried. “Melvin, where are you?” She rushed to either side of the road, looking into the ditches and the weeds for some sign of him. She called his name over and over, but there was no answer. She looked down the cracked road that led toward the main drag of Tourniquet, West Virginia, and then back the way she came. The sound of the collapsing house still rolled like low thunder in her ears. She knew those women wouldn’t be far behind her. Dark clouds had rolled in overhead, and she could smell rain on the air. Belle cursed under her breath as she began to run towards the open maw of the town square.

In the broken remains of what had been known as the Charm School, the Gray Ladies collected themselves. They had suspected the Walker girl’s house would do something dramatic on its way out — it was like her — but they’d hoped to get a chance to paw through its bones before it was all gone. They had waited decades to get their hands on whatever secrets that deceitful little trollop had squirreled away after she’d managed to hurt their master so. If not for little miss high and mighty Sheila Walker, their master would be the reigning darkness of this world. He had been well on his way to regaining his health and his power, and then he had to go and take the form of a man. Men were weak — he had underestimated that weakness — and it had infected him and brought him low.

They should have never left his side. They should have taken him to the cattle they were herding instead of the other way around. He’d been so sure about the girl being cowed into loyalty. He’d begun to trust her. When she spoke, he had begun to listen. They should have slaughtered her on the spot. The master had been growing impatient for some time, they knew. They could feel him reaching out to the parts of himself, lost and scattered to the world. They could feel the rage that filled him when those searches were fruitless. They did what they could to soothe him, to ease his mind and to fill his belly. If nothing else, that one good had come of the whole Walker disaster. He had turned away from all others, and he depended on them — his guardians, his nurses, his daughters — and only them.

That last one wasn't untrue if you thought about it. He was their father. Their master had pulled their minds screaming from the inner dark and poured them into the willing bodies of mortal women who had made their dark compacts with him. Once the ritual was complete, he'd turned them loose to eat the minds and souls of those vessels. He'd had his other thralls bind them into the hearts of dead and rotting trees until seven moons had passed, and then, with great ceremony, he had birthed them into the world. Each of them knew that they weren't exactly what he'd hoped for, but he'd kept them close. Given them their shared mind and new life in service to him. They were his daughters in more than blood, and they would burn alive in the fires of a thousand suns or freeze at the bottom of the deepest lake in winter before they'd fail him.

They did not have names — not as such — but they had their own thoughts, their own ways and their own dark gifts. They shared the ability to shift and twist their shapes to deceive the eyes of the sheep that walked this world. They often crafted themselves to look like sisters, but no two of them were the same.

The first spoke in the voice of a sweet young thing, but it was a voice that was dragged through a mouth of a thousand or more teeth, guarding a throat that was a hungering void that could not ever be filled. She was faster than the other two and stronger than any man would ever be. She would eat anything she killed and leave not a scrap of bone or gristle.

The second spoke with a voice that would have wrenched the sin from a hard man's soul if she'd ever sung in church. She was tall and bore herself with an authority that would bend the will of even the boldest men. Her luminous eyes and full lips drew many into her arms. Her many, many arms. When the second shed the skin she normally wore in this world, she moved like a curtain of flesh and tentacles, wrapping her prey in a shroud of meat and hooked teeth until she was bored with them.

The voice of the last was rattling branches against a bedroom window, the warning bray of the old crone in the old stories where someone ended up cursed for not respecting their elders or heeding some archaic superstition. The face she showed the world was usually that of a doe eyed young widow — or a surprisingly attractive spinster — but behind that appealing mask, she was a horror of rot and bones. As fond as her siblings of disemboweling and suffocating those who

dared defy them, the last preferred raking talons caked in filth and a maw that was more beak than mouth. She loved nothing more than to tear into some screaming little man and not stop until she'd eaten his heart and shit it right out there in front of him. Her contempt for the soft and guileless livestock that populated this world was matched only by that of her father.

That father waited for them even now, deep in a house that was not a house, at the end of a place that was not a place. In the house at the end of Lonely Creek, he bided his time, waiting for the final pieces of his crown to be brought home. That was the ultimate goal for certain, but if they could bring him one of the Walker get to drain? Oh ho! Why that would be a feather in their cap for sure, yes it would. A dash of vengeance to add savor to the meat.

And so the Gray Ladies set out toward the heart of Tourniquet to catch a little girl who had eluded them for the past decade. They glided through all the old saloons and parlor houses, darker shadows in the deepening twilight. Dawson's and the Black Diamond stood reasonably intact and were easily searched. Their doors had been locked and barred, but that was no obstacle for the ladies. Other parlors had caved in or burned out over the years, and they took a little more care and sniffing around these, but it soon became apparent that their quarry hadn't sought refuge in these dried up husks. The ladies were thorough — they searched almost every misbegotten hole — but finally there was but one option left. They stood in the northernmost part of the square, staring at the squat, brick building with its banded iron door and single word painted in white block letters over it: BABYLON.

“Oh my.”

“She's not gonna like what—”

—she finds in there, no sir.”

“She might find *him* but I—”

“—think that's unlikely.”

“That door is locked and sealed, so—”

“—we cannot go in after her.”

“Oh no, this is not our master’s—”

“—purview. No it is not. We did—”

“—leave a tribute, though, so we—”

“—have observed the proper—”

“—forms. Ladies, I think we should—”

“—depart. There’s no more for us—”

“—here. Yes. Let us go before we overstay our welcome.”

With that the Gray Ladies, the feared and dread servants of the Thing Whose Name Sounds Like a Horned Head But Is Not, cast one last shuddering glance over their collective shoulder at the cursed face of Babylon, and then retired to the south to attend their master.

Belle Calloway raced through Tourniquet on a tidal wave of panic. The creatures from her mamaw's past — hell, from *her* past — were here. They weren't blurry childhood nightmares or tenuous, half-buried memories. They weren't things she thought she saw out of the corner of her eye when she started to drift off to sleep. They were here and they were real and she was terrified. And yet... all her years of training in rational pursuits like animal husbandry, mathematics, and teaching youngins how to read pushed back against that naked fear. There was always a way out of this. Problems had solutions. She just had to find this one, and Belle had always been able to find her way out of even the darkest places. Barlo when it was burning. The Home and the beasts that stalked it. That time down by the river with her Cousin June and the

thing that had hunted them the summer before she'd come to the Gap. She'd gotten through all of that by not letting fear and panic run the show.

Belle had not ventured into any of the other parlor houses or hotels or saloons in search of a hiding place. They all looked either boarded up or unsafe, and she knew she didn't have time to waste on trial and error. She needed to find a place that looked both accessible and stable enough that it wouldn't fall down around her the second she stepped inside. She ran due north, where the company buildings had been constructed of brick and mortar and seemed to have better stood the test of time. She found the first three doors she tried locked, and was about to head back the way she'd come when a door at the end of the street blew open as if a gust of wind had caught it.

There'd been no gust of wind. The air in Tourniquet was thick and still as the grave. Belle stared at the door, waiting to see if someone or something would emerge from the darkness that lay behind it, ready to run at the first sign of trouble. Nothing came. The door swung idly shut, as if still caught by that nonexistent breeze, then bounced more gently open again. Inviting, as if it were trying its hardest to seem innocuous. She was torn. Surely this was a terrible idea, but the sound of approaching voices left her little choice, and so Belle Calloway ducked through the black door of the building called Babylon, and pulled it quietly shut behind her.

The foyer that she stepped into was like many of its time — a small antechamber where a man of imposing stature might check your credentials and pat you down. Money might change hands for VIP privileges, and at the end of it all a second door would be opened and passage would be granted to the festivities that lay within. Upon entering the chamber, one was confronted with a finely paneled wall covered in plaques and ancient portraiture. Two cheap reproduction portraits of Barrow & Locke's founding fathers hung side by side in ludicrously gilded frames to denote the dual sponsorship of the establishment. Elias P. Barrow's dark and beady eyes glared out from under heavy brows as if daring visitors to his company-funded den of iniquity to put one toe out of line, while the cocked eyebrow and wry half smile of Jameson Locke seemed to include patrons in some private joke that they wouldn't truly understand until they were inside.

There was no doorkeeper at Babylon today. The second door stood open, and Belle passed through it into the main gallery to behold its wonders. Walking with her hands extended in front

of her, she still nearly stumbled as she made her way into the pitch dark room. The air here was different from the flat, dead air in the streets of Tourniquet. The room smelled like roses that had been left to rust — a sweet metallic scent that was both pleasant and awful at the same time, like funeral blooms left too long in stagnant water. Belle didn't know who or what might take up residence in a place like this, but if she was lucky, the place was as dead and empty as those blooms, and she could find a place to hide and think. She knew could figure out what to do next — she just needed a minute to think.

Belle was six steps into the main gallery when the darkness began to recede as a gentle violet illumination flared from wall sconces and behind veiled corners of the room. Belle's eyes were not stung by the light, as it rose gradually and gently, revealing an elegant and well appointed entertaining space. Against the back wall was a large, intricately carved mahogany bar lined with plush, cushioned oak stools. Tall bottles of what she assumed was liquor, their faded labels one of the few signs of the passage of time in Babylon, adorned the back wall and the rich, polished black wood bar top.

Tables spiraled outward from this centerpiece like any gentleman's club of the day, richly draped in fine linens and surrounded by leather upholstered chairs and benches. Upon closer inspection though, Belle noted that each table was outfitted with shackles and chains on one side, as if the dining companion who might be seated there would not have the option of excusing themselves to the powder room. Some tables had sideboards pulled alongside them upon which lay instruments that looked almost surgical in nature. Blades, tongs, thin needles and spikes were neatly arranged on fluffy towels. Most were polished and clean. Others were... not. As she surveyed the room, other grim table settings caught her eye here and there. A cattle harness. Barbed wire. What for all the world looked like a cooking spit large enough to hold a grown man.

What was this place? The more she looked, the more Belle became certain she did not want to know. Moving past the tables toward the center of the room, she discovered what was clearly the house's main attraction. The floor opened up at its center, and the room descended in seven circular rows, forming a small amphitheater. Each row was laden with plush pillows and cushions. There were carved wooden boxes filled with objects intended for the use of the

spectators, Belle imagined. Some had plainer purposes than others, but the intent of each was fairly clear upon inspection.

Belle rubbed wearily at her eyes. Her head had begun to feel heavy, and she had to fight to keep her eyelids open. It had been a long day, and the strange violet light of the place made her feel as if she were half asleep. She made her way down to the last row of seats, right by the edge of what would have been the main stage. She imagined the arena filled with the leering forms of the beings who would derive pleasure from such a place.

“This feels like some sort of awful dream,” she said aloud, surprising herself.

She was even more surprised when a voice, soft and lovely, answered her. “To enter Babylon and know her delights is to leave the waking world. To leave the world of men altogether.”

Belle nearly jumped out of her skin. “Hello? Who’s there?”

“You have entered Babylon without proper tribute. Are you an interloper or are you an offering?”

Belle spun around, looking for the source of the voice and stumbled. She caught herself and realized she’d crossed from the audience onto the stage.

The voice came again. “An offering then. You stand upon the precipice of the Well of Remembrance. Your choices are to proceed forward and hope to gain egress, or to be meat upon the flame to feed those who serve. Either way, you will serve to enrich your betters.”

Flames quietly blossomed beneath two of the man-sized rotisseries on the floor above. The spits slowly began to turn. The violet light receded to the outer reaches of the room, leaving it lit only by those sinister cook-fires that felt like a spotlight on Belle.

Her head swam with confusion. “Wait — I’m to do what?”

“You stand upon the precipice of the Well of Remembrance. If you complete your journey across the stage to the door, and find what is on the other side, you may go.”

As if on cue, an insistent pounding began on the door that stood at the other end of the walkway crossing the stage. Something large and heavy shook the wood in its frame.

“And if I don’t?”

“You stand upon the precipice of the Well of Remembrance. You will proceed. Now.”

Whatever was on the other side of the door continued to unleash its fury against the stout wood, and Bell jumped, stumbling fully onto the stage.

The world fell away.

She found herself no longer in a musty old shut-up parlor house in Tourniquet. She wasn’t even in the great state of West Virginia. Belle stared around her in horror. She stood on a gravel road in Goshun Creek, Kentucky, just outside the Barlo town limits. The smell of coal and burning flesh filled her nostrils as she heard the dragging of unsteady steps on the gravel behind her. This couldn’t be real. She knew it couldn’t be. She was grown. She looked down at her feet. She wasn’t wearing her sensible shoes she’d chosen for this godforsaken errand. Her feet were small and bare and dirty. The feet not of a grown woman but a child. She heard that awful, rattling breath behind her — a sound that could still wrench her out of sleep, soaked in sweat, in the night — and turned to find the Thing That Was Not Daddy standing not six feet away.

“H-hey S-s-ugarpup. It sure is good to see you.”

“You are not my daddy. And you never were. You’re not even real.”

“Oh, I was your d-daddy, darlin,” came the familiar voice of Pinky Avery. “I w-was for a good hour or so after they shoved hot ashes and about a quarter ton of coal d-down my gullet. The fire and smoke et me up from the inside and made me all better though.”

Belle watched as the thing inched towards her, its one burning orange eye locked on her.

“Made me see what a mistake I made bringing an ungrateful little brat like you into this world. Worked my life away and burned up in that old mine to provide for you and that harlot of a mother. You think I wanted to die like this? You think I liked going into the belly of a goddamned mountain for you, you spoiled little—”

The thing roared and lunged at Belle, but she ducked and ran as hard as she could, the gravel of the road biting into her feet. “Sarah Avery, you get back here! You get back here and take your punishment, young lady!”

Belle made it another ten feet before she fell, as the pounding sound came again, seeming to shake the whole world. She lost her balance and tumbled forward towards the unforgiving weeds, when the world spun again.

She was sitting on a fencepost outside the company store. She could see the miners coming off of the day shift, riding in on the carts from the mine up and around the mountain. She saw her Uncle Eddie waving at her from one of them, and she waved back with a grin. She loved it when Uncle Eddie got back to town before her daddy. He’d always buy her candy before Mama or Daddy was there to say no. She loved her Uncle Eddy. She never had a papaw, but she had Uncle Eddy, and that was better.

As the cart came closer, she could see her uncle still waving at her, and smiling, and burning. Uncle Eddie was on fire. None of the other men on the cart with him seemed to notice, but Edgar Avery was engulfed in flames. His hair was gone and his eyes and face were melting into a charred and blackening mass. “I did it for you, Sarah!” he called through the flames and the stench of his cooking flesh. “Look at what you did, sweetie!” he cried, pointing at his ruined features as the cart came to a stop and he stood and lurched toward her, the flames growing higher as he moved.

Belle sat transfixed, unable to move herself as her beloved uncle lumbered slowly toward her, his features melting more with every step.

“I said run, girl!” Uncle Eddie cried, and stomped his foot so hard that the whole world shook.

Belle fell off the fence post and stood up in the front yard of her old house in Barlo. It was morning somehow. Her feet were wet with dew from walking from the Calloway’s house to her own. Her mama hung from the tree in their front yard. Of all the images that haunted Belle Calloway, this one came the most often. Her mama — dead and blue and hanging in the tree out front. She did not speak. She did not suddenly come to life to berate her daughter for being a bad child. Whatever power was doing this somehow seemed to know that just putting her back in this moment was worse than anything else it could have chosen to do.

She stood there in that silence with her mother for a long few moments and felt the sadness swallow her. She might have stayed there forever, lost in the memory, if two massive shapes hadn’t burst from the woods like hunting dogs. She couldn’t quite see them, except as a weird distortion in the air, but she could hear them, and she could feel their breath. Belle bolted toward the side of the house, but a third creature dropped from a tree and forced her onto the porch. They circled her, growling, snarling, snapping their long tongues, which would become visible for just a moment before they whipped them back, inches from her face.

The pounding sound came again. And her back was to the cabin door as the dogs closed in.

The pounding came again. And she heard the things that were not Daddy nor Uncle Eddie calling for her by her old name. Her mama hung silently in the tree, swinging in a slight breeze.

The pounding came again, now from the cabin door. The old wooden frame splintered at the force of the blows, and she heard someone calling her name — her chosen name — from the other side of the door as it exploded and she fell to her knees between the beasts that had been sent to hunt her and the thing coming through the door. From what she could see, it was huge.

Then someone or something grabbed both her arms and pulled her through the door of her childhood home, and everything went dark and quiet.

It was raining.

Where was she now? The Home? In the orchard with Elder Henry? She took a breath and tasted dust and ash and rot. The air smelled stale. Tourniquet? Her eyes trailed up to see the enormous thing that had come through the door to get her, that had snatched her from all the horrors of Babylon so it could have her, and she heard its low voice rumble.

“Miss Belle? Miss Belle, are you ok, darlin?”

“Melvin?” Belle broke then. She broke and she cried and she wailed, and then Melvin Blevins wrapped her up in the only type of hugs he ever learned how to give — which is to say warm and bear-like and safe. He shushed her and comforted her and rocked her in his arms until she calmed.

“Where are we? What was that place? Where have you been?”

“Well, uh. I was taking a little snooze in my truck while I was waiting on you and these three little ole ladies come up and asked if I could help them move some furniture and the next thing I knowed something hit my truck like a freight train and I woke up out back of this here black building. It’s all fenced in and I’m betting there’s some extra hoodoo on it to keep people in here. But anyways, I heard you screaming and crying and carrying on, so I did my best to get this here door down — took me a minute, but I got her done.”

“Melvin?” Belle said softly.

“Yes, Miss Belle?”

“Take me home. Please?”

“I gots to find us a tire, ma’am, and I’ll be right glad to.”

A few days after Belle Calloway returned to Baker's Gap, she collected the various items she'd fetched from her mamaw's house — including the old diary — and deposited them on the porch of the Walker House when she knew her Aunt Marcie would be out choring. She would eventually speak with Marcie about everything that had happened, but not just yet. Not until she'd made her own peace with what she'd been through. When she returned to her own tidy little house, she picked up the phone and had Daisy connect her to her other aunt up in Esau County.

“Hey, Aunt Ellie. Mmhm. I'm fine. I got back the other day. Mmhm. Yeah, it was something, all right. Listen, I'll tell you all about it later, but when I was in Mamaw's downstairs room, I found a set of them bone combs you made when you were living up there. I thought you'd like to have them. I'll be happy to put them in the mail for you, if you like. Oh? Oh, all right. Sure, I can send them to a friend if you'd prefer. Let me get a pencil and you can give me the address. Hang on. All right. Shoot. Mmhm. Mmhm. Ok, I got it, let me read this back to you. I'm sending this to Mr. J.T. Fields, 22 6th Street, Paradise, VA. Is that right, Aunt Ellie?”

[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. Oh, come on now. That's not really a cliffhanger, not exactly — that was just a little taste of what might be up the road in Act III of Season 3 of Old Gods of Appalachia. Just a heads up, our beloved mistress of the slow and poisoned dagger, Cam Collins, will be steering the ship on that arc, so buckle up, my buttercups. Now we're gonna take a small break and we'll be back to begin Act III on Thursday, August 25th. We will return on August 25th. You got me? Good.

Y'all, I wanna take a second to thank everyone who helped out with the Appalachian flood relief fundraiser. All told y'all helped put together around ten thousand dollars in floor relief via our matching partnership with TeePublic, and that money was then donated directory to mutual aid organizations on both sides of the Virginia / Kentucky line to help folks recover from the

horrific flooding that has ravaged our homeplace in the past week or so. I can't tell y'all how broken my heart is for Appalachia right now. We don't have a way to put that into words. We have links to mutual aid groups all over our Twitter especially, so if you want to give, you can find plenty of folks there to give to there. Completing your social media ritual and following us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram will help you stay in the know as we find more places to help out. We have family, both blood and chosen, who have lost people, places and things to the floodwaters in both eastern Kentucky and southwestern Virginia — and our hearts are with them. Please help out if you can.

This is your ever so often reminder that Old Gods of Appalachia is a production of Deepnerd Media, distributed by Rusty Quill. Today's story was written and performed by Steve Shell *and* Cam Collins as the voice of Babylon. Our intro music is by our brother Landon Blood and our outro music is by Those Poor Bastards. Talk to you soon, Family. Talk to you real soon.

© 2022 DeepNerd Media. All rights reserved.