

## OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA

*presents*

### BUILD MAMA A COFFIN

Episode 7: Daniel

*Build Mama a Coffin is an all-new original tale set in the same world as Old Gods of Appalachia. We want to thank y'all for your patience and your generosity, so let's just get on with this now, shall we, family?*

[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...*

Contrary to what your mamaw might have told you one time, nobody is born bad. You can throw all that garbage about original sin right out the window because no one enters this world with true darkness in their heart. However, one can be born peculiar. And I want to be clear, when I say “peculiar” that’s exactly what I mean. It is not a folksy, veiled colloquialism for neurodivergence or developmental delays or learning challenges, it is simply... peculiar.

And peculiar is the word we would use to describe young Daniel Boggs, son of Walleydale Hobart Boggs. While Daniel barely knew his mother who passed as he came into the world, he had a kind and loving father who took neither switch nor belt to him, though would have had it had been necessary by the Boggs family standard, but Dale was never a man for violence. He was a man for reasoning, but not a man for excuses.

Daniel saw things other people didn't. Reading not being his strong suit as the words did jump all around the page and letters flip around and sometimes even numbers trip into their place, that had nothing to do with the nature of his peculiarity. It made his life that much more challenging, because school books and lessons meant nothing to Daniel. His cousin, Delia, golden-haired daughter to Aunt Mercy, was a brilliant student, bright and capable, reading from everything including the Bible with the clarity and diction of an angel. Now his cousin Indiana, son of Vernard Michael, was a stumbling bumbling idiot, but he was an athlete — strong as a bull, twice as wide as a barn, and to hear Uncle Vernard tell it, the perfection of everything a young man should be. Daniel was the shadow child lost in the middle.

While school was a great challenge for him, imagine his surprise when late one summer while staying with Granny Glory, he found a stash of books in her woodshed. He'd originally planned on marking them up or ripping the pages out to make paper airplanes or some such, but these... he could read, and he could read easy. And the stories they told! Of shadowy things in the woods and out in the swamp; witches and treetops and black-mouthed dogs howling in the night;

tempting devils that came and offered power to those who would do their bidding. Daniel Boggs drank this up like a sponge.

And when his granny died, he had the freedom to dig even further and found the books she kept locked away. And in one of those books he found words that he knew would change his life, words to turn like keys in locks made of questions: he heard of a beast in the woods, an eldritch creature older than time itself, or so its entry claimed. Now Daniel also read the warnings written in his grandma's scribbled, spider-like handwriting, all cramped up in the margins, about how these Beasts should not be called lightly, and that there were ones sleeping in the dark of these mountains that, if woken, would consume everything and everybody that Daniel ever knew or cared about, and he wasn't interested in that. He just wanted to know more than the rest of them.

So he found a name he'd thought he could handle, of an ancient wurm sleeping beneath the earth, above the coal seams but beneath the feet of man. And it was this creature that Daniel Boggs would seek out when his daddy had set him to chore, sent him into the woods to find a fine piece of pine or whatever to build his mamaw's coffin. And that's where we'll find young Daniel now.

DALE: Daniel! Daniel, godammit boy, get your ass in here! Daniel!

DANIEL: I tell you what, he tells me go look at one more goddamn tree I'm gonna do something everyone's gonna be sorry for.

DALE: Daniel!

DANIEL: Damnit, Daddy, I hear you! He ain't gonna tell me what to do much longer, though, no sir. Pretty soon Imma have all the answers, and Imma know everything I need to know, and they can all just go eat dog shit. I ain't dumb, I don't care what no goddamn teachers or what Uncle Vernard said, I ain't. I know things none of them ain't got no clue about. They gonna see. Oh they gonna see, and hear, and hurt, and bleed like I had to — every last goddamn one of them! Calm down. Calm down, Daniel. They won't come if you ain't calm.

*Snake! Snake! Give and take.  
Choking river and dried-up lake,  
Call the moon and break its legs  
Bind the sun and make it beg  
Hear my call, and pray come tell!  
Secrets, bound by heaven and hell.*

The words Daniel had learned were important. He'd made up the rhyme himself and was quite proud of it. His mamaw's books had told him that invocation, that invitation to these things was very important, that the words you spoke in your heart — and with your mouth if your heart was

not strong enough — were important. He had crafted the invocation himself, so it came true from his heart, and from notes he had cribbed from the ancient and archaic language that for some reason made more sense to him than any reading primer ever did.

And he waited. He had performed this ritual before and had expected the great and ancient wyrm — which Daniel understood from his further exploration to mean “dragon” or “serpent” — to emerge to rip open the earth from the realm of shadow and mist and make him the wisest man who ever rode these mountains. But just like everything else in Daniel’s life, it was a bit of a disappointment.

But the earth had stirred. The ground had trembled the slightest bit. Grass had died and faded back. And from a dead circle of cold earth, the Great Wyrms — which was the size and shape of a soon-to-be-dead copperhead — poked its head from that circle, writhed around, its scales peeling and flaking in what seemed like a forever-molt, as it turned its blind, cold eyes to regard Daniel Boggs, the mortal who had dared call him forth.

Now, others had called him before to seek his counsel, for this beast did traffic in secrets, though they were not secrets of great weight or great merit. But to a boy Daniel’s age they were the weight of the world, they were things no one else could know, no one else could have answers for and thus there must be a greater treasure trove. And this wyrm — Old Copperhead, as he was called by the few who had bothered to call him, who usually very rapidly dismissed him after his worth was proven to be very little — well, he knew some things and thought very highly of himself. And lo and behold, here he was with Glory Ann Boggs’ own grandson whispering his name into the ether.

My, how his day had come. Glory Ann Boggs was dead and gone. There had been rumors. There had been creaking dry dust whispers behind the veil, but nobody thought it would ever happen. Well, shoot! That old hag looked like she was gonna walk until the final flood came, but here was her grandbaby, dumb as a bag of hammers and soft as a fresh down pillow, waiting for his wise counsel.

OLD COPPERHEAD: Master Boggs! I assure you that your nursery rhymes are not needed, but I appreciate the respect. So what brings you to my doorstep today, young master?

DANIEL: H-hail, Snake! Uh, *Master Snake*. I, uh... uh, my granny died, like you said. You said you seen it and you did. All hail Snake! Master Snake! You seen and told true! I’m right sorry that she’s dead, but... what would you have me to do?”

OLD COPPERHEAD: Young Master Boggs, you have done well to return here. What I will need from you is much, and I understand that. But you must bring me your grandmother’s husk... uh, her body. You must strip it and you must wash it in a very special way. And then you must cut her into pieces like a fine, fattened hog and bring her wrapped in fine paper to me. You do still

wish for wisdom, do you not? You wish to show all of them what you truly are, do you not, Master Boggs?

DANIEL: I... yeah. Yes? Uh, yes, Snake — uh, *Master Snake* — but, um... I-I gotta... I-I got-gotta-gotta cut my granny? I mean, like, I-I guess? But... you know, like... *all...* of her?

OLD COPPERHEAD: Do you want to be a fool all your life, Daniel? Do you want them to laugh at you and mock you even more than they already do? Do you want that oaf Indiana to always have more than you? Do you want that Little Miss Priss Delia to look down on you and feel sorry for you the way she always has, *forever*? Is that what you want, you sad little shit of a boy?

DANIEL: Deeley... ain't never been nothing but nice to me...

OLD COPPERHEAD: They laugh at you, Daniel. They laugh and laugh and laugh — oh, the times they have! The things they do when you're not invited. It must end, young master. I have foreseen it. They. Will. End.

DANIEL: Yeah... but... how? I-I-I... how? How do I... get her body? Uh... Master Snake?

OLD COPPERHEAD: Oh, my dear boy. Come closer. We will talk of many things.

[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 and performed by Steve Shell. The voice of Dale was Travis Hollyfield. The voice of Daniel was Jacob Moore. See y'all on Thursday, family.

*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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