

OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA

presents

BUILD MAMA A COFFIN

Episode 17: The Finale

MERCY: Mama? What?

GLORY ANN: I'm here, baby.

MERCY: *What?*

GLORY ANN: We ain't got time to talk about how, but I'm betting you can see why. Listen, your brothers... are gone. Vernard, Dale, and Dale's boy Daniel. They done kilt 'em all. I buried Dale and Daniel myself.

MERCY: Did Miss White do this?

GLORY ANN: Well, no, not her specifically. Well, honey, it's complicated. Things as bad as her or worse — or, hell, the same — they did it. They wanted to turn all y'all against each other to get ahold of my bones. That can't happen, baby girl, do you understand me? That *can't. Happen.*

MERCY: Yes, Mama. What about Indy? Oh, tell me they didn't get him too!

GLORY ANN: As far as I know, Indiana's alright. Vernard come up alone when... when They got him. Wait. Mercy, where's Deeley? This house was empty when I got here, and I don't feel her anywhere I can find her.

Glory Ann stared at her daughter. Mercy had asked if Granny White was responsible for the deaths of her brothers — why should Mercy ask that?

GLORY ANN: Mercy Boggs-Carter. Where have you been, and where's my grandbaby?

MERCY: Mama, I... I just wanted to make it up to you. Mama, I just...

Mercy dropped her head into her hands and began to sob, which was enough to tell Glory Ann that things were bad. Things were very bad. Mercy had never been one to cry, not even as a child, and as many differences as they'd had, she had always been her mama's daughter through and through. Glory Ann knelt down next to Mercy, and gently pulled her hands from her face, holding them tightly in her own.

GLORY ANN: Try to calm down. Tell Mama everything. Don't leave nothing out.

The whole story spilled out over the course of the next half hour, in fits and starts at first as Mercy got control of her sobs, and soon she was calmer. To her credit, she had a good memory for details. Glory Ann stopped her a few times, asking questions here and there, clarifying points, sometimes asking for details that might not have made no sense to Mercy. Her daughter was too upset to ask why, thankfully — good lord, that girl could drive her up a wall when she got curious — but by the end of it, Glory Ann had a pretty good idea of what old Loretta had in mind.

MERCY: I just wanted to make things right, Mama. To finally do right by you by making sure that Deeley could follow in your footsteps. I... I didn't know.

GLORY ANN: Hush now, honey. You didn't know what she was. I should have told you years ago when Dale and me got into it because he wanted to go work on that goddamn farm for the summer. I shoulda told all of you more. But I was trying to protect you. Just never mind that now.

MERCY: But Mama — she wants your heart! And your eyes, and...

GLORY ANN: She can have my heart, for all the good it'll do her now. I used up what was in there just so I could be here now. As for the rest, I've got some ideas about that. There's a working that could fool that Thing if we do it right, and if we do it *just* right, it could bind her and give us a fighting chance at putting her down for good. You'd have to deliver it right to her, though, and a gift or no, the working would center on you. Go fetch me the fourth book on the bottom shelf in my sewing room, probably about 150 pages in. I don't think Daniel got his gommy little mitts on that, and the list of everything we need will be there. And I know for a fact we got most of it right here on the property. I'll get the tools we need, you go get that book.

Glory Ann took the next couple minutes away from her little girl to steady her mind. She went to the closet by the back garden door, pulled out an old shovel and a hatchet, and had those very things in her hands when her daughter came around the corner.

MERCY: Mama! Mama, hey it says here that we would need the heart of the worker's mother — which you said wouldn't be no problem — but it also says we need the hands of the worker's father. How're we supposed to manage that? Don't nobody know where Daddy is, or if he's alive or if—

Mercy froze as her eyes met her mother's, traveling from the implements of breaking and digging in her hands, and reading the regret of what must come next written as plain as day on her weathered face.

MERCY: They were right, then. You killed Daddy. Everybody used to whisper about it in town, thinking I couldn't hear, but I... I never believed it. But you did.

GLORY ANN: Mercy. I never wanted to speak ill of your daddy to you or your brothers, but he was not a good man. None of y'all ever saw how bad he could be, because I protected you. I did everything in my power to keep you and the boys safe, 'til there just wasn't any other choice. He crossed a line, and he paid for it. And I think you understand that, now that you got a child of your own, don't you?

MERCY: Yes, ma'am. Yes, I think I do.

GLORY ANN: Good. Now come help me tear up the smokehouse floor. We ain't got all night.

[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...

Delia Hubbard had been a “guest” of the old woman who called herself Granny White — if she was, in fact, a woman, which Deeley very much doubted by this point — for the better part of two days. She had not been treated unkindly — she was just mostly ignored, in point of fact — but the White property and everyone who lived there put her hackles up. First, there were the children who worked on the farm. They were, to a one, extremely pale, as if something had drained all the color from them, and it wasn't just their skin — even their hair seemed sort of muted and washed out. Their eyes, though, were almost feverishly bright, and they all seemed to be some shade of gray. The almost slavish devotion they showed for Granny White unnerved Deeley. It wasn't that she was particularly unkind to them — although she was awful quick to swing that cane she kept near her rocking chair, but that wasn't much different that a lot of mamaws Deeley had observed growing up — but she didn't show them any particular affection either. She talked about how much she loved them, sure enough, but Deeley hadn't seen her pay any particular attention to them unless she wanted something. And she was pretty sure, with the exception of Bryson and Byron and their sisters Bettina and Birdie, that Granny didn't even know their names.

The Bs, as Deeley had come to think of Granny's adult children, were all cut from the same uncanny cloth. Bettina and Birdie, like their brothers, were unusually tall, with skin white as paper and deep black eyes. They were all bone-thin, all sharp cheekbones and collarbones that could catch rainwater... but strong. Too strong. Deeley had seen Bettina lift the corner of the old upright piano in Granny's parlor a good foot or more off the floor to mop under it all by herself. None of the four spoke, not that Deeley had ever heard, and even their movements were nearly soundless most of the time.

Granny White herself could also move silently, and much faster than you'd expect for a woman of her years. When she thought about it, Deeley had never actually *seen* Granny move. She spent

most of her time in that rocking chair on the porch or another just like it in the parlor, piled with quilts in the evening. Occasionally, however, Deeley would turn her head for a moment, and when she turned back Granny was standing right beside her. She never heard a sound, not even the creaking of the rocker as she got to her feet. Deeley wondered if the old woman was trying to spook her, but if so, she'd get no satisfaction from Deeley Hubbard. A girl who spent her life talking with ghosts and other spirits that dwell in the hills of Appalachia don't startle easy.

And that was a good thing, too. Because the White property was filled with ghosts. Deeley had discovered that the first morning after her mama's unexpected departure, when she finally got that tour that Granny White had promised her the previous afternoon. But her tour guide was not the silent Bryson. The only thing Bryson had shown Deeley was the root cellar, whose door he'd locked behind her the moment her back was turned. Instead, she was chaperoned around the farm by two of Granny's younger children — a boy who told her his name was Eli, and a shy, quiet girl that he introduced as June. Deeley also noticed the tall woman, Birdie, trailing some yards behind them — never too close, mind, and Deeley couldn't quite say for certain she was *following* them, but she was always within eyesight for sure.

The two children led Deeley around the property, showing her the barn out back of the house where Granny kept a pair of tan and white milk cows and a gentle, biddable old horse with a white blaze on his forehead named Scallywag. There were nearly forty chickens, which were kept in a pen far enough from the house to keep their stink from reaching the porch and the flowerbeds in the yard, but close enough to keep an eye out for foxes and racoons. There were seemingly endless fields of vegetables, flowers, hay, and a number of buildings out back of the main house. And everywhere they walked, from about the edge of the yard by the chicken coop on, there was ghosts.

Deeley couldn't see them all, but she could feel them — lingering between rows of vegetables, leaning into the shadows and the corners of buildings, hovering beneath her feet. They were everywhere. More ghosts than she'd ever found in one place, and the majority of them... well, ain't no easy way to say it, most of them were children. And Deeley couldn't stop and speak with them — not without scaring her two little tour guides, and not with Birdie watching her — but she could feel their regard. They knew what she was, knew that she could sense them and feel some of them begin to trail after her. Later, she'd speak with them, but for the moment she just let them follow along.

The children led her down a row of buildings, the largest of which she knew was a bunkhouse for the children that stayed on the farm with Granny. Some of these were orphans, but not all. Deeley wondered how often they saw their families, but Eli and June only shrugged when she asked. This surprised Deeley at first, because Eli was clearly a talker, the sort of boy who'd talk your ear off if you spent enough time with him. His mother probably had sent him to work on the White farm just to get some peace and quiet. So she tried to draw him out with questions of a less personal nature.

DEELEY: This is a big farm. What kinda crops y'all grow here?

The answer tumbled out of the boy in a rush like a bust dam, as if Eli had just been waiting for her to ask. "So many things! Maters and cabbage and pumpkins and all kinds of different squash and peppers, taters and beets, green beans and chili beans. We got corn over on the west side and apples and cherry trees on the other, and folks at the market say Granny grows the finest produce in the county! Some of the girls grow herbs and flowers, too. Granny wins the flower show at the county fair every year!"

When Deeley asked June if she helped grow flowers, the little girl — who must have been around six at best — nodded shyly, hunching her head down between her shoulders and gazing up at Deeley with big, round eyes and a hesitant smile. And then Eli just had to show Deeley the greenhouse, which is where June often worked, helping the older girls plant seeds and water sprouts for flowers, tomatoes, and such.

From the greenhouse, Deeley could make out an old ramshackle barn near the southwest corner of the property, its roof sagging, red paint long since faded to a dusty orange.

DEELEY: What's in that old barn over there? It's awful far from the house.

Here again, Eli seemed reluctant to answer. "That's... storage. Old tractors and stuff like that. It's where Mr. Bryson goes to work on things."

DEELEY: What kinda things?

June, Deeley noticed, was looking back in the direction of the corn field, where Birdie stood silently in the shade of the tall rows, the woman's gaze not quite on Deeley and the two children, but not far off.

Eli shrugged dismissively, as if her question was of no interest to him. "You know, just things that need working on. Sharpening his ax, that sorta thing. Hey, you wanna see the orchards?"

Deeley remembered the boy had mentioned that apple and cherry trees were on the far side of the property, and she couldn't help but wondering if he was distracting her from asking more questions about that old barn. Nevertheless, she smiled and told Eli that she just loved apples and nothing would please her more.

The White orchard was indeed on the far side of the property by the southeast corner of the fenceline, far from the main house. It was indeed filled with well-tended cherry and apple trees — not the wormy, sour crabapples found in just about everybody's backyard, but big, firm, red winesaps and bright green granny smiths. By now the sun was high overhead and beat down on their heads with scorching summer heat, and Deeley was grateful to stroll through the shade for a while. The southern end of the White property bordered the woods, and as they walked deeper

into the orchard, Deeley noticed the fence was split by the little creek that cut through that part of the land into the woods. Through the gap, she could see through the trees into a small clearing by a bend in the creek, where what looked like a large hole had been dug. From where she stood, Deeley couldn't be certain of how deep that hole was, but it looked at least the size of her mama's car, maybe bigger.

DEELEY: What's that back there? Over in the woods by the creek. It looks like a big hole?

Eli flinched visibly and grabbed her hand. "No, Miss Deeley! We can't go back there! We ain't allowed. It's not safe."

DEELEY: Well, why not? What's back there?

"Umm, snakes. Mr. Bryson says there's rattlers and stuff back there, and we're not supposed to go past the fence."

Deeley knew this was a lie. Mr. Bryson did many things around the White property, but one thing he did not do was speak. Deeley frowned, craning her neck to see if she could make out more of the hole, and when she could, her eyes widened a little.

If there were plenty of ghosts lingering around the rest of the property, this was the motherlode. The ground was downright covered with luminescent shades and specters of all ages and sizes. What started as a whisper and a tickle at the back of her head was quickly swelling into the murmur of an anxious crowd. Not wanting to catch their eye, Deeley allowed Eli to distract her, as he had begun backing away from the fence, pulling at her arm. Deeley turned back towards him, opening her mouth to assure him she had no intention of venturing into the strange woods, particularly if there might be snakes — or a mass grave, for that matter — and her jaw snapped shut.

Birdie stood behind them at the edge of the trees, silent and still, her black eyes fixed on Deeley. Deeley met her eyes without flinching, smiled, and then looked back down to Eli and June.

DEELEY: Thank you for telling me. We wouldn't want to break Granny's rules, now would we?

Deeley proceeded to spend the remainder of her time getting to know the ghosts that inhabited the White property. And although she was truly never left alone, she was allowed to wander the property mostly as she saw fit. As one of the B siblings was never far from her, she was careful to avoid the places that seemed to make the children nervous, and they mostly stayed out of hearing range, just keeping an eye on her.

Some of these spirits were different from human ghosts that Deeley had encountered before. These were not mere echoes of past events, or impressions left in the earth and repeating out through time, or even the shadows of people that hadn't fully moved on yet. Deeley soon realized

with a sinking dread that these were in fact souls — the complete spirits of people who had died, and died badly, on the White property — and they were trapped here. Deeley knew her mama was coming for her soon, but as much as she wanted to get out of this place and away from Granny White, whoever or whatever the old woman truly was, she knew she'd have to set these ghosts free first.

Bryson White, Granny's silent seneschal, was a very busy man on this, the eve of the True Harvest. He had checked all the offerings from the respective groups of laborers, ensuring there would be no embarrassment this time. He knew that they feared him, knew that they feared the quiet he carried with him. Feared his silence. Feared his black eyes that looked like they belonged more on some swamp predator than they did on a man. And he was old. He was the youngest of the Mother's keepers, but he was still so very old, and he was not sure he had ever been a man. He had no memory of a life before serving the Hungry Mother. He had no memory of any voice but hers. He could not speak to her with his mouth or with the tongue he did not have. He could only speak to her and others in dreams. In dreams, she had him read from various holy books and poems because she found it amusing. She'd have him read the driest books in the Christian bible just because she liked the rhythm of the words.

But dreams did not really matter. What mattered today were the tasks. He had risen before dawn with his three siblings as they always did. The sun did not weaken or faze them the way it had in the place they brought Granny from. The cold did not shake them. Their hides were thick and felt nothing. His sisters, Birdie and Bettina as she called them, were good for watching and being where they needed to be. Their oldest brother Byron... *ugh*, the Mother and her B names. She had told him once in a dream that when she first heard men speak and they used the *buh* sound, it tickled her. Made her laugh because it sounded so base and primitive. She said when she heard that sound enough times, she knew that the world of flesh would be no obstacle to her. *Buh buh buh...* So she named her four most trusted keepers with B names. How very droll.

Regardless, their older brother Byron had a head for figures, and could still speak with a voice that did not sound like suffocation, so he dealt with the workers in the manner of things that could not be communicated with action. Action is what Bryson was good at, and today Bryson was given very direct actions. He had raised the canvas baker's tent on the edge of the circle where offerings would be presented. The Boggs woman and her child would be kept there until they were called forth for the final gift of the harvest. He thought it was a bad idea to have an offering after the children. Traditions exist to keep lines drawn and chains taut. They are traditions for a reason.

But the Mother insisted that the woman and her daughter were to present their offering at the end. The woman he had in the root cellar. She was... sleeping, or so he left her. The girl was elsewhere on the property but being watched carefully. She would be rounded up at dusk and

placed in the tent with her mother. After he'd finished his walk-throughs of all the various factions and their offerings to the Mother, he retreated to the quiet of his barn.

Bryson had claimed this building early for his craft. And so here Bryson came to sit and think in the silence. The close hay-fed heat of a barn in late summer, the way the humid, stench-kissed air crawls across your skin like an old slick 'til it feels like your lungs are gonna fill up and gush over — Bryson found that soothing. After he sat a while, he walked about the corners of the barn with a stiff black push broom, clearing off stone markers set in the floor, each one carved in a tongue that none of these wretched sacks of meat had ever heard and could never speak. Once the sky was dark and the moon was new, this place would be fully his. And here he would bring the ones that Granny gave him as his payment. Here, to his silence, where he would know joy and they could not scream.

While Bryson basked in the heat of his barn, the remainder of the family Boggs had marshaled their forces two miles out from the main gate of the property. The two women sitting in the old Ford Mercy had driven from Kentucky did not speak. They did not need to. Mercy had pulled over to a wide spot on the side of the road and sat with her mama, holding her hand at first, then letting her mother pull her to her bosom and hold her daughter close for one last time. Mercy did her very best to ignore the lack of a heartbeat.

And then without a word, Glory Ann kissed her only daughter on the forehead, got out of the car, and filled the space she'd been occupying with the wooden box that contained a neat bundle of cloth wrapped in twine that held her own heart, her late husband's skeletal hands, and a pair of glass looking orbs that she'd used in her youth when her own sight needed a boost, to pass for her eyes. This was their hope: if Granny was arrogant enough to open the package and take it all in before she realized what it was, the working might bind and weaken her so Mama could finish her off. Glory Ann and her only girl locked eyes, nodded, and then Mama took up a long walking stick and vanished into the woods alongside the road. Mercy started up the car, a fancy contraption her husband had bought her, and headed to the front gate.

The die was cast. Let us now see where those bones fall.

Mercy made it all of a hundred feet when she was out of her car. Two pale farmhands escorted by Miss Bettina circled her like hungry buzzards and became her de facto escort to the front door of the main house. Miss Birdie met them there, black eyes glittering and hands fluttering, and led their little party through to the back porch overlooking the sight of the evening's festivities, where Granny waited, dressed in her Sunday finest.

GRANNY WHITE: Well now... Miss Mercy Boggs. To what do I owe the pleasure?

MERCY: You know why I'm here. Where's my daughter, you old hag?

GRANNY WHITE: Lordy, what a mouth on you! Your mama ought to wash your mouth out with soap. *Hm.* Oh, that's right. Bryson?

Mercy shifted the weight of the box into the waiting hands of the silent h'aint that had walked in her dreams many times since she first met him there — and bit her lip to keep the smile from rising as his pale fingers singed and almost blistered with the smell of tar and burnt hair. If he could have made a sound, he would have screamed, as he tipped the box back into Mercy's arms.

GRANNY: Oh, well well! Isn't that... interesting. Now to be quite honest, I didn't think you had it in you, girl. But it seems like you brought me what I asked for after all. I think you and your lovely daughter should just join us for the celebration tonight.

MERCY: *No.* That weren't what we agreed to. I will take my daughter and go.

GRANNY WHITE: Oh, but I insist. Bryson?

Mercy's mouth opened to protest further, but suddenly her head swam and darkness took her.

Glory Ann moved through the woods as silently as only the dead can do. This land set every nerve she had on edge. Her body was tired and her charm was fading, but the magic in this land was impure. If she believed in holiness the way the church people talked about, she would call it unholy, because every step on this land felt like blasphemy to the Green. A farm, a place of growing and planting and of taking up, had been perverted into being nothing more than a slaughterhouse of souls and minds. Those that slept beneath fed on those that walk above. Sometimes in flesh and bone, sometimes in heart and soul, and in other ways that we may not even understand. But what was happening on the White property was an abomination. Ghosts were legion. The ground itself seemed to scream and beg for release, and it took every bit of resolve that Glory Ann had not to lose her mind and to release her spirit right then and there.

She made her way to the edge of the treeline, reaching out with her senses and her Gift, finding the barbed wire of Granny's wards, twisted and warped into the heart of the land to let her know whoever might approach. But if Glory Ann knew anything about those Things, she knew their pride was ripe fruit for picking. So sure enough, as she got closer to a place of deep shadow — an old rust-colored barn sinking into the earth, it looked like — the wards thinned. This was a place of ritual and butchery. So Granny had let it stand as a chunk of the wall, and lo and behold, it also stood like a cracked back door. The unnatural silence of the place made a perfect sneaky hole for a dead old witch like herself to slide through.

Now Glory Ann wanted nothing to do with whatever made that barn that way, so she gave it a wide berth, and made her way to the parade grounds proper where the celebration would begin in earnest, set her eyes on the white canvas baker's tent and began to move like a shadow through the high grass.

When Mercy awoke, it was to find herself within the confines of an old canvas camping tent, big enough for a cot and a person. She found herself on her knees, her hands bound behind her and her mouth gagged. She did not see her daughter, or anyone but the menacing silhouettes of the White family members standing outside the door of the tent. And then, like a clarion call, a church bell began to toll across the fields, calling the White family to their celebration. Soon, the canvas tent's walls were all a blot with silhouettes of countless White family members. And before long, the B sisters slid their way inside the tent, pulled Mercy to her feet, and to her surprise undid her bonds, removed her gag, as if to show her that even with freedom there was no escape. They stood just behind the flap of the main tent, awaiting Granny's command.

And soon enough, the elder woman's voice rang out from the porch — not just in Mercy's ears, but in her mind and Mercy would swear in her bones. Before she knew it, her arms were bearing the weight of her and Mama's gift to Granny White, and the seas of the White family parted before her and the twin women flanking her as she was brought to the foot of the porch.

GRANNY WHITE: Dearest family, we gather here tonight for the True Harvest, where we take up what we have put in the ground all year long. We reap the fruits of our labor and finally mop the sweat of our brows away to bask in the cool winds of the evening. Yes, we do. We do... It is a rich crop we pull to our larders this year, my children. The blood of those who would stand against us is a mighty fine thing to be able to put back for the coming winter. Yes.

Granny grinned down at Mercy and her box, triumph and malice competing to shine brightest in her eyes as she introduced Glory Ann's daughter to her family.

GRANNY: Now, Miss Mercy Boggs here done brought us a gift. Done brought us a downright delicacy — the hands and the heart of a worker so steeped in the power of the Green that it will sustain me, and us, and this land for a long, long time to come. The flesh of a mother fed to the Unsated Mouth, such a vile and loathsome thing is a rare gift, my babies, yes. Yes, babies... So let's just dig in, shall we?

Granny White raised her rose-colored glasses and pulled the lid from the wooden box containing the Boggs family gift. There was a swell of lightning bug-colored fire rising from the box when Granny held up a single clawed hand, and the working was extinguished. Hope born and hope died all in one fell swoop. Granny seemed bemused, almost delighted, as she turned her eyes down to Mercy Boggs.

GRANNY WHITE: Oh, Miss Mercy, I'm almost impressed. Now you know and I know that you ain't got the gift gods give a salamander, so who helped you cook this up? Are those your daddy's bones? Well, now I see why my boys couldn't touch it now. Lord. Lord, lord, lord. Them Boggs men did have a couple of workers in their number, didn't they? Do I smell death magic in the air? Necromancy — well ain't that fancy! *Hm-hm*. Now, Miss Mercy, you been talking to your dead old daddy? *Hm?* Well who helped you? Huh? Who's that? Your little girl do this? Oh lord, child, I could *smell* that she had something going on, but this... well, now this was almost something, wasn't it? Oh, Miss Deeley, you and I are gonna talk later, and it's gonna be deeeelicious... *Mm-mm*. But for now...

Granny raised her hand in some form of foul malediction, but before she could speak, a figure emerged from the baker's tent in the middle of the field, and it was not young Deeley Hubbard, as a mother's voice readied for war rent the evening air.

GLORY ANN: Let me tell you one damn thing, Loretta White, you dried up old cob. Don't you think we've heard enough of your preeny, prissy bless-your-heart bullshit? Why don't you take off that skin, Beast, and show 'em what you really are?

GRANNY WHITE: Glory Ann! Glory Ann, as I live and breathe! How are you? Now you know my name's not Lore—

GLORY ANN: I don't give a shit, Loretta!

GRANNY WHITE: Why, Glory Ann, my children all know what I am. They've each and every one stood before me on a night just like tonight and seen me in what I was born in, and they still love me. As much as I love them. Oh, yes they do. They do... Now, I don't know how you're still walking around, but I have to say, that is mighty impressive. You done give up a whole bunch of you to even be here, didn't you? You want to call me a dried-up old corn cob, Glory Ann, why you're barely more than a husk yourself. Why don't you just sit a spell and rest?

GLORY ANN: It's over, Beast. And I don't know who you think you're talking to, trying that third-rate hoodoo, because I stand before you beyond the black door. I defy it. I hold it open, and by the Green and all the salt still in these bones, I will drag you through it and slam it shut on both of us before I let you hurt any of these people or my kin. So says I, so says my mother, and her mother before her. You want my blood? Come and get it, you old bitch!

What would happen next would be a thing of legend. Granny White clutched the air in front of her, barked a word that was not a word, and gave an unholy cry into the humid darkness, and lifted the veil from her family. No more was the parade ground field populated by pale, good-natured farmers in love with their beloved matriarch, no family. Flesh twisted and blistered and knotted. Eyes broke and multiplied. Limbs bent at unnatural angles as the children of Granny White took their true, monstrous forms — creatures of the inner dark, beings that

had existed inside the husks of these flesh sacks for long enough, now finally turned loose by their mother to feast upon the flesh of those that would make them stronger.

But it must be said, family, that Glory Ann Boggs, while she did recognize the artistry, was not impressed. As a group of seven of these creatures closed in on her right, she waved her long, oak-carved walking stick and watched them crumple like a particularly nasty beetle stomped on the back porch. As an even larger group tried to circle in from behind, she opened her hand, then closed it as a massive sinkhole swallowed them up to their waist and then crunched them like coffee beans in a grinder. The others seemed to take a moment of hesitation from this sudden destruction of their fellows, despite the wild howling from Granny's inner voices, all of her mouths on display now, each one seemingly speaking a different variation of the same black tongue.

It was in this chaos, in this contest of two ancient wills, that Mercy took her leave. Having not seen Deeley, she took to the treeline calling her name, rounded the hill and came down to the far path, and then saw lights in the distance. An old and sagging barn — maybe that's where they were holding Deeley. And thus, the young mother made her way toward the darkest and quietest place on all of the White property.

It would be a place from which she would not return.

In the back of the crowd of Granny's eager children, Deeley kept one eye on her mama and the other on the ghosts that clustered around the edges of the gathering. There were hundreds of them. It seemed that all who had died and been trapped here were drawn to the scene of Granny's unholy harvest, and with all of them in one place, Deeley could see the binding that held them — a complex, twisted mass of sigils that glowed red to her Sight. She turned her full gaze on the binding, squinting, trying to make sense of it, and at the sound of her own name in Granny's mouth, Deeley jerked her gaze up to the front of the gathering. The old woman crouched in a rocking chair, just in time to see the contents of the box her mama had brought tumble to the ground.

To Deeley's Sight, there was a flash of black-green light. Something skeletal and awful and part of *her* flashed through the air and landed on the ground. Slowly, careful not to draw attention to herself, Deeley began to make her way through the crowd as well, up toward the front and off to the side where the object of the ghosts' attention had fallen. When she reached the edge of the row, Deeley saw it was indeed a hand — or at least the bones of one, sheared off at the wrist of whomever it once belonged to. And to her vision, it pulsed and writhed with green and black lights.

Deeley looked carefully around her, but strangely nobody was paying her no mind, so quick as a snake, she knelt down and snatched the bony thing up in her right hand. Suddenly her Sight

blew wide, and she *saw*. She could see the structure of the binding that tethered these poor souls not just to the White property, but to Granny herself, and more than see it, she could *understand* it. Deeley inherited many things from her mama and especially her granny, but her Sight — she didn't know it, but her Sight came from her papaw. Deeley would never know the man, never know how he saw the same ghosts and h'aunts that she did, and how they came to him for help or for justice, and how instead of listening or engaging the way Deeley's heart had led her to naturally, he hid in the bottle until his heart was as black and pickled as his liver and his soul. And just as bad, his gift fell to the shadow as well, and ultimately the whole man had to be put down.

With her granddaddy's bones clutched in her right hand, she reached out with her left, wrapped her fingers around the binding, and with one sharp gesture snapped it apart. The ghosts screamed, a wail so loud and powerful not only Deeley could hear them this time — everyone heard and everyone felt it as hundreds of ghosts tore through the crowd like a storm and launched themselves at the Thing that called itself Granny White, the Thing who at this moment stood locked in hand-to-hand combat, her wrist trapped in the clutch of a tall, older woman, the very sight of whom made Deeley's blood sing in recognition.

GLORY ANN: Look around, Beast. Look at the family you've made for yourself. Look what happens when you build all you have on death. By earth, be bound. By fire, be burned. By water, be cooled to ash. By winds, be blown away. I name thee in my own tongue — Hungry Mother, Pale Daughter, Unsated Mouth, I name thee Loretta White, and I give you to the land. I give you to the Green!

GRANNY WHITE: Naww. Glory Ann... Glory Ann...

The Beast screamed, an earthly sound that rattled the trees around them and shook the ground underfoot as the spirits reached into it, plunging immaterial hands into that ripe, unnatural belly that had always seemed strangely pregnant, and tearing out the pieces of themselves, their lives, their loves, their souls that the Beast in its insatiable hunger had stolen.

And finally as Deeley watched, the ghosts who died on the White property found their freedom. Some of the spirits rushed across the field to where she stood, finding the bodies they'd inhabited in life, bodies that simply crumpled to the ground now, the flesh that clung unnaturally to the half-life the Beast had trapped them in disintegrating at rapid speed, leaving only piles of tiny bones behind. Others, their bodies long since claimed by the ravages of time, simply faded away. A few of these raised their tiny hands to wave at Deeley as they went to find whatever awaited them in the next world, the one they'd been so long denied. Exhausted and relieved, Deeley slumped to her knees where she stood.

The dead woman who now stood over the Thing that once called itself Granny White — a Thing that seemed to be crumpling into pale, white flowers — Deeley recognized her almost instantly as her own granny, Glory Ann Boggs. Though she had no idea how she managed to still be up

and walking around, the tall woman nodded at Deeley, her eyes shining with pride before she turned back to her work.

Neither Glory Ann nor Deeley had seen where Mercy disappeared to in the chaos, but both agreed the best place to start their search was back at the main house where Mercy might have naturally gone to search for Deeley. They found her quick enough. Mercy's car was parked out front where she'd left it, and Mercy — or what remained of her — was waiting there for them.

DEELEY: Mama, no!

Mercy smiled sadly but didn't speak. Sometimes it took a new-made ghost a little time to find the strength to manifest sounds that could be heard in the living world. Most likely the only reason Deeley and Glory Ann could even see her is because they were blood. She stood there watching them another moment, then raised a hand and was gone.

The ride to Boggs Holler was a quiet one. Glory Ann hadn't ever learned to drive a car herself, but Mercy had made sure her daughter knew how. Deeley was a careful and competent driver, and having a task to focus on helped her settle her thoughts. Though she had only traveled it once before, she found she remembered the way home easily. For this was her home, her family home, where she belonged.

Deeley parked her mama's car around back of the house and followed her granny into the kitchen. Glory Ann made some tea and poured a generous dose of whiskey on top of it, which made Deeley's eyes water, but her granny said it would help her sleep. While Deeley drank, Glory Ann explained where Deeley would find her will and the deed to the house and various other legal documents she might need, but she didn't have much time. She wanted Deeley to know how proud she was, how much she loved her.

Glory Ann gave her a big hug and a kiss on the cheek and sent her off to bed. In the bedroom where she had spent her first night in Boggs Holler, the room that had been her mama's growing up, Deeley found a letter waiting for her. Her name was written on the envelope in her mama's looping hand. Not Delia, the full name that Deeley never used but Mercy had always insisted on, but Deeley, the name she preferred for herself.

MERCY: *My baby girl,*

If you're reading this, then I didn't make it home from that awful place. Deeley, baby, know that I love you more than anybody ever thought they could love anything. When we lost your daddy in the war, I thought a part of my heart died with him, and I'd never be able to love again. When I married your stepdaddy, I was sure of it. But watching you grow into this bright young woman, you healed my heart. It grew again and I learned what love and blessed pride truly are. You carry the light and the gift of a long

line of powerful women inside of you, baby girl. I have no doubt that you will make us all so proud. I love you so much, Deeley. Forgive me for bringing you to this place. Please, don't judge me too harshly. I love you.

Your Mama

DEELEY: Oh Mama, I love you too. If you can hear me, you're always welcome to visit. I'll be right here.

It had been a terribly hard morning, this he could not deny. And as usual, he was pretty sure he would have himself to blame. After all the ruckus that went down over in Esserville on the White property, he simply could not stay away. You see, a man with his level of interest in this area and the people of this region must stay informed as to who he and does not owe a debt to or may have trouble with, so it was in the pre-dawn hours that Mr. J.T. Fields of Dorchester, otherwise known as Jack, found himself on the outskirts of Boggs holler.

He reached out with his senses, reached out to the trees and the land and the earth and he sensed not a soul at home — not Glory Ann, not none of her babies or grandbabies, and he thought he was about ready to move on. The old cob had got herself burned up out there on the White property, and maybe both of them was gone, and that'd be better for anybody. And Jack was just about ready to go when everything went black.

GLORY ANN: Oh, Jaack? Jaaaaaack? Are you with us, son? Oh, there you are. You didn't think I was gonna let you get away without keeping my promise, now did you?

JACK: What? What? Oh. Oh, Miss Bogg! Why am I chained up? Ma'am, you don't have to worry about me! I can find my own way clear of my mess. I can.

GLORY ANN: Mm-mm. No, sir. I ain't got much time left, but I can't leave owing such a debt to one such as you. No, sir.

JACK: Glory Ann, I kept my word. Your boy never bought that land and you ain't in no hole getting chewed up by no evil-ass tree. Now you don't—

GLORY ANN: The working I found to get you out of that busted old meat suit you're wearing is simple enough. We just have to kill it. End it. Release your spirit, so to speak.

JACK: Oh. Well, that's fair enough. I mean, I think you could just slip a hunting knife right here across my jugular vein, right—

GLORY ANN: No, honey, the books were right specific. We can't make no cuts. Can't use no blades at all. All we can use is this.

Glory Ann proceeded to hold up a club or a baton of sorts about twice the thickness of your average store bought baseball bat, carved elaborately in sigils and runes and dipped in the blood of something foul.

JACK: Are we supposed to... are we supposed to burn the meat suit? I mean... me?

GLORY ANN: Burn you? Oh no, honey. That would be way too fast. Way too easy.

JACK: Now, Glory Ann, sweetie. Now I can see your light, and you ain't got the juice left to hit me hard enough to bruise me, much less kill me, so what are we playing at here, darling?

GLORY ANN: Oh, I know, baby. I know. That's why I brought some help with me. See, this particular working requires the one doing the killing to have the strongest loving bond with the one who was wronged. And I loved my boy, I loved my big stupid boy more than anything in this world 'cept my other two. But *his* boy? Indiaaanaaa! It's time, honey! He loved his daddy the way his daddy loved *his* daddy, with a devotion I can't even match.

And on cue, young Indiana Boggs, all six-foot-nine, 385 pounds of him, enters the room. It is clear he has been crying.

INDIANA: Is this him, Granny? Him that... hurt... my daddy?

GLORY ANN: This is Mr. J.T. Fields, of Dorchester. Yes, indeed. Mr. Fields, this is my grandson, Indiana. I believe you'll find that your debt to my son belongs to him now.

JACK: Glory Ann, you can't be serious. I'm not — no, I forbid it! It has to be you, not—

INDIANA: Hand me that fancy piece of kindling you carved up there, Granny.

GLORY ANN: Take your time with him, Indy. Jack, everything's all in order. If you don't believe me, feel it for yourself. Go on now, try.

JACK: Woman, what have you done? There are rules to things like this, you can't just — you can't, Glory Ann!

INDIANA: You should go, Granny. I don't... I don't want you to see me like this.

GLORY ANN: I'll be right outside, baby. Right outside. You holler if you need me. Goodbye, Jack. I don't expect we'll see each other again. I love you, Indiana. Granny loves you so much.

INDIANA: I love you too, Granny. Go on, now. Close that damn door.

JACK: Glory Ann, please. You can't leave me with him, you—

And that was the last of the face-to-face business that Glory Ann Boggs had. It wasn't too far of a walk from the smokehouse where she left the man Jack with the new patriarch of the Boggs family, so she made it to the Glade. And there she stood, one step over a creek away from the place she'd been waiting to lay her bones since she was old enough to have tired bones.

She took a minute there and looked back on the holler. And said one last goodbye.

GLORY ANN: Well... there she is. Vernard, Dale, Mercy... hell, even you Daniel. I'm sorry. I truly am. The choices y'all made are yours, and they put you where y'all are now, and I can't do nothing about that, but please know I... I tried. I really tried. Oh... oh hey, Mommy! Oh, okay. I'm a'coming. Hold the door. I'm done.

[Build Mama a Coffin by Blood on the Harp]

Today's story was written by Cam Collins and Steve Shell. Directed by and produced by Steve Shell. Starring Allison Mullins as Glory Ann Boggs, Betsy Puckett as Granny White, Aliya Johnson as Mercy Boggs-Carter-Hubbard, Brandon Sartain as both Vernard and Indiana Boggs, Travis Hollyfield as Walleydale Hobart Boggs, Jacob Moore as Daniel Boggs, and Charlie Smith and Cam Collins as Deeley Hubbard.

Special musical thank yous to Blood on the Harp and Gravesend Weavers for the amazing theme song and tunes throughout the entire production of Build Mama a Coffin. You can find them at BloodOnTheHarp.com and GravesendWeavers.Bandcamp.com Please support these amazing musical artists.

We want to thank you all for joining us for our first ever complete Patreon storyline. Y'all, we did it. This thing was supposed to be 7-10 episodes and it ended up being 17. There is hot news coming about Season 2 in the next few days, and huge announcements coming and probably a livestream, so stay tuned.

Thank you so much for your emotional, spiritual, and especially your financial support. You have no idea the lives you've changed, the lights you've kept on. Y'all, this is just the beginning. We love each and every one of you, and we know some of you are still waiting for swag in the mail. It's coming. We're working out systems. A lot of decisions which weren't clear as little as a week ago are now clear, and there are new plans in action moving forward. We'll be explaining that real shortly.

Thank you to my amazing cast who recorded remotely. Thank you for people who were open to change when stuff had to be shuffled around. Thank you so much to our amazing staff here at

DeepNerd, Cam Collins, Heather Hawkins, and all those who support us on the Facebook Fellowship Hall group, on Twitter, on the Discord. Shout out to everybody who's given us that \$10 or more pledge — or any dollar! You may be bootlegging this right now, I don't care!

But stick around — there's more to come. See y'all real soon.

*And I don't want them at my grave
No I don't want them at my graaave...*

*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...*

*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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