

OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA

presents

SPRINGTIME IN BOGGS HOLLER

Chapter Two: Hunger Pains

“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 Two: Hunger Pains

Esau County, VA

1927

Melvin Blevins sat on the tailgate of his truck and waited at the mouth of Boggs Holler. Seemed like that had been his primary function lately — drive places and wait. He didn’t mind much when the Walkers were involved — shoot, especially when young mister Cowboy was the one they was helping. Melvin had taken a shine to the little feller, ‘specially since he was a youngun that needed help due to the influence of spooky things that were beyond his control. Melvin understood that firsthand. If that little man needed him, he would be front and center every time.

Melvin had arrived at Boggs Holler with Miss Walker and the boy before sunup, and they’d decided to sleep a bit before calling on this Miz Boggs. When they woke to find that the boy had wandered off onto the Boggs property, Miss Ellie had told Melvin to stay with the truck in case he came back. She’d pressed a smooth pebble from the creek by the Walker House into his palm and showed him one just like it hung on a string around her neck. If his little rock stayed cool, all was well and he could stay where he was and keep watch. If it got hot, then he’d better come quick and come expecting trouble. The stones worked both ways, so if he ran into any sort of problem, Ellie would know to come running as well. Melvin had tucked the thing into his shirt pocket so he’d feel right away if there was any change, but the pebble had stayed cool throughout the morning.

He'd polished off a light breakfast of boiled eggs and ham from their provisions and that had held him for a while, but Melvin was a man of greater carriage, and as the morning wore on, he began to feel a bit peckish. He was sorely tempted to have a nibble at the sandwiches they'd set aside for lunch just in case such hospitality wasn't offered them at the Boggs homestead. He was practicing his willpower — and contemplating whether it would be all right to go ahead and have just one of the sandwiches, just his own portion, no more — when he noticed the other truck. It was an old rattlebang thing, older even than his trusty old gal. Painted a flat black, not the gleaming ebony that rolled off the factory floor — probably a farm paint job. It had pulled off to the side of the road about 30 yards away, steam whistling like a tea kettle from its radiator.

Melvin watched as two men climbed from the cab and made their way around to examine the problem. He resisted the urge to mosey across the road and offer his expertise. While his beloved Bertha was an older model whose slightly rusty body had seen better days, he kept her engine running in tip top shape. These were strangers though, and they weren't back in the Gap where he knew everybody and everybody knew him. Never know what kinda nonsense you might run into out here in the boonies. Melvin had run with his share of moonshiners back in the day, and narrow back roads like this were just the sort they liked to use to ferry their wares around the mountains. Men like that don't take kindly to being approached by strangers. The pair seemed to be pushing the truck further off the road and were getting dangerously close to the edge of the drop off over there, but they just kept pushing, checking under the hood, and then scooting it a little farther.

Melvin strained to make out the model of the truck. It looked like a Ford Model TT with the wooden slats built up on the sides. He thought it likely these were legitimate working men, seeing as how they was doing whatever it was they were doing there in broad daylight. Hell, they were probably on the job right now. Melvin's inner mechanic twitched again as the men pushed the truck even further from the road. If they weren't careful, it was gonna go right over the edge of the embankment. Melvin couldn't stand to watch any longer. He made up his mind, hopped off his tail gate, and started across the road towards the two men.

“Hey fellers! Y'all need some help? I'm happy to take a look at her if ya need!”

The two men turned and gaped at Melvin as he approached. He stopped mid-stride, holding up

his hands to show he wasn't armed. This vantage also afforded him a closer look at the truck and its occupants. On the door of the truck was stenciled in pale, flaking letters "WHITE FAMILY PRODUCE COMPANY." The two men standing by the busted truck looked like they could do with a good plate of greens themselves. Melvin thought they might be kin — both had skin that was a pale, almost papery white. The taller of the two looked like a big man who'd lost a lot of weight from a bad sickness, his skin hung off his face like a rubbery mask. The other man was skinny and pale as bones wrapped in butcher paper and held together with rubber bands. His eyes were dark and sharp behind silver framed spectacles. Both were dressed for day labor, the bigger man in overalls and a white undershirt and the smaller feller in work britches with suspenders over a white button up.

The thin man stepped forward, meeting Melvin in the middle of the road. "Well, hey there, friend! I don't know what happened. We was plugging along just fine, and then — whoop-diddy-do! — there she blows!" His dark eyes sparkled as he laughed. The cadence of his speech was hypnotic, almost musical, and Melvin found himself chuckling along with him. "Christopher over here is downright useless with machines, but I fancy myself a middling hand at keeping the mechanical mechanicking. But if you'd like to take a look? I ain't agin it." The thin man's bottomless eyes met Melvin's and held him for a moment, and then another.

Melvin tore his eyes away from the little feller's gaze. There was... something off about the man. He couldn't quite put a name to it, but Melvin knew *off* when he felt it. He hesitated and gestured at the name stenciled on the door of the truck. "So um, y'all farmers?"

The thin man grinned widely. "I am not a farmer myself, sir, no, but my family is one of the biggest providers of local produce and sundry goods in all of Esau County. Surely you've heard of White Family Produce? Our property's out Esserville way. My Granny White's been out there for years, bringing nourishment from the earth to people far away as Stonega and even out towards Paradise if need calls! Byron White, at your service."

This feller could run his gob a mile a minute like a salesman... or a boss. Melvin, of course, trusted neither. He narrowed his eyes and nodded slightly. "Uh, mighta heard of it. I ain't from around here."

The man reached out and slapped Melvin on the shoulder. His touch was cold. Melvin could feel it through his shirt sleeve. “No sir, you ain’t, are ya? I’d remember a big strong one like you — yes, indeed. You get to know most people when you live in the little towns like this don’tchee?” That little laugh again.

Melvin didn’t laugh with him this time. He found the man’s words hard to follow, and he’d begun to feel fuzzy headed. He didn’t like it. He didn’t like this fast talking booger one bit, but people in need, were people in need. Melvin started to walk towards the truck, but the man stopped him, proffering his hand. “I’m sorry. I didn’t get your name, friend.”

“Uh? Me?” Melvin’s head felt cloudy, and he had to reach for his name “Uh, my name is—”

“Mister Blevins?”

Melvin’s head snapped up at the sound of Cowboy’s voice.

“I don’t think you shake that... man’s hand. You need to trust me. Come back towards me, please, sir?” The boy extended his hand and Melvin unsteadily turned towards him.

“Cowboy? What are you doing back out here? Why aren’t you with Miss—” Melvin felt woozy on his feet all of a sudden.

“Call me Caleb, Mister Blevins. Do you understand now?”

Melvin’s eyes went wider. He’d heard the boy’s stories about what had happened to his first family, in his first life, had heard the boy tell Miss Ellie that sometimes he thought of himself as Cowboy and other times as Caleb. And how those other times were almost never good times. Caleb reached out, took Melvin’s big hand in his small one, and tugged him back to the far side of the road. Melvin felt almost drunk as he stumbled back towards his truck.

The skinny man in suspenders glared as if Caleb had just stepped on his good shoes and called his mama a name. Melvin saw his hands go to his hips like an old church lady about to tell somebody off. “This your boy, mister? Well, if he was my boy, he’d know better than to interrupt

grown folks when they're talking," Byron White declared.

When Caleb had come back to the truck to find Mister Blevins wandering toward two strangers, he had *seen* the men in the special way he saw sometimes, where life and death unfolded before him. What he saw was an abomination. The bigger of the two men was dead, just an empty sack of skin filled with a ghost that wasn't even his. The man's face, though slack and tired to those who looked at him in the regular way, contorted in a neverending scream of agony to Caleb's sight. It scared him a little, but more than that, it made him feel bad for the poor ghost stuck inside a stranger's body.

The little man in the middle of the road, though... he was a different story. He did not belong here. This was not his place, not his life nor his world. His face — if you could call it that — was blank and featureless: no eyes, nose or mouth to be seen, just a raw, rippling expanse of slimy membrane. The rest of his body consisted of a twisting mass of great white worms, thick as a grown man's arm, woven into the rough idea of a person. The worms writhed in a soup of gray, sticky ichor that seemed to serve as both lubricant and binding. There was a power coursing through him, a cold white light that didn't belong to him any more than the ghost belonged inside the body of the other man. There was no life or death for Caleb to see in this thing pretending to be a man. It was from a place where neither concept applied. The thing did not seem to realize that Caleb could truly *see* him though, as he prattled on.

"Someone just needs to take you over their knee and teach you some manners, young man. Your Daddy has done a terrible job at instilling respect for your elders." He nodded at Melvin, who had dropped to a knee, trying to stop his spinning vision.

Caleb just shook his head. "He ain't my Daddy, Mister."

Byron White's voice bubbled with glee in response. "Oh! Is he not?"

"No sir, my Daddy is dead."

"Oh, you poor, poor thing — left to be raised by the cold, cold world. No wonder you don't have any manners. Oh! No mama, either, I can see that now. Yessir, we Whites can spot an orphan a

mile away, yes we can. Well, we have just the place for little boys who need to learn manners and don't have family to teach 'em, so I think you, and your big friend there, should just come with us."

Caleb could see the man gather some of the gray ooze that coated his body on his hand, and he knew he was about to try to touch him. Caleb gestured at the marooned vehicle across the road. "I think your truck stopped working because you came too close to Miz Boggs' house. I don't think the land here likes you. I don't think Miz Boggs would like you being here, either. You should probably take your friend and start walking back down the mountain, sir."

Byron White wasn't listening, and in a world where he looked like a skinny little man in glasses, his face grinned. To Caleb's eyes, the faceless white membrane wrinkled a little. He reached for Caleb then, reached for him with that special touch of his that made your body go numb and your color drop, and eventually blew your name out of you like a candle at bedtime.

Caleb felt the cold rise in him, felt the place where ice cold lips once touched his cheek in the dark woods, planting a splinter of death in the very core of him. She'd meant to protect him, he thought, and she had. Near as he could tell, no real harm could come to him, not by force or even by time. He never slept. He couldn't eat. But he never got so much as a stuffy nose. And if anybody or anything tried to harm him, Her power would rise up in whatever horrible form it needed to take to protect him. It was almost as if She stood beside him in those moments, summoning monsters to keep him safe and destroy and devour everything else around him. Even when he was supposed to die, he couldn't seem to do it, and.. maybe that made him a monster too. He didn't know. But right now, he'd do whatever it took to protect Mr. Blevins and Miss Ellie. Even if that meant letting this... thing... hurt him — just a little, just enough to call up her awful, awful blessing — he was more than willing.

The thing that called itself Byron White stopped just short of contact with the boy as the ground shuddered and the temperature suddenly dropped around them. For the first time, it seemed to really see Caleb. The eyeless face crinkled, finally sensing the shadow that marked the boy, feeling it pull at the things that slept beneath the earth. The mass of white worms crafted in the shape of a man convulsed in fear, and the ground shook again, cracks forming as a massive shape pressed its spine against the surface of the mountain from below. The road bowed up as if

an earthbound leviathan was tunneling and slithering just under the surface, circling the boy and the monster, the sound of its coming like a living landslide being born, as whatever dead things slept outside the wards of Boggs Holler rose to answer the call of the darkness, hidden like a watchdog inside the boy.

Caleb was cold now. So cold. He could let that thing in the ground rise up and swallow this little worm. He could let it summon all the death that slept under this mountain, and there was so much. Oh, so much. He could feel it rising as the widening ripples of earth flipped the stalled truck — along with poor Christopher, who cowered behind it — off the edge of the embankment, where they tumbled away out of sight with a sickening crunch. As Byron White scuttled away from Caleb, the mountain seemed to calm itself. When he was far enough away, the ground went still, but the air stayed cold. The silence that followed would have stolen the breath from angels. The two locked eyes for just a moment, and then Byron White, eldest of the children of Granny White, taskmaster and mind-stealer of the White Property, turned and pounded down the road that led out of Boggs Holler like his unnatural life depended on it. Which it did.

Caleb watched the little man disappear around a bend in the road, and let out the breath he didn't know he'd been holding. He'd done it! He'd used whatever that woman had done to him to protect his friends and no one had gotten hurt. It was just a lot of noise and show and—

Caleb's gut clenched, and he broke into a cold sweat as the ground began to tremble once more. He felt the thing that had risen to protect him stir, felt its desire — no, its *need* — to keep coming, its need to devour and destroy everything that wasn't Caleb. And the boy fought, pushing back against it, but it was so hard and he was so tired. It would be so easy just to let it go, let it take what it wanted. Cowboy's knees turned to water, and he had begun to fold in on himself when he heard Miss Ellie call his name. And she was there, holding him up, the pebble she'd strung around her neck burning like a tiny sun against his skin as she hugged him against her.

And then he heard another woman's voice — maybe it was Miz Boggs, he didn't know — say:

GLORY ANN: It's ok, boy, you can let go. I got it now.

And so he let go, and everything went dark.

[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 you for joining us for chapter two of “Springtime in Boggs Holler” — Hunger Pains. If you’re a Patreon supporter and you have experienced *Build Mama a Coffin*, then this episode mighta hit a little bit different for ya than for those that haven’t made that tithe just yet. The White family, mmm. They are a special kinda something, ain’t they, y’all? If you know, you know. If you don’t know, you can find out. Head on over to Patreon.com/oldgodsofappalachia and you can experience all 17 episodes of *Build Mama a Coffin*. And *Build Mama a Coffin* takes place shortly after the events of “Springtime in Boggs Holler.” So if you wanna get in on that, it’s a good time to do it. And for a lot of you who were with us for the original run of *Build Mama*, who were waiting week for week for it, you’re seeing the events that will lead up to this, and I hope you’re enjoying the ride.

As always, this is a reminder to complete your social media ritual. Head on over to oldgodsofappalachia.com, and you’ll find links to all our social media — Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, the Discord server. They’re all right there so you can join up and follow along with the rest of the family, where we leak early information and give you hints and clues at what’s coming and what might not be coming. You never know. We might be slightly unreliable narrators. But you can check all of those out at oldgodsofappalachia.com.

Old Gods of Appalachia is, of course, a production of DeepNerd Media, distributed by Rusty Quill, produced by Steve Shell and Cam Collins. Our intro music is by brother Landon Blood. Our outro music is by Those Poor Bastards. Today’s story was written and performed by Steve Shell. The voice of Glory Ann Boggs was Allison Mullins. We’ll see ya soon, family. See ya real soon.