

## OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA

Season 4, Episode 59: Points of Order

*Old Gods of Appalachia is a horror anthology podcast, and therefore may contain material not suitable for all audiences, so listener discretion is advised.*

[ “The Land Unknown (The Bloody Roots Verses)” by Landon Blood ]

*These old roots run  
into a ground so bloody  
Full of broken dreams and dusty bones  
They feed a tree so dark and hungry  
where its branches split and new blood flows  
And the ghosts of a past you thought long-buried  
rise to haunt the young  
The shadow falls as judgment comes  
Tread soft, my friend, amongst your fellows  
Make your bond your word  
Lest you get what you deserve*

In the chamber beneath the mountains where the council of the Rock had convened to render judgment upon the man known as J.T. Fields, a young man who was most often part wolf fidgeted in his seat as the crowd of onlookers gawped at him. Anthony McReynolds had spent the latter half of his teen years and early twenties stuck between forms — half wolf and half boy — and was unused to feeling this exposed. His skin felt raw and oversensitive without the thin veneer of pelt he had grown accustomed to. His voice — which had changed in the intervening years, during which his mouth was ill-suited to his human tongue — sounded foreign to his own ears. And while he had spent most of those years performing on one stage or another, sitting here with no instrument to hand while all these strangers stared at him was a distinctly uncomfortable experience.

“So once you escaped this sideshow,” Hiram Cook asked now. “What did you do?”

“We went home,” Anthony said. “At least at first. Jade was right about Mama and Daddy, of course. They weren’t mad — leastways not about what happened when I changed, though

neither of our parents were too happy about not knowing where we was for so long. We visited with them for a little while, but... well, not knowing for sure what become of Mr. Cain, we decided it was best we keep moving.” Anthony glanced over at Jade and Clover with a smile. “Anyway, we’re a band now. We got used to being on the road.”

Hiram nodded thoughtfully, his expression serious as he mused aloud, his voice growing in volume and fervor, “Trapped in a half-form. Kidnapped. Forced to perform before the prurient gaze of the sort of folks who patronize freak shows. Kept from the bosom of their kin out of fear of the retribution of that disreputable business. And all this misfortune due to the actions of *one man*, folks! That man!” Hiram spun on his heel and pointed theatrically to the skinny, scruffy little man at the table situated opposite his own. “Jack! The man who calls himself J.T. Fields of Paradise,” he sneered. Cook let out a derisive snort and shook his head. He turned back to Anthony and said, “Thank you, Mr. McReynolds — and Miss Benton and Miss Meaders as well.” He nodded to the bailiff and said, “I have no further questions for these witnesses.”

The bailiff raised her staff, clearly prepared to dismiss them, but before she could rap its heavy wooden length on the floor, the smartly-dressed woman at the table opposite the representatives of the Green and the Dark shot to her feet.

D.L. WALKER: Excuse me, Harbinger, if I may.

D.L. Walker smiled politely at the figure cloaked in white who sat upon the dais, positioned at the center of the group of five councilwomen.

D.L. WALKER: I too have some questions for these witnesses.

Hiram Cook scowled. The Harbinger’s lips pressed into a thin line of obvious displeasure, but she nodded at the bailiff, who intoned stiffly, “Proceed.”

The red-haired attorney approached the chair where the young man still sat. He shot her a nervous glance, and she smiled reassuringly, glancing down to consult what she’d written on the yellow notepad she held in her right hand.

D.L. WALKER: Mr. McReynolds, I'm curious about something. You said that you — along with Miss Benton and Miss Meaders — were abducted by a man named Herbert Guthrie, known professionally as Erebus Cain.

ANTHONY: Yes, ma'am,

Anthony confirmed.

D.L. nodded sympathetically.

D.L. WALKER: That must have been terrible. I don't doubt the three of you suffered, but... my question is what precisely did my client — Mr. J.T. Fields, you see him sitting at the table there — what did he have to do with any of that?

Before Anthony could answer, she continued.

D.L. WALKER: Was Mr. Fields employed by this sideshow?

ANTHONY: No, ma'am.

D.L. WALKER: Did Mr. Fields assist in your kidnapping in some way?

ANTHONY: No, ma'am?

D.L. WALKER: Did you perhaps suspect that this Erebus Cain was actually my client in disguise?

At this, Anthony chuckled, and a good portion of the assembled onlookers joined in. The bailiff eyed them all sternly and gave her staff a single, sharp tap on the stone floor. Clearing his throat — though he couldn't quite suppress the amused twist of his lips — Anthony answered quickly.

ANTHONY: No, ma'am.

D.L. Walker smiled back.

D.L. WALKER: Did you in fact ever lay eyes on Mr. J.T. Fields before you entered this chamber today?

Anthony shook his head.

ANTHONY: No, ma'am.

The attorney turned to look at his two packmates, who waited patiently by the entrance to the gallery.

D.L. WALKER: Ladies? Had either of you met Mr. Fields before today?

Jade and Clover shook their heads. At a glare from the bailiff, they quickly spoke up.

"No, ma'am," Jade said.

"Never seen him before," Clover agreed.

D.L. nodded thoughtfully, turning back to Anthony.

D.L. WALKER: Then I'm curious, Mr. McReynolds, why you would hold Mr. Fields responsible for your unfortunate predicament.

Before Anthony could answer, a shout echoed from the back of the chamber.

"It was the damn wolf grease!" Bettie Jo Meaders spat, shoving her way through the crowd to the front of the gallery. "None of this would've happened if he hadn't sold my friend that damn wolf grease!" She twisted a handkerchief between her shaking hands, and her voice teetered on the edge of tears. "Tell 'em, Clover!" she pleaded.

"Mama, stop," her daughter sighed.

The bailiff pounded her staff against the stones. “That’s enough! Miss Meaders, your testimony is concluded and you have already been dismissed.” She gestured to one of the white-sashed men standing near the back of the gallery. “Attendant, remove this woman.” The attendant hastened to Bettie Jo’s side, placing a hand on her elbow. To his credit, the touch was gentle, and Bettie Jo went along quietly.

Under the bailiff’s thunderous glare, the gallery fell silent once more, and D.L. Walker resumed her questioning, turning to Clover.

“Please excuse her,” the girl said. “My mama gets... upset... talking about her old friends.”

D.L. WALKER: That’s understandable. What happened at the Clutch was truly a tragedy. Do you agree with your mother, Miss Meaders? Do you believe Mr. Fields is responsible for those events, and later what happened to you and your friends?

Clover chewed her lip for a moment, then shook her head. “No, ma’am,” she said finally. “He may have sold mama’s friend that wolf grease, but it wasn’t his fault what they done with it.”

The attorney turned her attention back to Anthony.

D.L. WALKER: What about you, Mr. McReynolds?

ANTHONY: No, Miz Walker.

Anthony’s voice was tinged with sadness.

ANTHONY: Blaming him for how our mamas and their friends used the wolf grease is like putting Henry Ford on trial because somebody ran their neighbor over with a Model T.

D.L. WALKER: Then I’m curious why you came here to testify today, if in fact you don’t hold Mr. Fields responsible for your plight?

Anthony sighed.

ANTHONY: We didn't want any part of this.

The young man gestured toward the representative of the Green.

ANTHONY: We only agreed to testify because Mr. Cook there promised he'd help with my little problem that y'all saw earlier.

The crowd assembled in the gallery erupted. D.L. Walker's face split into a grin.

D.L. WALKER: Did he now?

She mused, turning her gaze on Hiram Cook, whose face had grown near-purple with rage.

"I object!" Hiram sputtered, surging to his feet. "I fail to see the relevance of my agreement with the witnesses!"

D.L. WALKER: It's unethical, Hiram,

D.L. explained, her tone that of someone explaining a concept to a young and not particularly bright child.

D.L. WALKER: I understand that comprehending ethics is a bit of a challenge for you, but even you should grasp why it's unacceptable to bribe witnesses.

The bailiff's staff rang against the stones. "We will have order in this chamber!" she shouted. "Order! Or we will clear this chamber and have these interviews conducted privately!"

The onlookers in the gallery seemed to hear in the bailiff's voice that this was no idle threat, and thus quieted themselves and resumed their seats with all due haste. At a glare from his colleague representing the dark, Hiram Cook sank back into his seat and folded his arms, his brow furrowed in a sullen scowl.

D.L. Walker turned to address the council, bowing her head contritely.

D.L. WALKER: My apologies to the council.

“Miss Walker, do you have any further questions for these witnesses?” the bailiff asked in a tired voice.

There was a soft murmuring in the gallery as the accused himself rose shakily to his feet, the girl who had been taken into custody alongside him gently holding his elbow for support. “I have something to say to these young folks, if I might,” Jack said, in a tone more humble than anyone of his acquaintance would have countenanced.

The bailiff shot his representative an annoyed look. “Miss Walker, I hope you and your client haven’t planned these... hijinks... in a bid to disrupt these proceedings.”

D.L. WALKER: We certainly have not,

She answered primly. She glanced with concern at Jack, her brow furrowing, but he gave her a wink and a smile that was no doubt meant to be reassuring. D.L. Walker was not reassured in the least, but she suppressed the urge to roll her eyes and returned to her seat at their table.

The bailiff turned and approached the dais, conferring quietly with the Harbinger. When she returned to her previous position, her face was grim. “The accused may speak — *briefly*. If the accused issues any threats, either to the safety of these witnesses or anyone present here, the council will end these proceedings and render judgment immediately. Am I understood?”

The man known as J.T. Fields merely smiled politely, unperturbed. “Certainly, ma’am,” he answered.

“Then you may proceed,” she intoned.

Jack straightened his coat and gazed around the chamber for a long moment, making eye contact with the various assembled witnesses, friends, enemies, and curious onlookers before he began to speak. “What the young fella here said a minute ago seems about right. Now I don’t deny that from time to time I used to travel through Johnson County, selling various tinctures and salves and curios and whatnot. It’s possible that at one time I might have had a small stock of wolf grease to hand. To be quite honest, I don’t remember. I’ve done a lot of business with a lot of folks in a lot of places.” Jack gave a self-deprecating shrug. “My memory ain’t what it used to be. My point is, I may have sold that wolf grease to somebody in the Clutch. But I’m no more to blame for their actions than a gunsmith whose rifle is used to commit murder rather than to hunt deer, or Mr. Henry Ford in this young man’s rather astute example.”

A ripple of discontented muttering ran through the gallery, but Jack raised his voice to quiet them before the bailiff could step in.

“That said,” he pronounced distinctly, “if those ladies came to harm as a result, I’m truly sorry for their loss. As for these young folks here” — he nodded toward the Bone Pickin’ String Band — “well... damn. I never heard of wolf grease having these sort of... lasting effects... but I do think I may be able to help Mr. McReynolds here.” Jack turned to speak directly to the council “If the Harbinger would simply lift prohibition on our gifts for a few moments—”

“Absolutely not!” the bailiff thundered suddenly, in a voice that sounded not quite like her own. Her eyes were wide, her expression startled, as silence fell across the chamber. Recovering herself quickly, she continued. “The accused will not be permitted to employ his so-called *gifts* in this chamber.”

The crowd buzzed with whispers at this pronouncement, expressions on the faces of the assembled onlookers running the gamut from approval to outrage to amusement. Standing together at the front of the gallery, the young werewolves spoke quietly among themselves, their expressions dark as they looked from the bailiff to the council members seated on the dais. It was Clover who finally spoke, unable to contain her agitation.



“So let me get this straight,” she said, her voice loud enough to carry across the massive chamber. “Y’all are trying to lay the blame for Anthony’s troubles at this feller’s feet, but when he offers to help make it right, you won’t let him?”

“The council deems this an unnecessary risk,” the bailiff explained in lofty tones. “You have already been offered assistance by Mr. Cook, which may or may not be forthcoming due to your... ambivalence... with regard to your testimony.”

“That’s bullshit!” Clover snapped. A chorus of giggles rang through the gallery, accompanied by offending grumbling from some of the more conventional members of the audience.

Jack winked at the young woman. He liked her spark. “I have to agree,” he drawled.

The bailiff hammered her staff against the stones beneath her feet, and by now accustomed to the procedure, the onlookers fell quiet. She pursed her lips in obvious irritation and gestured to the officials ranged along the back wall again. “Your testimony is concluded,” she informed the wolves. “You are dismissed. Attendants, please show them out.”

A trio of the white-sashed men hustled the members of the Bone Pickin’ String Band toward the doors at the rear of the chamber, and Jack called out to them, “My offer still stands, young’uns! Once this... unpleasant business... is concluded, y’all come find me down in Paradise. I will do what I can to help you, son.”

The bailiff banged her staff against the floor again, now addressing the table where Jack stood. “The accused has had his opportunity to speak. Sit down and be silent.”

D.L. Walker put one hand on Jack’s elbow, pulling him back into his seat. Glancing over her shoulder to the seat still occupied by her sister Marcie, she spoke softly to her client.

D.L. WALKER: Was that a sincere offer or merely a play on the sympathies of the crowd?

“Why, Miss Walker, you wound me,” Jack whispered back. “Wouldn’t offer if I didn’t mean it. I’m not sure I can help the boy, but I will try.”

Dougie Walker turned to look at her sister again, and Marcie nodded. “I’ll get word to them,” she promised.

At the front of the room, the bailiff called the room to order in her usual fashion, and when the room fell silent, she nodded to the table where the representatives for Mr. J.T. Fields’ accusers sat. “If it please the Rock, the speaker for the Dark may summon their first witness.”

The elegantly-dressed, silver haired woman who had introduced herself as Miss Gray rose to her feet, a wicked smile spreading across her pale, perfect face. “The Dark would speak with Mr. Poe.”

In the gallery directly behind Jack and his representative, Marcie Walker hissed, “Son of a bitch!”

Dougie Walker leaned back in her chair and whispered over her shoulder.

D.L. WALKER: I gather you know this witness?

“Oh, I know him,” her sister answered grimly. “And he’d best be grateful for the binding we’re all under here.”

From some unassuming shadow towards the middle of the assembled body of observers emerged a creature that was vaguely vulpine in appearance, but also distinctly not a fox. It was black and gray and white and seemed to be made of living soot and ash, moving through the room with lithe, graceful motions that called to mind something like swimming. Little flecks of its body seemed to flake away as it traversed the chamber, dissipating like smoke. Its feet were tipped with wicked, needle-sharp claws that made little critching sounds as it whispered over the ground. Its eyes were huge compared to its narrow, foxy muzzle and glittered with a flickering orange light. Its tail billowed behind it, a great plume of shiny dark fur that melted into a wispy, inky shadow.

Someone from the gallery whistled, impressed. “Good night, is that you, Tailypo? What you done to yourself, son? You look like you done run through the Devil’s stovepipe and come out t’other side with your tail all burnt.”

Someone else laughed, and somewhere in the crowd a woman jeered, “You better watch your mouth, Skint Tom! Don’t talk about his tailypo, or he’s liable to come cut you up while you’re sleeping, laying down in bed under the covers all helpless, whether you stole his tail or not.”

A rumble of laughter passed through the crowd. The creature that had settled itself on the witness chair narrowed its glowing eyes, and its tail lashed with displeasure.

Miss Gray turned cold slate eyes on the crowd, her gaze settling on a cloaked man seated in the fourth row of the gallery next to a shadowy, amorphous form distinguished by its glowing, iridescent green eyes. The pair were whispering amongst themselves, the man grinning. “Skint Tom,” she snapped, catching his attention.

“Yeah, darling? Something I can help you with?” Tom’s eyes roved over her figure, and he favored her with the slow smile that had opened so many doors — and throats — for him over the course of his long life.

Miss Gray was not charmed. “The witness answers to Mr. Poe, Tom,” she replied icily. “If you have thoughts on his tail — or perhaps you’d like to take it, as so many have before you — you are welcome to try. *Outside* of this chamber, once these proceedings have concluded.”

The face of the creature seated at the front of the room split into a grin so cruel and cold that D.L. Walker felt her breath catch in her throat. It turned those flickering orange eyes on Skint Tom, and its fox’s tail split into three... then six... then nine... then twelve tendrils of willowy darkness that opened like the petals of an exotic flower. Then, as the entire chamber watched, transfixed by this display, a single ebon appendage lashed out, cracking across Skint Tom’s face with the force of a bullwhip. The mask he wore split right down the middle, as precise as the cut of a surgeon’s scalpel, and the two halves of his borrowed face slid down the front of his cloak, dropping to the floor at his feet with a wet *smack*.

“Well shit!” Tom cried out in pain. “I just got this face last week, damnit!” Tom rose and hurried from the room, Old Green Eyes floating along in his wake.

The bailiff thumped her staff against the stone floor, calling the room to order once more. “Is the witness ready to proceed, Miss Gray?”

The representative for the dark’s eyes glittered, and she licked her lips. “Oh yes,” she answered. “Mr. Poe has quite the tale to tell.”

[ “Atonement” by Jon Charles Dwyer ]

Well, hey there, family. Thank you for joining us as the trial of the man they call Jack takes its next turn away from the Bone Pickin’ String band and into a much darker bunch of woods to hear the tale of Mr. Poe. I think y’all are gonna be horribly interested in Mr. Poe. I know how y’all are. But time will tell. We invite you to journey into the even darker woods behind our house and find your way to [oldgodsofappalachia.com](http://oldgodsofappalachia.com) where you can find links to episodes, cast and creator bios, as well as all the appropriate portals to complete the social media rituals of your choosing.

This is your every time your mom calls I lie and tell her you’re busy in the other room and certainly not still missing from that camping trip down by the river reminder that Old Gods of Appalachia is produced by DeepNerd Media and distributed by Rusty Quill. Today’s story was written by Cam Collins and performed by Steve Shell. Our intro music is by brother Landon Blood and our outro music, “Atonement,” is by Brother Jon Charles Dwyer. The Voice of D.L. Walker is Cam Collins. We’ll talk to you soon, family. Talk to you real soon.

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