

## OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA

*presents*

### BUILD MAMA A COFFIN

#### Episode 3: Mama's Boys Part I – Vernard

*Build Mama a Coffin is an all-new story set in the same world as Old Gods of Appalachia, but y'all knowed that already, didn't you? Well, who am I to stand in the way of a good time? Alright family, let's go.*

[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...*

*“A wise son maketh the proud father, but a foolish son maketh the heaviness of his mother.”*

— Proverbs 10:1

Vernard Michael Boggs was the eldest boy of Waylon and Glory Ann, but if there was ever a boy born to get above his raising, it was Vernard. He hated life in Esau County. Looked for every way out as he grew up and out, a veritable mountain himself in both height and mass. Vernard was taller than most of his classmates and thrice as thick.

When Waylon up and — well, disappeared — Vernard was heartbroken. There was so much his daddy hadn't taught him, he couldn't just be gone. He had to be coming back. So for most of his twelfth year walking this world, every evening after doing his chores he'd just sit in the cab of his daddy's old busted-down Ford and wait for him to come home. He figured if *he* was getting out of Esau County, out of this pitiful holler that had chewed up and digested generations of Boggs men, then he had to come back for his oldest boy. He wouldn't just *leave* him here! He knew one day... one day, he'd wake up and find his daddy warming up the truck and whistling for him to hurry up. They had miles to go to get out of these damn mountains.

That never happened. That day never came. Once he was old enough, Vernard tried to join the army, but his considerable girth and flat feet kept him out. But when he was 19, he answered an advertisement that he saw in the local feed store looking for laborers in the tobacco fields of far-off North Carolina. Vernard had never dreamed of actually getting to work someplace so exotic. In the week before he left, he practiced talking “proper” and imitated old Duck Cardy who'd been the ‘baccer wholesaler who posted the ad, drawing out his words trying to sound more like “southern sugar syrup” than hilltop and holler bottom. Sounded like a damn fool, but you'll see what I mean.

One of Vernard's favorite books when he was a boy was the road atlas his daddy left in that truck. Vernard would spend whole afternoons tracing the red and blue squiggly lines through exotic places like Pennsylvania and Kansas and Ar-kansas and the place with the prettiest, most fancy name he'd ever heard: Indiana.

Now Vernard worked for 20 years with Wellington Tobacco and climbed the ladder 'til he owned land of his own. He was doing quite well for himself. Now he'd never be *rich* rich, but he'd eat and for a man like Vernard that was something. He married a thin, pale, quiet woman named Dora Bradshaw, and she bore him a son he thought was the handsomest boy that ever lived. In this fat and squalling ball of meat, Vernard saw the bright horizon of the future, and thus named him the brightest and most hopeful name he could think of. And thus, Indiana Boggs came to be.

Now in this time in the shadow of his mama's death, Vernard's greatest desire was to return home to Boggs holler and show everybody what he'd made of himself. To flash pinky ring and belt buckle and that crisp roll of dollar bills that he always kept in his inside suit jacket — well hell, he was wearing a suit jacket! That alone made him 45% better than you and me, don't you know nothing? Shoot.

But in this, his most prosperous season, he had the best idea he'd ever had in terms of showing off his status and his money and to show everybody how much better he'd turned out than all of them — and he would use Mama's death to do it.

Now he'd never tell anybody, but the idea had come to him in a dream, complete with the layout of the grounds of the Boggs Family Memorial Garden: a brand new cemetery to be built outside of town unlike anything this little hickville had ever seen. A proper place of tranquility and respectability, where Mama could be the first soul laid to rest, with greenery cut at specific angles and pathways made of white marble and specially-crafted stones. It had to be just so. His dream told him it had to be *just so*. He couldn't tell you why. It just had to be. And thus, Vernard reached out to the one man he knew could help him: his younger brother Dale.

VERNARD: *Little brother,*

*I am writing to you on this sad day to lay a foundation for a discussion we must have once we are face to face. I know that fortune has smiled upon you as much as it has upon me in these recent years, and we once lowly sons of the holler have made of ourselves upright and well-heeled men of means.*

*I think it is incumbent upon the two of us to honor Mama properly. No half-assed, pastor-led service down at Glamorgan cemetery for our Mama, no sir! Well, not that they'd let us bury her behind the church anyhow, but brother, I have come up with a plan for us to glorify Mama's good name and put those backwards-ass hillbillies in their place right and proper.*

*I have been engaged by a Mr J.T. Fields of Dorchester regarding the sale of a piece of land that might be developed into a proper memorial garden that will edify not only our precious Mama, but the Boggs*

*family for years to come. I look forward to discussing the particulars of it with you in person when we are all once again gathered at the familial manse. I trust you will be as enthused as I am once you see the blueprints.*

*Your big brother,  
Vernard M. Boggs.*

Now, Vernard wasn't a stupid man. He knew his brother Dale would not be easily fooled or swayed or impressed because Dale — not Walleydale as his daddy wanted to call him, just Dale — was black and white, practical as a two-by-four and as efficient as a ball peen hammer. He would not be swayed by fancy words or promises by Mr J.T. Fields of Dorchester, but he could be brought around if Vernard did this right. And he had to do this right, his dream told him it had to — he owed it to Mama, he had not been good enough to his Mama, the least he could do is assure her proper ascension by buil— it... it had to be done.

So Vernard reached for his secret weapon — his little sister Mercy.

Taken from correspondence in the days after Glory Ann's death between Vernard and Mercy Boggs-Carter:

*VERNARD: I have seen the place. I have walked it in my dreams, and it is magnificent! Special greenery imported all the way from Ohio. Cut stone paths laid out just so, three into the rising sun and three from the setting sun. All of the hedges and flower bushes cut and trimmed in geometrical designs. Statues of saints and angels all kneeling and pointing into the center of the garden where Mama's tomb will be. That's right, not grave: tomb. A proper tomb for the queen of Boggs Holler! I never treated Mama right after Daddy left. I guess I blamed her for him going and not taking me with him. But I see now.*

*I know it sounds crazy, Merse, but it come to me in my dreams. I can see the pathways, smell the flowers. I can see the places other graves will eventually go. But mostly, I can see Mama's. White marble inlaid with bronze, all kinds of fancy lettering all over the door frame — in maybe Latin, maybe Greek, maybe something in the tongues of angels, like in the Bible! We'll work that out. But it would be a properly place for the matriarch of a proper family, not some hole in the ground like Dale wants.*

*Please, Merse. Back me on this and I'll make sure Delia's schooling gets paid for. I know you don't want to ask me or Dale for money, but I know it ain't easy with your husband traveling all the time and your heart still broken from Craig. You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. And Mama? She'll thank us all in heaven. Think about it, please.*

*Love from all of us here in Ivy,  
your big brother,  
Vernard.*

[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 narrated by Steve Shell. The voice of Vernard Boggs was Brandon Sartain. Join us this Thursday for the next chapter of Build Mama a Coffin, wherein we will meet brother Dale Boggs and hear his thoughts on the matter. See you then, 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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