

Old Gods of Appalachia
Season 1: Barlo

Episode 1
Old Number Seven

FADE IN:

EXT. WHAT USED TO BE BARLO, KY- GOLDEN HOUR, PRESENT TIME

A FEW BEAMS OF GOLD LIGHT FILTER THROUGH THE TANGLE OF VINES AND VEGETATION IN THIS PLACE. WHAT USED TO BE A SMALL MINING TOWN HAS BEEN ENTIRELY OVERTAKEN BY THE GREEN- EXCEPT FOR ONE LAST BARELY-STANDING BUILDING.

THE SCHOOLHOUSE TODAY IS A BROKEN, ROTTING HUSK OF ITS FORMER SELF.

OUT FRONT ARE THE SAGGING FRONT STEPS- BOWED AND WARPED BY THE PASSAGE OF TIME. THE PASSAGE OF THE MOUNTAIN SEASONS HAS SUCKED ALL THE LIFE FROM THIS PLACE. THE FRONT DOOR IS LEFT HANGING BY A SINGLE RUSTY HINGE.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE- CONTINUOUS

THE AIR IS HEAVY WITH THE HUMID, FETID, SICKLY-SWEET SMELL OF THE WOODS IN AUTUMN. DUST MOTES DANCE IN THE AIR.

WHAT USED TO BE THE TEACHER'S DESK IS EMPTY- EXCEPT FOR THE ANCIENT BIBLE WHICH SITS MOLDERING IN THE OPEN BOTTOM RIGHT DRAWER. BEHIND IT THE CHALKBOARDS STILL CLING TO THE ROTTEN WALLS, ONLY BARE TRACES OF LESSONS LONG ENDED REMAINING ON THEIR STAINED AND DISSOLVING FACES.

OVERHEAD, THE ROOM OPENS TO THE RAFTERS AND HOLES IN THE TAR OF THE ROOF; THE CEILING ITSELF HAVING ROTTED AWAY A LONG TIME AGO ALREADY.

SCATTERED ABOUT THE ROOM ARE FIFTEEN OLD-FASHIONED WOODEN SCHOOL DESKS. SOME ARE MISSING PARTS, OTHERS ROTTING AND PEELING, SOME ENTIRELY UNRECOGNIZABLE OF WHAT THEY HAD ORIGINALLY BEEN.

A FULL 360 VIEW GIVES ONE LAST LOOK AT THE FORGOTTEN LITTLE SHACK BEING SWALLOWED BY LUSH GREEN VEGETATION.

FADE TO:

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE, AUGUST 1917- MORNING

THE SCHOOLHOUSE HAS TRANSFORMED. NOW IT IS CLEAN, ORDERLY, A SPACE FILLED WITH LIGHT AND POTENTIAL. OUTSIDE THE WINDOW, WHERE THERE ONCE WAS A TANGLED MASS OF FLORA, IS THE TINY TOWN OF BARLOW, KENTUCKY.

'TOWN' IS A GENEROUS WORD FOR WHAT BARLOW IS: A COLLECTION OF A POST OFFICE, A DRY GOODS STORE, A CHURCH, A SCHOOL, A BANK, AND TWO OR THREE OTHER BUSINESSES THAT ARE CONCERNED MORE WITH PAPER AND SIGNATURES THAN ACTUAL WORK. OUTSIDE WHAT IS HALF-JOKINGLY CALLED THE SQUARE ARE THE MODEST TRACT HOUSES AND OLDER DWELLINGS THAT THE LOCAL FOLK BUILT THEMSELVES. UP THE ROAD AND AROUND THE MOUNTAIN ARE THE MINES.

ANNIE MESSER (30, PLAIN, UNMARRIED), THE SCHOOLTEACHER, STANDS BEHIND THE FRONT DESK, READING FROM THE BIBLE SEEN EARLIER- ONLY NOW IS IN ITS PRIME OF USE-AND WRITING ON THE CHALKBOARD. ALL FIFTEEN CHILDREN OF HER FIRST-TO-EIGHTH GRADE CLASS ARE SEATED AT THEIR INTACT DESKS, WRITING ON THEIR SLATES.

MISS ANNIE

"Now what wisdom is, and how she came to be I shall proclaim; and I shall conceal no secrets from you. But from the very beginning I shall search out and bring to light knowledge of her; I shall not diverge from the truth."

(cont'd)

The Book of Wisdom, chapter six,
verse twenty-two. Please make sure
you remember what we've learned
about the proper shape of each
letter within each word, and try
best you can not to lift your
chalk until you've completed each
word.

[DEEP, EARTH-SHAKING SOUND OF AN EXPLOSION]

THE ENTIRE BUILDING SHAKES. **MISS ANNIE** LOOKS AROUND WILDLY. THE
SOUND OF THE BLAST CAN BE HEARD FROM EVERY CORNER OF TOWN. **MISS
ANNIE** JUMPS TO HER FEET AND RUNS TO THE WINDOW, LOOKING TOWARD
THE MOUNTAINS TO THE EAST. A GREAT GOUT OF FIRE AND A SOOTY
BLACK COLUMN OF SMOKE BEGINS TO RISE IN THE DISTANCE, NOT FAR
FROM THE EDGE OF TOWN.

SEVERAL CHILDREN SCREAM. ALL THE CHILDREN ARE IMMEDIATELY ON
THEIR FEET AND TRYING TO GET OUTSIDE.

MISS ANNIE

Please try to calm yourselves,
babies! Now, come on back inside!

DESPITE HER ATTEMPTS TO CORRAL THEM, **MISS ANNIE** ENDS UP OUTSIDE
ON THE FRONT YARD AS WELL.

JUST OUTSIDE THE DOOR TO THE SCHOOLHOUSE, ALL FIFTEEN CHILDREN
HUDDLE CLOSE TO MISS ANNIE AND STARE UP AT THE DISTANT PLUME OF
SMOKE. ONE OF THE YOUNGER BOYS CLINGS TO THE HEM OF HER SKIRT.
MISS ANNIE HAS AN ARM WRAPPED TIGHT AROUND **SARAH AVERY (10)**,
ANOTHER STUDENT.

SEVERAL CHILDREN ARE BABBLING AT ONCE. SOME OF THE YOUNGER ONES ARE CRYING. THE OLDER ONES ARE WHISPERING TO EACH OTHER.

SARAH AVERY

That's not Old Number Seven is it,
Miss Annie?

MISS ANNIE HOLDS SARAH TIGHTLY TO HER, SQUEEZING HER IN REASSURANCE. SHE DOESN'T ANSWER IMMEDIATELY.

MISS ANNIE

I don't rightly know, but I'm
afraid it might be.

LITTLE BOY

But my daddy is at that mine!

SARAH AVERY

Mine too...

CHILDREN

Mine too!/ My brothers are at that
mine!/ I think mine's there too...

MISS ANNIE

I'm sure your daddies are just
fine, my babies. All y'all know
that whole camp has been on strike
for well over a month. Now come
on, let's all go on back inside.
I'm sure y'all's mommas will be
coming by soon enough.

MISS ANNIE HERDS HER CHARGES SLOWLY BACK INTO THE SCHOOLHOUSE. SEVERAL CHILDREN HAVE TO BE TAPPED OR GRABBED TO TAKE THEIR ATTENTION OFF THE BLACK SMUDGE IN THE SKY.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE- LATER

ALL OF MISS ANNIE'S STUDENTS EXCEPT FOR **SARAH AVERY** ARE GONE, HAVING ALREADY BEEN COLLECTED. **SARAH** IS SITTING AT HER DESK, STARING INTO SPACE.

MISS ANNIE IS AT THE WINDOW. SHE WATCHES A FEW OF HER STUDENTS, ALONG WITH THEIR MOTHERS AND SIBLINGS, WALK BRISKLY UP THE ROAD IN THE DIRECTION OF THE SMOKE.

MISS ANNIE

(Under her breath) Dear God,
please let those men be alright.
Maybe a bit soot-faced and shaken,
but please let them live.

CAROL ANNE AVERY (36), SARAH'S MOTHER, ARRIVES SWEATY AND WILD-EYED. SHE CLIMBS THE STEPS AND ENTERS THE OPEN DOOR OF THE SCHOOLHOUSE.

CAROL ANNE

Sarah, come on sugar, we gotta go.

HER VOICE IS AS STRAINED AND FRAYED AS HER HAIR, WHICH IS NOW A WILD TANGLE FROM RUNNING ALL THE WAY FROM THEIR HOME OUT ON GOSHEN CREEK. NEAR THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN. SHE HOLDS HER HAND OUT EXPECTANTLY.

SARAH

Yes, Momma.

SHE HOPS FROM HER DESK. **MISS ANNIE** GIVES CAROL ANNE A SILENT AND SOLEMN NOD.

MISS ANNIE

We've been praying over Pinky real hard, haven't we, Sarah?

MISS ANNIE COMES OVER TO CAROL ANNE TO EMBRACE HER.

SARAH

And Uncle Ed, too!

CAROL ANNE

Thank you, Annie. (*tiredly accepts the hug*). Come on, baby. Let's go find your daddy.

CAROL ANNE AND **SARAH** TURN TO LEAVE, HAND IN HAND.

MISS ANNIE

I'll keep praying, Carol Anne. I promise. Y'all are gonna get up there and I just know that they're both gonna be right as rain—just you see.

CAROL ANNE LOOKS AT MISS ANNIE WITH A DISTANT, PAIN-DULLED EXPRESSION.

CAROL ANNE

Thank you. That's very kind.

SHE TURNS, DAUGHTER IN HAND, AND LEAVES. **MISS ANNIE** WATCHES AFTER THEM FROM THE TOP OF THE FRONT STEPS.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

EXT. GREASY CREEK MINING CAMP NO. 7- DAY

CAROL ANNE AND **SARAH** WALK UP THE DIRT ROAD THROUGH THE ENTRANCE OF THE MINING CAMP. A SIGN NEAR THE FRONT GATE DISPLAYS THE NAME OF THE CAMP AS WELL AS THE INSIGNIA OF THE B&L MINING CO. THE SMOKE COMING FROM THE MINE HAS LESSENERED FROM A SINGLE MASSIVE COLUMN TO A HANDFUL OF WEAKENED TENDRILS.

CLUSTERS OF PEOPLE ARE EVERYWHERE, SURROUNDING THE STILL BREATHING MEN OF THEIR FAMILIES. EVERYONE WHO HAD BEEN PICKETING THAT DAY IS ALIVE.

A FEW MEN NOTICE THE AVERY GIRLS AND QUICKLY AVERT THEIR EYES AS THEY WALK SILENTLY THROUGH THE CAMP, GIVING THEM AN ODDLY WIDE BERTH. **CAROL ANNE** CATCHES WHISPERS AS THEY PASS.

WOMAN 1

... Poor woman...

WOMAN 2

...Heroes, those Avery boys...

MAN 1

...foolish going back in there, and
for scabs no less?

CAROL ANNE

(Gasps) Oh sweet mother of Mercy...

CAROL ANNE FREEZES AND PULLS SARAH TIGHT TO HER, USING HER BODY TO BLOCK SARAH FROM SEEING ANYTHING. SHE COVERS THE GIRL'S FACE WITH HER APRON.

SARAH

Momma, what—

CAROL ANNE

Hush now, child. No child should
see this.

NEAR THE MOUTH OF THE MINE ARE THE REMAINS OF THE 62 MEN WHO HAD BEEN IN THE MINE AT THE TIME OF THE EXPLOSION. LAID SIDE BY SIDE, MOST ARE UNRECOGNIZABLE. 51 OF THEM HAD BEEN BLACK MEN. MOST OF THE MENS' FLESH IS CHARRED RED AND BLACK. EYE SOCKETS ARE EMPTY, SAVE FOR VESTIGES OF CLOUDY, VISCOUS DRIPPING FLUID. WHERE BONE IS VISIBLE, THAT TOO IS BURNT BLACK.

TWO MEN STAND NEARBY, STUDYING THE MASS OF CHARRED BODIES, TALKING (NOT SOFTLY ENOUGH) TO EACH OTHER.

MAN 2

Well at least most of them's
scabs. Not much of a loss in terms
of workforce.

MAN 3

What the hell are we supposed to
do with all them Coloreds' bodies?

MAN 2

Ask Gary Hastings when he finally
gets here—he's the undertaker, not
me. And where the hell is Earl?
Oh— Mrs. Avery, uh, what you doing
out here?

CAROL ANNE LOOKS HARD AT THE MAN WITH THE CLIPBOARD.

CAROL ANNE

Where is my husband?

THE TWO MEN RELUCTANTLY APPROACH HER, REMOVING THEIR HATS.

MAN 2

Mrs. Avery, let's go over here so
we can talk, okay?

HE MOTIONS TO A SMALL SHACK THAT SERVES AS THE CAMP'S OFFICE.
SHE DOES NOT RESPOND BUT FOLLOWS SILENTLY, STILL MAKING SURE
SARAH CANNOT SEE THE DEAD MEN.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE- MORNING

ONE WEEK AFTER THE FIRE

MISS ANNIE IS AT HER DESK, LOOKING OVER LESSON NOTES. SHE IS THE ONLY ONE HERE.

A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

MISS ANNIE

Come in!

CLETUS GARVIN (40) ENTERS, HAT IN HAND.

CLETUS GARVIN

Mornin', Miss Annie. You doin' alright?

MISS ANNIE

Well hello there, Pastor Garvin!
Don't normally have a man like you
calling around here. Something I
can do for you?

MISS ANNIE MOTIONS FOR **CLETUS** TO TAKE A SEAT IN THE SPARE CHAIR
SHE KEEPS RIGHT NEXT TO HER DESK.

CLETUS

Well, possibly. I was just wondering if you'd had little miss Sarah Avery in class recently? I've had a thought that it might be good to check in on her and her momma, and since the Averys never have been churchin' folk, I figured you might have at least seen the Avery girl. You know, since—since the accident?

MISS ANNIE

Actually, I haven't. She hasn't been back since. Not that I blame her, mind. With her poor daddy and great-uncle gone now, Carol Anne probably needs all the help she can get with the chores. So sorry I can't be more help to you, Pastor.

CLETUS NODS AND LOOKS AT HIS HANDS, BROW FURROWED.

CLETUS

No matter, darlin'. I sorta expected as much. Say, you ever been down to their cabin over on Goshun Crick?

MISS ANNIE

Can't say I've ever had much reason to. I really only make house calls to my more troubled pupils and Sarah's one of the brightest out of all of them—

(cont'd)

including the boys. Anyway, they live so far out in them woods you can barely call it Barlo. I do think it's mighty nice of you to want to look in on them, though. Thing you might go up there yourself?

CLETUS

I suppose I might. (*nervous beat*) Say, would you mind joining me? I'm not as spry as I used to be, and a friendly face like yours might make the trip a bit easier, not to mention those Avery girls might be glad to see you.

MISS ANNIE

(*thinks for a moment, then nods*) I think I will. When did you have in mind?

CLETUS

Well, I actually have my cart with me out front. If we left now, we could be at the Avery cabin by late afternoon. Poor old Gracie don't have much steam left in her for a brisk trot, but she's amenable to just above a crawl.

MISS ANNIE SMILES POLITELY AND STOWS HER PAPERS.

MISS ANNIE

Then let's go, shall we?

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

EXT. AVERY PROPERTY, DRIVEWAY ENTRANCE- LATE AFTERNOON

CLETUS'S MULE-DRAWN CART TRUNDLES UP THE AVERY'S DRIVE. HE AND MISS ANNIE RIDE IN SILENCE, ENJOYING THE COOL OF THE AFTERNOON AND THE PLEASANT SORENESS THAT COMES WITH A HARD DAY'S RIDE. THEIR FACES CHANGE TO ALARM AND CONCERN AS THEY SEE THE WRECKAGE OF THE PROPERTY.

SOMETHING CATCHES HIS EYE, HANGING FROM A LOW BRANCH OF THE TALL OAK AT THE EDGE OF THE YARD.

CLETUS

What is that, over there?

MISS ANNIE SQUINTS, LEANING FORWARD. AS THEY DRAW NEARER HER EYES SNAP WIDE OPEN AND HER HAND FLIES TO HER MOUTH TO MUFFLE A SCREAM.

CLETUS

What— Oh my God...

THE BODY OF **CAROL ANNE** GREETES THEM WHERE SHE SWINGS, BLOATED AND PURPLE AT THE END OF A ROUGHLY TIED NOOSE. FLIES BUZZ ABOUT HER FACE AND BULGING EYES, AND THE CONTENTS OF HER BOWELS STAIN HER HOUSEDRESS AND RUN DOWN HER LEG, MARKING THE TORN EARTH BENEATH HER. THE YARD LOOKS AS THOUGH HORSES HAD RAN THROUGH IT IN THE MIDDLE OF A THUNDERSTORM - THE EARTH CHURNED AND RIPPED. WHAT GRASS IS LEFT IS COATED IN A GREASY BLACK RESIDUE THAT LOOKS LIKE SOOT.

GRACIE BALKS AT THE PERIMETER OF THE YARD AND REFUSES TO GO ANY FURTHER, EYES ROLLING. **CLETUS** HOPS DOWN AND TRIES TO CALM THE MULE. **MISS ANNIE** SOBS SILENTLY.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

EXT. AVERY CABIN, THE PORCH- CONTINUOUS

MISS ANNIE

What on earth could have done
this? And what is that *smell*??

SHE STANDS IN FRONT OF THE PORCH. **CLETUS** CLIMBS ONTO IT AND TAKES IN THE WRECKAGE IN SILENT SHOCK, HAND COVERING HIS MOUTH AND NOSE.

THE HOUSE HAS BEEN RANSACKED. IT LOOKS AS IF ANIMALS HAD TORN OPEN THE FRONT DOOR AND DESTROYED AND BEFOULED THE HOUSE. THE WINDOWS AND THE WALLS ARE SMEARED WITH EXCREMENT AND WHAT LOOKS LIKE FUNGUS.

MISS ANNIE GASPS, SUDDENLY REMEMBERING SARAH.

MISS ANNIE

Pastor- where's Sarah? Do you see
her? *Sarah!!!*

MISS ANNIE WALKS AROUND THE HOUSE, WHICH BACKS UP TO THE EDGE OF
A DENSE COPSE OF TREES.

MISS ANNIE

Sarah? Sarah, come see, baby!
Where are you? Dear God, please
let her still be alive...

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

EXT. THE WOODS- DUSK

SARAH AVERY'S BREATH COMES IN SHARP GASPS. HER FEET NEVER STOP.
SHE TEARS THROUGH THE FOLIAGE, RUNNING FROM.. SOMETHING. THE LOOK
IN HER EYES IS NOT FEAR, INSTEAD SHE IS ANGRY, CONFUSED, AND
HUNGRY. DESPITE THIS, SHE DOES NOT STOP RUNNING.

BEHIND HER IS THE SOUND OF SOMETHING CHASING HER, GAINING ON
HER.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

EXT. DIRT ROAD- CONTINUOUS

SARAH BREAKS THROUGH THE BRUSH AND TREES AND ONTO THE MAIN ROAD. SHE CAN NO LONGER HEAR ANYTHING CHASING HER. SHE STOPS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD.

PINKY AVERY (O.C)

Sarah...

A VOICE CALLS TO HER FROM DOWN THE ROAD, MAKING HER SNAP AROUND IN ITS DIRECTION. SHE MOVES TOWARD IT UNTIL SHE CAN MAKE OUT THE FIGURE STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD. SHE FREEZES IN HER TRACKS.

SARAH'S DADDY, **PINKY AVERY (39)**, STANDS BEFORE HER, CALLING TO HER. HE IS COVERED IN SOOT AND ASH AND PARTLY ON FIRE. NONE OF THIS SEEMS TO PHASE HIM AS HE LURCHES AND LIMPS TOWARD HIS ONLY DAUGHTER. HIS SPEECH IS SLURRED DUE TO HIS MOUTH IS PARTIALLY BURNT, MELTED INTO WHAT IS LEFT OF HIS TEETH.

PINKY

Hey sugarpup. D-D.. Don't look so s-s-scared, it's just your old daddy.

SARAH KNOWS THAT THIS IS NOT HER FATHER. SHE BACKS AWAY FROM HIS ADVANCES. **THE THING THAT IS NOT DADDY** LAUGHS. BLACK SMOKE WHEEZES OUT OF THE VARIOUS HOLES BURNED IN HIS BODY.

NOT PINKY

You just come on with me now and I'll get you home to your momma.

SARAH

Momma's dead.

NOT PINKY

Well ain't that a shame. I can
still get you to her though,
she'll be right glad to see you.

NOT PINKY LUNGES FOR SARAH, AND SARAH SCREAMS.

END