

OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA

Season 3, Episode 43: Escape From Paradise

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

The holiday season of 1935 was a busy time at the Paradise offices of Locke Rail. The shipping arm of the Barrow & Locke combine was hastily preparing to roll out the new bar car service on its passenger trains, and making plans for the grand debut of that exciting new venture in coaxing dollars from travelers' pockets. Tommy Adkins, as Nathaniel Locke's assistant, had to shoulder most of the logistical burden of seeing Mr. Locke's vision to its fruition. There were contractors and caterers to hire. There were licenses to secure, and palms to grease to ensure they were issued in a timely manner, given the tight schedule the Locke staff were working under. There were designs from carpenters and plush fabric samples from upholsterers to review. There were gilt light fixtures to order and silver service and glassware to choose. And the responsibility for coordinating all this landed squarely in the lap of one young man from Esau County.

His work days stretched long into the evening, and Tommy returned home exhausted at the end of each of them. And yet, he found he had more to do. When he wasn't making deliveries or running one errand or another for his employer, Mr. J.T. Fields, he was helping to organize a different type of celebration entirely, and one far closer to his heart.

Very soon — indeed, with the coming of that very bar car which Tommy labored to bring into being for Locke Rail each day — Tommy would travel to California and join his fiancée, Miss Ginny Estep. Ginny would meet him at the train station in Los Angeles, and from there, the couple would travel to the exotic-sounding city of Las Vegas, Nevada, where a justice of the peace would join them in holy matrimony. Their choice of destination was one that had been suggested to them by Mr. Fields, who assured them it was a shining jewel of the desert, the most romantic city you could ever imagine in which to wed. Tommy suspected his recommendation had more to do with the speed and ease with which one could acquire a marriage license in that desert jewel, but he was happy enough to go along with whatever plan would most expeditiously thwart Frontier Productions' plans for Ginny's future.

Ginny had no plans to inform her employer of their impending nuptials, at least not until Tommy put a ring on her finger and the ink had time to dry on their marriage certificate. This too had been the suggestion of Jack Fields, who had proffered the age-old wisdom that sometimes it was better to ask forgiveness than permission. The studio had a vested interest in maintaining their control over Ginny's career. Better they think her a flighty, lovestruck girl than a stubborn woman with no intention of being forced into marriage with a groom not of her choice.

Tommy and Ginny had notified their parents, who were disappointed that the wedding would not be held at their families' home church back in Esau County, but otherwise delighted to see the pair finally joined in that most esteemed of unions. It would not be the sort of wedding you saw at the picture show, with Ginny in a glittering white gown and Tommy in a tuxedo. Ginny would wear a neat white linen blouse and matching skirt, onto which her mama had embroidered blue roses at the collar and the cuffs. Tommy would wear his best Sunday suit. It would be a quiet ceremony attended only by a sleepy bailiff and the judge's secretary to stand as witnesses, but it would no doubt be the happiest day of their lives.

Jack had acquired a pair of simple gold bands for the couple to exchange, since Tommy was concerned he might face questions if his employer had learned of the purchase. Paradise may have felt like the big city to Tommy Adkins, but it was a small enough town that gossip on the scale of a young man buying wedding rings was sure to reach every ear. The last thing Tommy needed was to arouse the suspicions of Nathaniel Locke. The man was dangerous, as was the plan that he and Jack had concocted to extricate Tommy from his employ.

As they had hammered out the details over the past month, Tommy had grown more confident that Jack's scheme could work. Maybe. But there was very little room for error. Everything had to go just right, or Ginny Estep would be exchanging her white dress for a black one to wear to his funeral.

["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*

For all the days seemed longer than most as Tommy scrambled to make all the necessary arrangements for the two events he was planning, the time almost flew by. The debut of the new service was scheduled for December 31st, and would be celebrated with a rolling New Year's Eve party aboard the Lockes' first locomotive to feature the glamorous new bar car. Executives from both the Barrow and Locke contingents of B&L would be in attendance, alongside other VIP guests affiliated with the company, and these folks kept Tommy busy accommodating their special requests up to the very last minute. This one exclusively drank a particular variety of wine that could only be acquired at certain specialty shops in New York City, which Tommy had a devil of a time reaching to place the order. That one required certain crates to be delivered to their quarters on board the sleeper car — and they must be delivered the evening before the event, of course, and only the guest's staff could be allowed to handle the crates. The list went on and on.

Christmas come and went, and Boyd and Emma Adkins were disappointed that their son was too tied up with Locke Rail's special project to travel to Esau County for a holiday visit. Instead they offered to take the train down to Paradise on Sunday the 29th to bring Tommy his Christmas present. He had a hell of a time dissuading them from the plan, but they finally relented when he promised to bring Ginny for a visit after the wedding. Tommy hated to lie to his mama and daddy — in truth, he had no idea when the two of them might be able to return —

but he had no intention of putting anyone he cared about in Nathaniel Locke's sights. Not with what he and Jack had planned.

Before Tommy knew it, the whole last week of December had passed, and on the last day of the year 1935, he found himself at the Paradise train station overseeing the final details of the evening's festivities. He expected to take delivery of the cases of J.T. Fields' Special Brew that Mr. Locke had ordered for the party — as well as the barrels that would be delivered to the Barrow home office in Pennsylvania — that afternoon, and see them loaded safely onto the train. For once, Tommy was not responsible for making this delivery himself. Jack had hired a truck to retrieve the order from his distillery, and was sending along some of his distillery workers to assist with the loading. Tommy was grateful to have the help, but when the delivery arrived around noon, he was surprised to find Jack had come along to personally oversee the operation.

Tommy directed the workmen to the car where the barrels would be loaded — a freight car located directly behind the bar car — and reached for one of the crates of bottled Special Brew to lug into the bar car himself, but Jack pulled him aside.

JACK: You let them take care of that. That's what I'm paying em for. If I might have a word?

Tommy glanced around nervously.

TOMMY: Here? Are you sure?

Jack nodded and winked.

JACK: Don't you worry about that, son. If I want a private word, I assure you it stays private. Now. You're ready for tonight? You know the plan?

Tommy nodded.

TOMMY: Mr. Locke knows you want me to personally look after those barrels until we get to Pennsylvania. He seems to think it's funny, but he's agreed to it.

Jack's teeth flashed in an expression that wasn't quite a smile.

JACK: He thinks he's humoring me. Good. He'll never see it coming. Go on, now. Tell me the rest.

TOMMY: I'm to keep out of Mr. Locke's way and keep an eye out the window. When I see the Casimir County wayside sign, I should go back to the car with the barrels. If anyone asks, I'm just checking on the cargo. I should stay there until we get to the whistle post. When I hear the whistle, the train will start slowing down. I should wait twenty seconds, light the fuse, open the door, and jump. I'll take cover in the woods, then walk back to the whistle post. Your friend will meet me there.

JACK: Good. Good job, son. Yes. Exactly. Now, about those barrels.

The barrels had all been branded with the J.T. Fields' Special Brew insignia, which featured three Xes at the bottom. The barrel with the fuse, however, Jack explained, carried a fourth X — recognizable enough for Tommy, but not a variation that should draw anyone else's attention as anything other than an error. This special barrel had been fitted with an extra false lid — which Tommy would need to pry off — that concealed the fuse.

JACK: It ain't on there tight, now. You won't need a pry bar. Just make sure you've got a good knife in your bag. That should do.

Tommy nodded.

TOMMY: All right. I've got daddy's old hunting knife in the truck.

JACK: Now listen, son, this... friend of mine who's helping you along... he's a peculiar sort. Very particular. You mind your manners with him now, understand?

TOMMY: Yes, sir.

JACK: Ok, son. Now... you're ready? Do you have any questions? Is there anything else you need from me?

Tommy hesitated, and then nodded reluctantly. He hated to ask Jack for anything else, given his previous experience with Jack's favors, but he had no one else to call on.

TOMMY: Could you get the old Ford back up to Esau County? I'm sure my mama and daddy could use it — or sell it, if they need the money. It was my papaw's, and... well, I hate to just leave it here.

Jack grinned.

JACK: Say no more, son. It's as good as done.

One small weight removed from his shoulders, Tommy retrieved his rucksack from the back of the Model T, gave it a fond pat on the hood, and handed Jack his keys. The two shook hands, and Jack clapped him on the back fondly.

JACK: Good luck to you, boy. And give my love to Miss Ginny.

The rest of Tommy's day passed relatively smoothly. There were numerous final details to see to, but thankfully, the B&L staff Mr. Locke had brought in to work the event were competent, although many of them seemed somewhat ill-suited to their jobs. Tommy was surprised, for example, to see a hulking man of nearly seven feet assigned to tend the bar. Meanwhile, a reedy little man who Tommy's eyes never quite seemed to settle on had been hired to act as a stoker. The juxtaposition struck Tommy as mighty peculiar, but he didn't have the time nor the poor sense to question Nathaniel Locke's judgment.

Around three in the afternoon, Mr. Locke's guests began to arrive. To his great relief, it was not up to Tommy to see them situated in their cabins. That unhappy chore was the conductor's responsibility, and he was welcome to it. By four-thirty, the passengers had boarded, Mr. Locke

had arrived, and the conductor announced they would soon be on their way. Tommy took a few moments to nip into the lavatory to wash his hands and face, change into a clean shirt, and put on a tie. He considered changing into his Sunday suit for the party, but decided against it. He planned to wear that suit in the wedding, and it wouldn't do to rip the knee out jumping off the train.

If you survive jumping off the train, a little voice whispered in Tommy's mind, but he pushed the thought aside. He was committed to his course now, and he would see it through. The alternative was... well, the alternative was probably death, because if he delivered these barrels to B&L's home office, the folks in Barrow, PA would quickly discover that what they contained had far more firepower than whiskey. Tommy didn't know exactly what it was — when he asked, Jack had told him it was better he not know, just in case something went wrong and he was questioned about it. But Jack had impressed upon him how very important it was that Tommy get clear of the train before it blew.

Once he felt he was presentable enough, Tommy took the seat assigned to him by Mr. Locke and waited nervously for the train to depart. At a quarter to five, the whistle blew, and the steam engine began its journey north right on time. The plan was to travel through the evening, straight through to Barrow with no stops in between. They should arrive around midnight or thereabouts, and the party would continue with a banquet at the Barrow family home offices. Of course, if Tommy succeeded, the train would never reach its destination.

He sat nervously in his seat until the sun set and the conductor announced, in solemn tones, that the bar car was now open. The assembled passengers rose to their feet, cheering, and folks began to file past Tommy, eager to order drinks. Once the guests had all found their way to the party, Tommy followed, though not to join in the festivities. He worked his way politely through the crowd and then slipped into the car behind to check on his charges. To his great relief, the barrels were undisturbed. Tommy had taken the precaution of stashing his pack behind them earlier in the day, as carrying it with him through the party might attract undue attention. Now, he reached into it to retrieve the book he was currently reading. He had begun *The Thin Man* last month but had made little progress due to his work schedule. Now he had nothing else to do but wait and watch for the Casimir County wayside marker, but that was a good ninety miles ahead

of them. So he would settle into his seat with the book to pass the time — and to keep him from worrying about the task ahead.

The night was clear, the weather cold but otherwise ideal for travel, and the train made good time. When his watch told him they must surely be nearing Casimir County, Tommy tucked his book into his coat pocket and occupied himself with watching through his window for the marker alongside the tracks.

NATHANIEL LOCKE: Mr. Adkins!

Nathaniel Locke's voice suddenly boomed from behind him as his employer stepped out of the men's lavatory. A moment later, Tommy felt the man's hand clamp down on his shoulder. He froze, a chill working its way up his spine.

NATHANIEL LOCKE: What are you doing out here, Tommy old boy?

TOMMY: Well, uh... I *am* here to work, Mr. Locke. I didn't think it would be right to—

NATHANIEL LOCKE: You didn't think it would be right! That's why I like you, son. So conscientious! But come now, it's New Year's Eve. I think the company can spot you a drink, son. Especially since you're the man responsible for all this!

TOMMY: Well, Mr. Locke, I... I don't think... I mean I'm also here to look after, uh, Mr. Fields' interests. I—

But Nathaniel Locke wasn't taking no for an answer.

NATHANIEL LOCKE: Oh, hush now! Jack brews the stuff himself! And I know well enough he was bootlegging it before they passed the 21st. He certainly would not begrudge you a snort or two.

Mr. Locke hauled Tommy to his feet, and not knowing what else to do, Tommy followed him through the train to the bar car. He had to admit, it had turned out nice. The bar itself was constructed of polished oak that gleamed under the light of elegant stained glass lamps. Guests lounged on plush sofas that smelled of fresh leather, or perched on chairs appointed in rich velvet. Tommy was led to the bar, where Nathaniel Locke proceeded to order for him — J.T. Fields' Special Brew, neat.

Tommy was concerned about drinking before undertaking the night's work, but he had little choice. He sipped at his whiskey, and thanked his soon-to-be-former employer for it. Satisfied, Mr. Locke excused himself to go and speak with a guest. Tommy withdrew to a spot near a window where he could resume his watch for the Casimir marker. Finally, the marker emerged from the shadows. Relieved, Tommy knocked back the rest of his drink, set his glass on a nearby table, and began making his way through the crowd, toward the door that would lead him to the adjacent freight car where the barrels waited.

He had his hand on the door when he felt a hand clamp onto his shoulder once again.

NATHANIEL LOCKE: Tommy! Leaving the party already?

TOMMY: Just checking on Mr. Fields' delivery, sir, as I promised him. I'll be right—

NATHANIEL LOCKE: Oh, it can wait! Come now. There's someone very special I'd like you to meet.

Tommy found himself dragged alongside his now clearly drunken employer, who for some reason felt the overwhelming urge to introduce him to a pretty young woman in a red dress.

NATHANIEL LOCKE: Susan, this is my assistant, Tommy Adkins. Best assistant I've ever had!

Nathaniel Locke rambled on to the woman, whose smile had begun to look a bit forced, his arm slung around Tommy's shoulders. Tommy glanced at the clock, praying to be released soon. Then suddenly he heard the whistle blow, and knew he'd run out of time.

TOMMY: Um, excuse me, sir — madam — apologies, but I need to, um, excuse myself.

Tommy babbled excuses, and felt Nathaniel Locke's eyes on him. He could hear those dark whispers rise around the man as he regarded Tommy with annoyance and perhaps suspicion. The air around him grew cold and — to Tommy at least. The icy murmuring in his ears grew louder, and he could almost make out what they were saying. But then Mr. Locke chuckled and slapped him on the back.

NATHANIEL LOCKE: Need to see a man about a horse, eh? By all means, boy, don't let us keep you.

Relieved, Tommy backed away from the pair, moving as quickly through the crowd as he could while keeping one eye on his boss. The men's room was located in the opposite direction from the freight car. He couldn't take a chance on Mr. Locke noticing his trajectory and wondering where he was really headed, but he had to hurry. He could feel the train slowing beneath their feet. There was no time to waste.

Finally, Tommy reached the doors and ducked into the freight car, pulling his rucksack from behind the barrels. He grabbed the knife he'd packed and began riffling through it for his lighter. Where was it? And why hadn't he had the sense to put the damn thing in his pocket? His fingers found the smooth metal of the Zippo, and he pulled it out and flicked it to glowing life, peering at the logos on the barrels. There, right in the middle, was the barrel with the misprint logo. Tommy pulled the hunting knife from its sheath and quickly pried the false lid from the barrel, feeling around until he found the fuse. With shaking hands, he held the lighter out, and the fuse sparked.

TRAIN CREWMAN: Hey, boy! What you doin over there? Is that... is that fire!?

Tommy turned to find the skinny little man he had noticed that morning stepping through the door at the opposite end of the car. The crewman rushed over, grabbing Tommy by the arm. His grip was far stronger than Tommy would have credited a man of his size. At his touch, that sense of darkness washed over Tommy, and he heard the echo of whispers in his head. It was faint — just a tickle, not as strong as when he was in Mr. Locke's presence, but Tommy had learned to

recognize it over the years. Whatever else this man might be, he was touched by the same taint as Nathaniel Locke.

TRAIN CREWMAN: What do you think you're doing? You want to kill us all?

The little man snarled, and Tommy didn't mistake the growl in his voice. The clock was ticking, the fuse burning. He could hear its deadly hiss behind him, and he had no choice. Tommy plunged his knife into the Locke crewman's chest and sprinted for the door.

Below him, the ground rushed by. The train was still moving at a clip, but he thought he just might make it. Gripping his rucksack, Tommy took a breath and jumped. He hit the ground hard and rolled with the impact, tumbling ass-over-teakettle down the grassy embankment as a massive BOOM! shook the night. And then another. And another. There was one for each of the barrels Jack's men had loaded onto the train. Twisted metal, ash, and debris rained down from above, as the burning train rolled on, a juggernaut of screaming metal fire. It didn't leave the rails until it reached the switch some hundred yards further down the track.

Tommy rolled to a stop just inside the treeline, coming to rest in a tangle of brush and mountain laurel with a jarring impact. For a moment he lay where he was, stunned and breathless. Then breathing slowly, hoping to calm his racing heart, he began taking stock of his injuries, rocking his head from side to side, wiggling his fingers and toes, feeling about for any broken bones. Miraculously, he felt fine. He was covered in scrapes and bruises from his tumble down the hill, but otherwise unharmed. Cautiously, Tommy rolled over and pushed himself to his haunches, keeping under the cover of the brush and peering into the darkness for any sign of pursuit. He saw no one. Pushing himself to his feet, he looked around.

In the distance, he could see a light glowing atop the whistle post where Jack said his friend would be waiting. Shouldering his pack and keeping to the trees lest he be spotted by any survivors, Tommy hiked back to the spot where the marker had been firmly planted in concrete and glanced around nervously. After a moment he called tentatively into the darkness.

TOMMY: H...Hello? Is there... anybody out there?

THE RAILROAD MAN: Why, yes. Yes there is, Mr. Adkins. All safe and sound, are we?

Tommy whipped around at the words. Standing directly behind him was a tall man in an elegant, perfectly tailored charcoal pinstripe suit. His hair was dark, lightly dusted with gray at the temples, and his salt-and-pepper beard was trimmed with a precision that spoke to the expertise of a seasoned barber, and in spite of the late hour and their location, his polished black oxfords gleamed.

TOMMY: Yeah... I'm alright, I think. Are you the friend that Jack sent?

The man flashed Tommy a dazzling smile, and his dark eyes twinkled.

THE RAILROAD MAN: Friend... is a strong word, Mr. Adkins, but yes. Our mutual friend asked that I collect you from yon disaster and see you safely to the next leg of your journey. If you'll follow me?

Before Tommy could say another word, the man in the bespoke suit turned and began striding down the side of the tracks.

THE RAILROAD MAN: Step lightly, my boy. You've another train to catch.

TOMMY: Oh! Yes, sir. Sorry, sir.

Tommy adjusted his rucksack and hurried after the stranger. In spite of his youth, it was almost a struggle to keep up. The man set quite a pace.

THE RAILROAD MAN: I trust you've no plans to further pursue your career in railway sabotage, yesss?

TOMMY: Uh... no. No, sir. One time was more than enough for me.

The stranger flashed that brilliant smile again, clapping Tommy soundly on the shoulder.

THE RAILROAD MAN: Good man.

The rest of their walk passed in silence, Tommy trailing in the besuited man's wake as a tunnel loomed ahead of them. He didn't recall passing through any tunnel just before he'd jumped from the Locke train, but he had been a little distracted. Maybe he'd missed it. The darkness enveloped them as though they'd been swallowed by some great dark beast, and the only thing Tommy could make out in the gloom was the outline of the man ahead of him. The tunnel seemed unaccountably quiet. He could hear nothing but the sound of his own breath, not even the sound of their footsteps, which should have echoed against the walls of the concrete chamber.

The passage stretched on. It felt as though they'd been walking through the darkness the better part of an hour, and Tommy was on the verge of asking just where they were going, when without warning, they emerged into the starry, moonlit night. The air was cold, and a dusting of snow lay on the fields that surrounded them as far as they eye could see, stretching clear to the horizon — corn fields, Tommy recognized with a start, the shorn stalks of last summer's crop poking up through the thin blanket of white. Ahead of them, not fifty yards from the place they left the tunnel, a quiet country station was lit by a single, glowing lantern.

The change was so sudden, Tommy nearly lost his balance. He had seen no light at the end of the long tunnel, heard no gradual return of the night's usual noises — shuffling night critters, hoot owls, and the like. One moment they were absent, and the next, they filled his ears. Tommy found himself in a place he did not recognize, one they surely hadn't come through on the train from Paradise. He opened his mouth to ask Jack's friend about their strange route, and then thought better of it. If there was one thing he'd learned during his time working for J.T. Fields, it was that there were some questions better left unasked.

The rural depot at which they found themselves was small, not the sort of place that would be open to the public. There was enough room for one person to sit and sell tickets, perhaps space for a privy in back, and not much more. As they approached, Tommy could see a sleepy ticket agent nodding over his post within. The man in the natty suit stepped up to the window, spoke briefly with him, and returned with a ticket. The next train, he explained, would take Tommy to Chicago, where he would board another that would take him the rest of the way to Los Angeles.

As they stood talking, Tommy heard the whistle of that next train approaching, and turned to watch it roll to a stop in front of the station.

The doors swung open, but no one emerged from the passenger car. Instead, the conductor stepped down and motioned Tommy forward. Tommy handed the man his ticket, and started to climb aboard, but then remembered the man in the suit and turned back.

TOMMY: Oh! Excuse me, sir, I almost forgot. I wanted to thank you for your... your help.

The platform behind him stood empty. The man in the charcoal suit had vanished without another word.

In the woods that ran alongside the railroad track through Casimir County, the man known as J.T. Fields stood with his hands in his pockets under cover of the trees, and surveyed his work. Or rather, Tommy's work. It appeared the boy had followed his instructions to the letter, or near as made no difference. The embankment was littered with twisted metal and charred wood and all manner of unrecognizable debris from the 2-8-2 steam locomotive that had left Paradise that afternoon, stretching from the switch in the tracks off into the trees on the other side. Some cars lay on their sides, the Locke Rail insignia burned away from their blackened husks. No one stirred from the wreckage, at least not yet, not that Jack had seen. His teeth flashed in a feral grin.

Jack felt the air stir to his right.

THE RAILROAD MAN: It seems you've made quite a mess here, old friend. Who do you imagine is going to clean it up?

JACK: Now, now. There shouldn't be much damage to the rails themselves, just the train —

THE RAILROAD MAN: Just the train. *Just*. The train. Yess. You know, when you called in your marker, you asked that I take responsibility for your ward. That I collect him when his task was

done and see him safely on his way. You told me he would need to sabotage the train. And while I agreed to overlook this trespass upon my territory, you failed to inform me of the extent of the damage you planned to do. Or that one of *my* instruments would be on board.

JACK: Well now... I should think ridding your rails of a bit of vermin would almost count as a favor.

THE RAILROAD MAN: He was mine. He was an insufferable nuisance who never showed the proper respect for his betters, and I was rather looking forward to eliminating him as soon as he'd served his purpose, but he was not. yours. to kill. His ilk have made themselves a part of the railroad, by word and by bond of blood. His death belonged to me.

JACK: Collateral damage. It couldn't be helped.

THE RAILROAD MAN: Oh, Jack... you know better than that. Jack of Fables, Jack of the Wood, Jack of too many names to count, by the old compacts and the new, you have brought harm to one of mine. My debt is repaid, and now you. owe. me.

The remains of the smile faded from Jack's face. Of course. This one always was a stickler for rules and etiquette and observing the proper forms. Jack would have preferred to call in another marker, solicit aid from any other source, but given the situation, it couldn't be helped.

JACK: So it's like that, is it? All right then, name your price.

The main from the railroad smiled. Jack could see the gleam of his sharp white teeth in the moonlight.

THE RAILROAD MAN: It wouldn't quite be an... equivalent... trade, but the boy has potential. I find myself intrigued.

JACK: Leave him be. I've no claim on Tommy, in any case. He served his purpose and repaid his own debt to me. He earned his freedom.

THE RAILROAD MAN: Has he? He was your hand in this, the instrument of your insult upon me and mine.

JACK: Leave. Him. Be.

THE RAILROAD MAN: Very well then. I suppose I might be persuaded to turn a blind eye to his transgression... for a price. A favor owed, to be collected in future at a time of my choosing. And you will *not* deny me again.

Jack gritted his teeth. There was that shoe again, back on the wrong foot. How he loathed obligation. He sighed.

JACK: Done.

THE RAILROAD MAN: Excellent. Always a pleasure doing business, Jack.

When Jack glanced up again, the man in the bespoke charcoal suit was gone.

[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. And just like that our time with Mr. Fields and them star-crossed young'uns comes to a close, and what a close it was. Now don't act surprised. Y'all knew we couldn't wander around the tracks that long before a certain charcoal suited so-and-so got involved — but you gotta wonder when he's gonna call in that marker, don't you? What's he gonna ask of our Jack? Time will tell, family. Time will tell. Now, this marks the end of the Paradise arc this time around, but it does not — not not not — mark the end of Act III. We got a couple more episodes left before we take a little break before the home stretch of Season 3. So buckle up for a little two-parter action that yours truly has cooking on the stove as we speak. New characters, new places. Get ready, y'all.

Now, you can keep up with what's coming next, be reminded of all our upcoming events and happenings, by heading on over to oldgodsofappalachia.com. Complete your social media ritual by following us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. There are even links to the cozy confines of the Facebook group and the Discord server over there. But if you're wanting to support us in more of an envelope full of ill gotten-gains sort of way, you can head on over to patreon.com/oldgodsofappalachia and pledge your devotion at the appropriate level to gain access to over thirty episodes of exclusive storylines and special programming. If you'd like to make a one time donation, you can follow the link to the Acast supporter feature in the show notes.

And this is your every dang show 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 performed by Steve Shell. Our theme song is by our brother Landon Blood and our outro music is by Those Poor Bastards. The voice of the Railroad Man, as always, is Yuri Lowenthal. Talk to you soon, family. Talk to you real soon.

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