

## OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA

*presents*

### BUILD MAMA A COFFIN

Episode 10: Deeley

*Build Mama a Coffin is an all-new original story set in the same world as Old Gods of Appalachia, which is a horror anthology podcast. But y'all don't care about that. Let's just get on to suppertime.*

[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...*

Growing up in a haunted house is no easy thing, especially for a child with... certain gifts. Deeley Hubbard — whose mother, Mercy, insisted on calling her by her given name, Delia, though no one else, including the girl herself, called her that — had been seeing spirits as far back as she could remember. Haints and ghosts and... other things, that Deeley knew no name for but which she knew in her bones had never been human, had been as clear and tangible a presence in her life as you or me, since she was just a little bit of a thing.

The house Deeley was born in — her Daddy's house, and her Papaw's before that — had been a warm and cozy, comfortable place, filled with the loving presence of her Papaw and Mamaw, neither of whom Deeley had ever met in life. Still, she knew them as well as she knew her Mama or Daddy. She could feel them watching over her as she played in the yard, and when her parents tucked her into bed at night. Could see them sometimes, and once or twice had heard their voices, telling her “hush, now” when she cried, and delivering a sharp “Deeley, no!” once when she'd reached for the stove as a small child. She could sense the presence of other spirits too, though not as clearly. Still, she knew they were family, and she never was afraid of them. They just felt like home.

This house — Deeley's stepfather's house, where she'd come to live when her mother remarried — was not home. She knew her Mama thought of it as her own, but the house — and the things

that dwelt within its walls — did not agree, and did not harbor any particular love for the new Mrs. Carter.

Mercy Boggs Carter was not a bad woman, but it must be said, family — she was not particularly... sensitive. And had it not been for the intervention of her daughter, she would have had a very different experience of the fine old house on Main Street where she came to live with her second husband.

The moment Mercy set foot in Kenneth Carter's family home, she began putting her stamp on it. Needed new wallpaper, new rugs, new furniture. The kitchen was just antiquated and simply had to be renovated. That antique crib that Kenneth and his Daddy and his Granddaddy had all slept in? Why, they didn't need to waste a whole room on that! That would make such a lovely guest room, and the crib could be stored in the attic until such time they might need it (which was never gonna come because there were a few bits of wisdom Mercy had retained from her Mama, and she didn't want another baby, thank you very much).

The house was not pleased, and Deeley spent her first months living there working patiently to familiarize herself with the spirits in residence, and to forge some sort of peaceful living arrangement with them, both for herself and on behalf of her Mama. She lit candles under family photos. She "forgot" cups of coffee and glasses of water on end tables, and left sweets out on her dresser. She secretly took up smoking, as some of the residents — as she came to think of them — were fond of good tobacco.

Mostly, she was able to soothe ruffled feathers and maintain the peace of the house throughout her mother's redecorating projects. However, there was one spirit — a very angry ghost that Deeley thought might have been her stepfather's first wife — who would not be appeased.

Deeley first became aware of her as a pool of icy discomfort lurking at the bottom of the stairs on the day she and her Mama moved into the house. Her stepfather had hired some local men to help his new wife and child move from their cozy home into the dark and sprawling — but yes, beautiful — house in the center of town, and Deeley stood on the bottom step, at her mother's elbow, as Mercy directed the moving efforts. She felt watched — no, she *knew* they were being watched — and the presence felt not quite hostile, but... suspicious. Deeley knew they were not

welcome here, and had to fight the feeling of the hair rising on the back of her neck all that afternoon.

Next morning at breakfast, Mercy began detailing her plans to redecorate to her new husband over a plate of eggs and grits and her morning coffee. Slowly, Deeley felt that cold presence sliding into the room, at first just a light draft around her ankles, but slowly growing to fill the space, until her stepfather complained of the cold and called for Ethel, the housekeeper, to come put another log on the fire.

It was when Mercy started talking about her plans for the old nursery that Deeley's glass of orange juice suddenly smashed to the floor.

Mercy and her husband didn't see it happen. They weren't paying attention to Deeley, and her new stepfather scolded her for her clumsiness as Ethel came back into the room with a couple old kitchen towels to help clean up the mess. But Deeley hadn't dropped her glass. Deeley had been sitting perfectly still, listening to the whisper neither of them could hear:

*MY house!*

It was the first volley in the ghost's battle against Mercy's renovation. As work on the house progressed, there were more incidents of broken glassware and crockery. Buckets of paint that had never been opened were found mysteriously spilled. Freshly-spread wallpaper somehow rolled itself off the walls in long, jagged strips.

"I don't know why it's so difficult to find good help," Mercy complained, oblivious while her daughter shivered under the spirit's furious presence.

Still, Deeley never saw the angry ghost until the workmen her Mama had hired moved on to the old nursery. The moment they picked up the antique crib to carry it up the stairs to the attic, Deeley alone heard the ghost's furious scream echo down the hall, and finally, she saw her: a woman with long, messy black hair that hung loose down her back, in a red dress and heels maybe ten years out of fashion, standing by the nursery door with her fists clenched. It was the middle of the day, and the house was full of men she didn't know working on her Mama's

project, and Deeley knew better than to try to talk to the ghost now, in front of all these people. They'd think she was crazy. It'd happened before, and Deeley had learned to hold her tongue until she had privacy, no matter how insistent a spirit might get. Ghosts could be pushy sometimes when they wanted something, but just as Mercy was her Mama's daughter, so was Deeley. She would not be bossed by dead people.

Deeley waited until late that night, long after her Mama and her stepfather had both gone to bed in their separate rooms on the second floor, to climb out of bed and put on her slippers and robe to help keep warm. She stuffed her pockets with a couple of hard candies and a packet of crackers, a little bag of salt she'd taken from the kitchen that afternoon, a miniature china cup she'd saved from her old dollhouse before they moved, and a flask of whiskey she'd pilfered from the desk drawer in her stepfather's study before he came home from the bank for the evening. She carefully lit a candle and carried it with her as she quietly left her room and began to walk through the dark, silent house.

Starting at the foot of the stairs, Deeley made her way slowly through the house, listening and feeling for the presence of the ghost in the red dress. She crept through every room except her parents' bedrooms, where she paused to press her hand silently against each door, closing her eyes and reaching out with... her gift or curse or whatever it was that let her see and talk to what used to be people. But of course, in the end, Deeley found the ghost exactly where she knew she probably would — at the top of the house, in the little room in the attic where Mama had told the workmen to stash that crib.

Deeley couldn't see her at first, but lord, she could feel her. The room was icy cold — cold enough for her breath to hang little clouds in the air — and the sense of rage in the room weighed on her, pressing down on her back and her shoulders and wrapping arms around her neck like somebody riding piggyback. Someone else might have been scared. But although she'd grown up in a house full of peaceful, loving ghosts, Deeley had left the house before she came here. There were plenty of ghosts in other people's houses, and in the woods or on the road, in the upstairs of the general store in town, in one of the churches her Mama used to attend on occasion, and any number of other places she'd found herself. The whole world is haunted. It's just that most folks don't know how much.

Deeley Hubbard had dealt with cranky ghosts before, and some of them were far scarier than this sad, angry little shade. Still, best to start out polite. Most spirits, be they shadows of people who had passed on from this world or the Others — various things that had never been human — wanted acknowledgement and respect above all, which was why they typically responded well to the little treats she brought them. They might not be able to physically partake of a sweet or a cup of coffee, but they appreciated the gesture usually.

So Deeley began as she often did, ignoring the discomfort of the room to set down the candle and arrange around it the little snacks she'd brought: candy and crackers, and a shot of whiskey in the little china cup. She sat back on her heels and said, in her polite, speaking-to-elders voice, "Evening, ma'am. I know you and I don't know each other just yet, but seeing as we're gonna be sharing this space, I thought it would only be right to introduce myself. I'm Deeley, and I've brought a little treat to share if you'd like some."

Silence. The room seemed to grow even more still, the air heavier. The candle flickered.

And then the angry woman in the red dress materialized directly in front of Deeley, nose to nose and screaming in her face.

Deeley allowed her head to rock back slightly, and she blinked. And when the ghost was silent, she said, "Well now, that's just not neighborly at all. I thought we'd have a nice, friendly chat, and here you are cussing me. Now how bout you simmer down and tell me what's got you so riled up like a civilized person?"

Then Deeley waited, and she listened.

It was a sad story, to be sure. The woman had indeed been the first wife of Deeley's stepfather. From what she could gather — 'cause figuring out what a ghost is trying to tell you isn't always simple, family — the ghost's child should have been the last Carter to occupy the fancy crib that sat not two feet from Deeley in the little attic room. But his birth had been a hard one, and the babe hadn't lived more than a day. And it seemed his mother had followed shortly thereafter. Deeley couldn't quite get a straight answer as to what had happened to her. She might have

taken sick herself and succumbed to complications from childbirth... or perhaps the despair had overwhelmed her, and she'd taken her own life.

Either way, the little piece of her spirit that lingered in the place where she'd known such pain was mighty angry that her husband had taken another wife. That's the thing you need to understand about ghosts — they're not a whole person, they're not *souls*. Most of the ghosts Deeley had encountered were harmless, just going about their ghostly business, much as they did in life. Many of them she couldn't talk to the way she could this one — they were more *impressions* than actual presences. And the ones she could talk to... well, they weren't always rational. They weren't *whole*.

So Deeley listened to her story, and listened to her rage against her stepfather and her Mama. But when the threats began, she was done listening.

"No, ma'am," she said sharply, and slapped her palm on the floor in front of her. The ghost fell silent. "I'm real sorry what happened to you," Deeley continued, "but I won't let you harm anyone in this house. Now I don't want to run you out of your home — you were here first, after all, so that doesn't seem fair — but if you try to hurt somebody, I'll do it in a second."

Deeley did not, in fact, know that she could do any such thing, but if anybody tried to hurt her Mama, she sure would try. So she looked right at that little ghost and crossed her arms over her chest as she said this, just like her mother always did when she Meant Business, Young Lady.

And when the little ghost flew into her face, screaming, Deeley was ready for her. She popped up to her feet and took two quick steps back — through the door and into the hallway, across the line of salt she'd laid down across the threshold before she walked in. It wasn't a permanent solution, but it did the trick — the screaming ghost halted in the doorway, still wailing.

Deeley shook her head at the woman again. "No, ma'am," she said again. "I told you — I won't let you hurt anyone in this house, and that includes myself. Now why don't you just sit a spell and think about things. I'll come check on you again tomorrow." And she turned her back and went down the stairs to her own room, to the comfort of her bed.

She did keep her promise. The next night, Deeley returned to the little attic room, brought a few little offerings, and sat with the ghost awhile. It took some time, but eventually the angry little spirit calmed. She stopped threatening Deeley's Mama with a quickness, as she didn't much like it when Deeley used the salt trick on her, but she kept breaking crockery and causing other mild chaos for a little while. These incidents tapered off over time, especially once Mercy's renovations were complete and it became clear she had no intention of otherwise tampering with the antique crib that so fixated the spirit of her husband's first wife.

Through it all, Mercy never seemed to even suspect the house was haunted, or that there might be anything more behind the strange occurrences in the Carter home beyond general bad luck. She certainly never mentioned seeing, hearing, or otherwise suspecting the presence of the spirits that shared the house with her.

For this reason, it came as quite a shock one morning, years later, when Deeley returned home from a friend's birthday sleepover, to the news that her mother had a spiritual visitation.

DEELEY: *Dear Diary,*

*Well it has surely been an eventful day! When I got home from Rachel's house this morning, my mother told me I should pack a bag. We're going to visit her old homeplace in Virginia, Boggs Holler. Mama said she has had a spiritual visitation, and these spirits have told her she has to go home to Boggs Holler, to meet with some old woman out in the woods called Granny White. Well, you could have knocked me over with a feather!*

*All my life, Mama never could see the things I see. I don't mean she didn't believe me — she always believed me, or at least she never seemed to think I was just making up stories, like some folks do. But when I asked, she told me she couldn't see those things, and she never really wanted to talk much about it.*

*But Mama's been... strange... since Mamaw Boggs passed. Not just sad — of course she's sad — anybody'd be sad their mama died. She's started talking about things, though. About the things I can do, the things I see. She says Mamaw Boggs was like me. She could see ghosts and... the other things, the things that never were human to begin with.*

*I always wanted to meet Mamaw Boggs. Or any of my grandparents. Seems like everybody has grammaws and grampaws and papaws and meemaws but me. But my daddy's parents died before he did, and Mama never did take me to meet her Mama. What with one thing and another, she says, there never seemed to be time. I don't know about all that, but... she sure seems sad about it now.*

*I guess it will be interesting to see her house at least, and visit the place where Mama grew up, but... I don't know about this Granny White person. And I don't understand why Mama's taking directions from some old lady she's never met. It's not like her. The Mama I know would say, "Does she think she can just summon me like she's the Queen of England? Who does she think she is? If she wants something, she can come to me."*

*I don't know, but... I don't like it. It gives me a bad feeling. I suppose the best I can do is go along and try to keep Mama out of trouble.*

[Build Mama a Coffin by Blood on the Harp]

*Gonna build Mama a coffin, hmm-mmm*

*Gonna build Mama a coffin, hmm-mmm*

Today's story was written by Cam Collins and performed by Steve Shell. Sorry about the delay, family, appreciate the patience and understanding. We'll talk to you real soon.

*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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