

OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA

presents

BUILD MAMA A COFFIN

Episode 6: Mercy's Reply

Build Mama a Coffin is an all-new original story set in the world of Old Gods of Appalachia, which in itself is a horror anthology podcast and y'all know what that means... so let's just get on with it.

[Build Mama a Coffin by Blood on the Harp]

Gonna build Mama a coffin, I'm gonna make it out of pine

There'll be tears from sister to make those hinges shine

Gonna build Mama a coffin, I'm gonna make it out of spruce

They can all act broken when they hear the news

That Mama's dead and gone...

“Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands and let her own works praise her in the gates.”

—Proverbs, 31:30-31

It must be clear to you now, family, that the sons of Glory Ann and Waylon Boggs are clamoring for redemption. They both know they never did right by their mama after their daddy left. They know they never honored her or respected the sacrifices that she made — the walks into blood and shadow that she partook in, in order to ensure their safety and their future — Vernard with his need for the better and the greener grass, and Dale with his enclosing nature of needing just to be left alone and to be something different, if not better, than those who bore him.

It's in these times we want to make things right when there is no way to make right. Have you felt that, family? Have you wanted to say goodbye or I'm sorry and not been able to? Well, I have. So it was in that desperate vein that the sons of Glory Ann and Waylon Boggs cast forth their hope to the town of Pineville, Kentucky, to a fine house where their younger sister laid her head.

Mercy Boggs-Carter had no more been the ideal daughter than Vernard and Dale had been perfect sons. So when her older brothers cast their lots into the wind toward Pineville, Kentucky, to see if their younger sister would ally with them against the other's plans for honoring Glory Ann, I'm not sure if they would be disappointed or intrigued with her response.

Either way, a letter sits in a mailbox in Ivy, North Carolina, and a similar missive rests in a well-built box just outside a house in Stone Fort, Virginia. Let's see what might be contained therein. Shall we, family?

MERCY: *Dear Vernard,*

It's good to hear from you, big brother. You don't write me as much as you should. How are Doris and Indiana getting on? I imagine Indy's about grown now? Eighteen, if memory serves. I hope he's a help to you and your business. A boy should follow in his daddy's footsteps. In the same way, I think a girl should follow in her mama's as best as she can.

I know I was always a stubborn child, and I gave Mama a lot of backtalk when I was a girl. I blamed her for Daddy running off, too. Children never understand these things, and you and me were no different. I understand you want to make amends and honor Mama's memory, and I do too, but I'm not sure Mama would approve of such a grand resting place, Vernard. She'd say we were putting on airs, getting above ourselves. You know it's true. I don't think we should just bury her out back of the house like an old dog like Dale wants to do, either, though. Maybe you could build a nice family cemetery down by the river? We could bury Mama there. Scenic views, peaceful... a lovely spot for Mama's final resting place. Dale can still build the coffin. He's a fine carpenter, although that boy of his is downright peculiar, if I'm being honest.

Anyway, I think it's a nice compromise. Your offer to finance Delia's education is very kind, but in fact I've already found a teacher for Delia. Actually, that's related to another matter I wanted to discuss with you and Dale, as it involves Mama's estate. I would like to move into Mama's house in Boggs Holler after the funeral. As I said, I want to make amends for the way I treated Mama when I was young. The best way I can see to do that is to take up her duties as local midwife. I know that I'll never be as good as Mama, but I've found a local woman who can tutor Delia, a sort of apprenticeship. I think with time and study, Delia will make a fine healer, who can then take my place and care for our community like Mama did.

Now, I know the family land is valuable. I have some money put aside and my husband will help out too, to make sure you and Dale both get your fair share of what the property is worth. I hope you agree that this makes the most sense so our land stays in the family. Give my love to Doris and Indy.

*Your sister,
Mercy.*

Dear Dale,

Vernard wrote to me about the cemetery he wants to build, just like you thought. He went on about it for several pages, in fact. He sounded like he'd been into Daddy's moonshine. Although being Vernard, I'm pretty sure it was some kind of fancy whiskey. But I suppose I shouldn't judge a man for drowning his sorrows in a time of grief.

You're right, of course — Mama would spit on the idea of such a fancy resting place. As I told Vernard when I wrote him back, she'd say we were big-assing. I think she'd like the simplicity of being buried on the family land as you suggested, but I think we should do a little more to honor her memory. We all know none of us did right by her when we were growing up. We should do what we can now to make amends, even if it is too little too late, as they say. I'll tell you what I told Vernard: he should build a simple, family cemetery down by the river where we can lay Mama to rest. You can build Mama's coffin as you planned. There's no better carpenter in Esau County than you, Dale, and I'm sure it'll be lovely. We'll have a wake

and a nice service so people can come and pay their respects. Nothing too fancy — she wouldn't want people carrying on, or some minister who didn't even know her to give a eulogy.

There is something else I want to talk with you and Vernard about, Dale. I know I never showed the proper respect for Mama when she was alive — not the respect a daughter owes her mother, much less the respect a woman with her skills deserved. But I'd like to do what I can now to make up for that. I want to go home to Boggs holler and take Mama's place as local midwife. I know I'll never be able to really fill her shoes, but I think that Delia can, someday. My girl has the gift, Dale, just like Mama, I'm sure of it. I should have sent her home to learn from Mama years ago, truth to tell, and not let Mama's knowledge die with her. But I've found a widow woman out in the woods not too far from Boggs Holler who should be able to teach me enough to get by ,and train Delia to be a real fine healer someday.

Now, I know Mama's land is valuable, but I have some money saved from what Craig left me and my husband is willing to pitch in too and make sure you and Vernard get your fair share of the estate. That sounds more crass than I want it to, but I want you to understand that I'm not looking to cheat you boys out of anything.

*You're my brothers and I love you both. Give my love to Daniel.
Your sister,
Mercy.*

[Build Mama a Coffin by Blood on the Harp]

*Gonna build Mama a coffin, hmm-mmm
Gonna build Mama a coffin, hmm-mmm
Gonna build Mama a coffin, hmm-mmm
Gonna build Mama a coffin, hmm-mmm
Mmm-mmm...*

Today's story was written by Cam Collins and narrated by Steve Shell. The voice of Mercy was Aliya Johnson.

*Gonna build Mama a coffin, I'm gonna make it out of pine
There'll be tears from sister to make those hinges shine...*

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