

OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA

presents

SPRINGTIME IN BOGGS HOLLER

Chapter One: A Cowboy Calls

“Springtime in Boggs Holler” is an all new story set in the same world as Old Gods of Appalachia, which is a horror anthology podcast and therefore may contain material not suitable for all audiences. This story takes place following the events of “The Scenic Route” in Season 2 and precedes the events of *Build Mama a Coffin*.

Chapter One: A Cowboy Calls

Esau County, VA

1927

When you live on the edge of one of the oldest wind gaps along the Virginia/Kentucky border, spring is something that happens to other people. The ground was just beginning to offer up tender shoots in various shades of green, knowing damn well that a frost-kissed cold snap could be perched like a tomcat waiting to swipe the whole process back to crunchy mud and withered husks at any given moment. It was a cruel and bitter game, but that’s what living on the side of a mountain will get you. This particular daybreak carried just that flavor of unfinished winter, and Glory Ann Boggs was making her morning rounds, tending to the land that had been her refuge and small kingdom for as long as she or anyone else could remember .

She moved slower than she liked these days. Leaning on a long carved walking stick that had been her companion since she’d become a mother, she made her way along the circuit that she’d walked every day since she married Waylon Boggs all those years ago. She tended the chickens out back and gathered what eggs her old girls had to offer up, tossed some feed to Burt, Jane and Coffee Can, the three goats that kept the back hill clear of unwanted brush. Her last stop was on the other side of the property where Hattie and Berenice, her two pretty milk cows, were pastured. Her oldest boy Vernard kept telling her she needed to hire some help or else part with some of the livestock, but she wouldn’t hear of it. Since Mercy left some years ago, them old critters were her only companions around the house. She saw her fair share of folks coming and going, needing her services, as they always did. She’d travel out to deliver a newborn here and

there, but more'n more, folks were going to the new hospital over in Glamorgan to have their babies as the town grew.

Glory Ann had not been sleeping well as of late. The dreams were coming more often, and were getting more and more unsettling. She always started her days well before dawn, but these days she found herself waking earlier and earlier, piddling around, cleaning and straightening things. It was like she was expecting company, but didn't know who was coming. She was well aware the dreams weren't just dreams neither. Shadows were circling her and her blood, and as she approached her eighth decade walking this world, her time was growing short. Hell, gifted dreams aside, Glory Ann's own body was telling her it was about time. She wasn't as ready as she should be though. Grannies with the true gift could live well beyond a hundred years or more, as time treats those blessed by the Green differently than the rest of us. Glory Ann Boggs, however, had been at war with the sorts of shadows that could take years off your life just by showing you their true face. She had been a candle against the darkness for most of her life, a candle that had been burning at both ends for far too long.

She'd got all her babies off the mountain, thinking that if they got away from the land they'd be safe, but now she wasn't so sure. Vernard had his property and business down in North Carolina, Dale had his lumber and carpentry work over in Stonefort, and Mercy... well, Mercy was her own mess, but she married twice, and at least got out of Esau County. Still, none of them were prepared to stand if the things outside their understanding decided to mark them as prey. So as she progressed through her morning, Glory Ann was deep in rumination, worrying about her babies and their babies, and not paying much attention to where she was going. She knew every step of her land and the whole damn holler just by the feel of it under her feet — so when the ground spoke to her, it came up through the soles of her old work boots and shook her to a sharp and sudden attention.

Someone was on her land, and not just at the mouth of the holler. They were over on the far side of the smokehouse, at the very end of the path where she had almost walked fuzzy-headed and distracted. "Goddamn it, Glory," she muttered to herself, "you can't worry about the younguns so much that you let them catch you with your mouth open and your teeth out." As quiet as she could, she set her egg basket and feed satchel down and focused herself. She settled her breathing and closed her eyes. She drew upon her gift and felt the Green steady her for the

moment. The ache in her hip and her tricky knee faded and firmed up. If somebody was on *her* land, inside *her* wards and meant harm, she almost felt bad for them. Almost. Her grip shifted, and she held her walking stick as a weapon rather than a crutch. She moved with surprising silence and stealth for a woman of her considerable height and size to the east side of the property. She kept her eyes peeled and extended her senses through her wards, and it wasn't long before she saw him.

He was just a boy, maybe a little more than school-aged. She couldn't tell for sure from where she stood, but he wasn't big at all. She did not relax or let the power she'd gathered about her go. There were things in these hills that could look like all manner of innocents right up until they got close enough to bite you. On the surface, he looked like a baby, younger than her youngest grandson. Something just... wasn't right with him, though. There was a coldness about him that had nothing to do with the fickle seasons of southwestern Virginia. He stood with his back to her, staring at Hattie and Berenice. The animals did not appear spooked — in fact, Hattie had moved closer to him and seemed to be considering accepting pets from the little feller. Hattie wasn't the brightest thing, but even she should sense what Glory Ann did: the child was touched by something dark and old. To her eyes he was a boy, plain and simple as any other, if a bit small and soft. Through her gift though, she could smell leaf-rot, grave-turned earth, and the iron-kissed stench of cooling blood. If he was a boy, he was surely afflicted with a curse, and a powerful one. The boy was about to touch Berenice's nose when Glory Ann called out, her power infusing her words with command.

GLORY ANN: Stop right there, son. And don't you move a hair.

The boy didn't jump. He didn't even really stir. He turned his head slowly to look at Glory Ann. She expected to meet the gaze of something hiding inside the form of a child. There were things under the mountain that could hold together a human form for a while. They'd walk into a dry goods store or a church looking normal as you please, and next thing you know, there's dead bodies everywhere and no explanation. But the eyes were usually where the Things or the h'aunts got it wrong. Even with animals and such. You'd have a sweet little rabbit or fawn come to the edge of your yard and go to see about it, and its eyes would be swirling pools of purple shadow or weeping tears of black blood, and then it would speak in the voice of a dead preacher or something like that. Glory Ann had seen it plenty of times. But this boy's eyes were a normal

pale blue and seemed soft and kind. In fact, as he turned to face her fully, that cold sense of rot slowly shifted to the warmth she associated with someone with a gift of their own. She blinked. The boy looked startled, but not really scared. He smiled a bit uncertainly.

“I-I like your cows,” he said simply, pointing into the pen.

The ground under Glory Ann’s feet thrummed again. This time the message was clear. Eastern ward. Powerful gift. A woman. No ill intent, but panicked.

A fearful voice came from 10 or 15 yards in that direction. “Miz Boggs! Miz Boggs! Wait! Wait, please wait! We don’t mean you no harm, please!”

Glory Ann turned to see a redheaded woman that she vaguely recognized standing right at the edge of her eastern property line, anxious to cross, but clearly knowing better than to try. Her eyes were wide and her face was wrought with fear. She’d have wondered if this was the boy’s mother if her mind hadn’t made the connection and fetched up the woman’s name from her memory. Glory Ann squinted over at her and called back.

GLORY ANN: You’re a Walker, ain’t ye? One of Sheila’s girls? Thought y’all was over in Tennessee?

ELLIE: Y-y-es, Ma’am... I keep a...a...place over on Birchfield, in Glamorgan, part of the time too.

GLORY ANN: Yeah, I heard that too. Ellie Walker. That you?

ELLIE: Yes, Miz Boggs, that’s me. If you grant me passage, I swear on my mama and her mama’s name that we mean you no harm and honestly, we need your help.

Glory Ann looked back to the boy by the cowpen. He’d turned back to the cows, and the shadow of death and hungry dark spread out from him again, chilling her bones.

GLORY ANN: Well, come on in, Miss Walker, and please explain what you’ve brought onto my land.

Ellie didn't know where to start. She'd been stunned when Glory Ann Boggs had recognized her on sight. The woman was known throughout the region as one of the toughest and wisest grannies still walking. Her reclusive nature and thunderstorm of a temper had also become infamous as she aged into her sunset years. She'd planned on calling on Miz Boggs all formal like good manners dictated, but she'd woken up to find Cowboy had wandered off. Then come to find he'd somehow just glided past wards that would make her sister Marcie green with envy to visit with the old bird's beloved milk cows. Could this morning get any worse? She had to choose her words carefully or she might find out.

Ellie started to speak, but Glory Ann shook her head.

GLORY ANN: No, ma'am. Mm-mm. I suspect what you need to tell me needs me to be fully awake and listening close, and that requires that I have my breakfast and my coffee.

She threw a skeptical eye over at Cowboy.

GLORY ANN: You are welcome to join me, but you'll understand if I ask the young gentleman to eat outside.

Ellie scowled at this a little on Cowboy's behalf, but then realized how the boy must come across to gifted folks who didn't know him, especially somebody who'd seen the kinda things Glory Ann Boggs had. Ellie nodded and called over to the boy, "Cowboy, honey, Miz Boggs is gonna be putting the stove on. You want something to eat?"

"No thank you," the boy called back, his eyes never leaving the bovine ladies in their pen. "I'm not hungry right now, Miss Walker." And then, "I appreciate you offering though, Miz Boggs."

Glory Ann felt that shift from cold shadow to spring sunshine again as the boy turned to face her. What a peculiar little thing he was. Warily, she returned his smile and nodded.

GLORY ANN: I'll set some aside for you, young man, should you change your mind. I got a mess of bacon and taters to fry and the smell might wake your belly up.

Cowboy smiled and nodded and turned back to the cows. Glory Ann motioned for Ellie to follow her as she moved down the path towards the house, not wanting to feel the return of that withering shade that spread from the boy's back.

On the walk to the house, Ellie Walker told Glory Ann everything she knew about Cowboy, who used to be called Caleb. His family had moved onto land adjacent to the nameless place and had given it a name, which apparently had started a dark chain of events that rolled across the Tennessee Valley. The Mother and Child walked again, and it seemed that death was everywhere. Glory Ann listened and nodded grimly.

ELLIE: Things been stirring all over, and that old biddy being up raisin' hell fits right in. Why there's been all kinds of doing over in—

Glory Ann stopped walking and turned on Ellie.

GLORY ANN: Wait a goddurn minute, Ellie Walker. You said you come here looking for help?

ELLIE: Yes'm. I was hoping—

Rage and frustration suddenly filled Glory Ann's weathered face. She breathed deeply and went on in a clipped tone.

GLORY ANN: Miss Walker, look me in the eye and tell me you ain't asking me to saddle up and come down to Tennessee and fix this.

ELLIE: Miz Boggs no, we—

GLORY ANN: I'm telling you here and now I can't. I just can't do it. I ain't got long left, and I got business of my own to get on with before my time is up. I can't go bind up every beast y'all let loose now. It's y'all's turn. I told them they couldn't change a damn thing about the way that binding works, now look atchee. Come runnin up the mountain for the elders to save you, I tell you I cain't!

Ellie cut her off as respectfully as she could.

ELLIE: Miz Boggs. It's the boy, Miz Boggs. He's the only one she's spared that we know of, and she... she changed him.

Ellie plowed ahead before Glory Ann could interrupt, her words spilling forth in a rush, desperate for the guidance of someone who knew more than she did, scared to death Miz Boggs might turn them away.

ELLIE: My niece Sarah brought him to us. She was his teacher at school. She's got the gift, and she noticed that something wasn't right with him, but he ain't never hurt nobody. So my sister Marcie and me, we did the egg test with him and what we found don't make no sense. It's like the dark and the green are all mixed up inside him. He ain't growing, he can't eat — that's why he didn't want no breakfast — everything he eats he sneaks off and throws up. He thinks we don't notice, but we do. That's not the worst of it though, ma'am. I don't think... I don't think he can die. He went out on the lake out by the Gap and something come for him. His friends it — saw him die, they said. They saw something hit him hard enough to break every bone in his body, and he just shows back up at the school house like he just got left behind on the playground. Now please, I ain't asking you to set one foot off this land, but he's just a baby, Miz Boggs. He never asked for this. Never asked to be chained to this earth like some damned h'aint. And everybody knows that Boggs Holler is where you go when you need help with the dead or with things that won't die. We all got bags to carry and life ain't fair, but those of us that can do more should do. I don't know what your mama taught you, but it's what my mama taught me. So please, Miz Boggs, if you think you can help Cowboy, then do. If you can't... well, I guess we'll be on our way.

Glory Ann took a deep breath and let it out, releasing the power she'd been holding. The aches and stiffness in her old bones and joints slowly returned, along with a fresh wave of shame that poured in like rainwater to fill the place that had held her initial anger. There she went again, so caught up in her own woes and troubles, she'd almost forgot the whole reason for the gifts she'd been given. She was put here to help people, to keep folks safe from the darkness.

GLORY ANN: Miss Walker, I'm gonna go in my house and fix some breakfast. Why don't you come in and tell me more about our.... young friend out there. We'll see what can be done.

ELLIE: Miz Boggs, thank you. I-

GLORY ANN: Hush, girl. I ain't done y'all no good just yet. I ain't making no promises on that count. What I can promise is bacon and eggs. You get on in the house, now.

Ellie dipped her head like a chastened school girl and proceeded through the open door into the house. Glory Ann took a moment to gaze thoughtfully back in the direction of the cowpen and her new friend. Now that she was aware of the shadow he carried, she couldn't not feel it on her land. With a sigh for both the situation at hand and the ache in her old bones, she followed the younger Miss Walker into her house, closing the door behind her.

[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. Thank y'all for coming along for the ride here in "Springtime in Boggs Holler, Chapter One: A Cowboy Calls" I know y'all have been real anxious about finding out what happens to this little feller. Well you got three episodes to tell that tale. You might regret asking, but you done did it, so here we go. If y'all are enjoying meeting the inhabitants of Boggs Holler, you may want to consider joining the congregation over on Patreon.com/oldgodsofappalachia. For \$10 a month, you get access to all seventeen episodes of *Build Mama a Coffin*, the ongoing series of *Black Mouthed Dog*, which is a prequel to *Build Mama*. You get Door Under the Floor, Steve Reads, Cam Reads, all kinds of digital extras. It's well worth the investment. We work very hard to make our Patreon worth your time and worth your hard earned dollar. You can also head over to oldgodsofappalachia.com to complete your social media ritual. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Discord — it's all right there. Just head on over and join the family, y'all.

Old Gods of Appalachia is a production of DeepNerd Media, distributed by Rusty Quill. Today's story was written and performed by Steve Shell, produced by Cam Collins and Steve Shell, with additional audio production by Kris Hayes. Our intro music is by Landon Blood. Our outro music is by Those Poor Bastards, and as always the voice of Glory Ann Bogg, the Spine of the Mountain, was Allison Mullins. See ya soon, family. See ya real soon.

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