

Old Gods of Appalachia
Season 1: Barlo

Episode 6:
The Boy: A Legend in Three Parts

PART ONE

ROY ABSHER, 1906

FADE IN:

EXT. ROOSTER BRANCH FARMHOUSE, FRONT PORCH- SUNDOWN

ROY ABSHER SITS IN A WICKER ROCKING CHAIR, MASON JAR OF MOONSHINE IN ONE HAND AND CIGAR IN THE OTHER. HE IS ENJOYING WATCHING THE SUN SINK OVER HIS PROPERTY, PRAYING SILENTLY TO HIMSELF. A PICTURE OF CONTENTMENT.

AS THE SUN SINKS BELOW THE HORIZON, **THE BOY** CAN BE SEEN OUT AT THE EDGE OF HIS PROPERTY. HE IS BARELY 10 YEARS OLD, IF THAT. HE WEARS WORK OVERALLS A FEW SIZES TOO BIG FOR HIM AND CARRIES A LANTERN.

ROY STANDS UP AND LEANS OVER THE PORCH RAIL. HE SQUINTS TO GET A BETTER LOOK.

ROY

(hollering) Who's out there? You ought not be playin' with that lantern like that! You're like to burn yourself! Get on home, boy! Go on, git!

THE BOY DOES NOTHING. JUST STANDS THERE, STOCK STILL.

ROY

(sighs, muttering) Damn kids...

ROY SETS HIS MOONSHINE ON THE PORCH RAILING. HE WALKS OFF THE PORCH, TOWARD THE BOY. HE STOPS DEAD ONCE HE IS A FEW YARDS AWAY FROM HIM—CLOSE ENOUGH TO SEE THE BOY'S DEAD, FLAT, ENTIRELY BLACK EYES. HE TAKES A TIPSY STEP BACK AND RUBS HIS FACE.

ROY

(Stammering) What's your name,
boy? You lost?

NO ANSWER FROM **THE BOY**, WHO CONTINUES TO STARE BACK BLANKLY WITH UNSETTLING COAL DUST EYES.

ROY

What's the matter son, someone cut
your tongue out your head? Who's
your daddy?

FOR A LONG MOMENT, THERE IS UTTER SILENCE BETWEEN THE TWO.

THE BOY'S VOICE IS OF A MAN MUCH OLDER THAN HIM.

BOY

You are.

ROY

T-T-Tommy? No, he died in the mine
three years back, you can't be-

THE BOY LIFTS THE LANTERN, WHICH IMPOSSIBLY ILLUMINATES A GREAT SWATH OF LAND AROUND HIM. BEHIND HIM STANDS A GROUP OF AT LEAST TWENTY BOYS, AGES RANGING FROM 7 TO 16, DRESSED JUST LIKE HIM, COVERED IN COAL DUST AND VARIOUS CUTS AND BRUISES. ALL OF THEM HAVE THE SAME FLAT BLACK EYES. THE THREE BOYS DIRECTLY BEHIND THE BOY ARE ROY'S LATE SONS: **ROGER (14)**, **KYLE (13)**, AND **TOMMY (11)**.

ROY

(Gasps, begins to weep) My boys...
Roger? Kyle? Oh god, Tommy, is
that you?

HE REACHES OUT WITH BOTH HANDS. HE TAKES A SHUDDERING STEP TOWARD THEM.

THE BOY DROPS THE LANTERN AND THE LIGHT WINKS OUT, LEAVING ROY IN NEAR-FULL DARK. THE SOUNDS OF YOUNG BOYS CRYING AND CALLING OUT FOR THEIR DADDIES AND MOMMIES ECHO AS IF FROM DEEP WITHIN A MINE SHAFT.

ROY IS OVERCOME WITH RACKING SOBS AND FALLS TO HIS KNEES, SCREAMING FOR HIS DEAD SONS. HE COLLAPSES TO THE GROUND, FINALLY UNCONSCIOUS.

FADE OUT

PART TWO

MYRTLE HOOPER, 1912

FADE IN:

INT. MYRTLE'S BEDROOM- SUNDOWN

SOWERSTOWN, KY; JUST SOUTH OF BARLO

MYRTLE HOOPER (18, A JEALOUS AND BITTER WOMAN) IS DRESSED IN HER WEDDING GOWN. IT'S THE NIGHT BEFORE HER WEDDING. SHE IS STARING AT HERSELF IN THE MIRROR, NERVOUS AND CONCERNED.

LORETTA HOOPER, 53, ENTERS.

LORETTA

Oh, my. Well don't you look just like a magnolia in May. Is something wrong, baby?

MYRTLE

Nothing, mama. Just nerves, I suppose.

LORETTA

Well that's normal, honey! I'd be more worried if you didn't have at least a few butterflies. I just wish your poor brother were here...

LORETTA SNIFFLES, TAKES OUT A HANDKERCHIEF AND DABS HER EYES

MYRTLE

(rolls her eyes) Brian's been in the ground for seven years now. Ain't it time for you to stop grieving? It's my wedding day tomorrow, for chrissakes!

LORETTA

Myrtle Mary Magdalena Hooper, how dare you say something like that? He was your brother! His poor body, floating down Goshen Creek... I'll never get that image outta my head..

LORETTA SOBS INTO HER HANDKERCHIEF

MYRTLE

(sighs, exasperated) I need some air. I'll be back soon.

LORETTA

In your wedding dress?!

MYRTLE

(halfway out the bedroom door)
Goodbye, mama!

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

EXT. HOOPER PROPERTY, EDGE OF GOSHEN CREEK- EVENING

MYRTLE WALKS ALONG THE CREEK EDGE, TRYING TO CLEAR HER HEAD. SHE ROUNDS A BEND AND FINDS HERSELF NEAR-BLINDED BY A GLARING LIGHT.

MYRTLE

(shielding her eyes) Whoever that
is better cut that damn light! Who
the hell is walkin' around my
daddy's land this late??

THE LIGHT LOWERS, AND **MYRTLE** APPROACHES.

AS SHE GETS CLOSER SHE CAN SEE IT IS **A LITTLE BOY**. HE LOOKS TO BE ABOUT BRIAN'S AGE AND IS DRIPPING WET. HE WEARS A CAP AND OVERALLS.

MYRTLE GASPS, FOR A MOMENT THINKING IT'S HER DEAD BABY BROTHER. SHE PUSHES THE THOUGHT AWAY. SHE STEPS GINGERLY TOWARD THE BOY, HITCHING HER SKIRT AND CROUCHING TO HIS LEVEL. SHE TRIES TO SOFTEN HER VOICE.

MYRTLE

Hey little man - whatchoo doin'
out here? You lost? Are you
lookin' for your mama?

BOY

You're not my mama. You're not
anyone's mama, and you ain't gonna
be. Never.

THE BOY STARES AT HER WITH HIS COAL-DUST EYES AS HE LIFTS HIS
LANTERN AND LIGHTS THE WATER AROUND THEM.

MYRTLE LOOKS AT THE WATER AS DOZENS AND DOZENS OF PALE CHILD-
SIZED ARMS RISE FROM THE CREEK, GROPING THEIR WAY TOWARDS
MYRTLE. ONE LITTLE HAND SNAGS THE HEM OF HER GOWN AND SHE
SHRIEKS.

THE WATER OF THE CREEK STARTS TO RISE RAPIDLY, RISING UP AROUND
MYRTLE'S FEET.

MYRTLE

Shit, my dress!

SHE TRIES TO YANK HER SKIRT AWAY AND GET OUT OF THE WATER. MORE
CHILD'S ARMS SWARM AROUND HER, TANGLING IN HER DRESS, CATCHING
HER ANKLES, CLIMBING UP HER THIGHS, CLUTCHING AT HER WAIST AS
THE CREEK RISES HIGHER AND HIGHER, THE HANDS PULLING HER DOWN.

AS THE WATER RISES TO HER FACE AND SWALLOWS HER SCREAMS, THE
LAST THING SHE SEES AS SHE FULLY GOES UNDER IS THE BOY TIPPING
THAT LANTERN OVER, EXTINGUISHING THE LIGHT.

FADE OUT

PART THREE

EARL HAMNER, 1917

FADE IN:

INT. EARL HAMNER'S BEDROOM- PREDAWN

EARL HAMNER WAKES UP WITH A SOUR AND BITTER STOMACH, WINCING AND CLUTCHING HIS BELLY. HE STUMBLES OUT OF BED.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

EXT. EARL'S HOUSE, NEAR THE OUTHOUSE- CONT.

EARL LEANS AGAINST THE SIDE OF THE OUTHOUSE, CLUTCHING HIS BELLY. HE SPIES A LIGHT BY THE EDGE OF HIS YARD. HIS STOMACH GURGLES AND HE GRUMBLES AS HE GOES INSIDE.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

INT. OUTHOUSE- CONT.

EARL SITS, AND SEES THROUGH THE SLATS SEES THE LIGHT MOVING ALL OVER THE EDGE OF THE YARD.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

EXT. OUTHOUSE- CONT.

EARL EMERGES AND WALKS ROUND THE SIDE OF HIS HOUSE TO INVESTIGATE. THE LIGHT IS BACK AT HIS RATTY MAIN GATE SET INTO THE PICKET FENCE. HE SQUINTS THROUGH THE LIGHT AND MAKES OUT THE FORM OF **A SMALL BOY**, NO OLDER THAN 10 OR 11. A LANTERN DANGLES FROM HIS HAND AND IS DRESSED IN SOOTY OVERALLS AND A CAP. HIS FACE IS SMUDGED WITH COAL DUST AND GRIME.

EARL

(growling in his boss's voice)
Who's 'at? Boy, what are you doin'
with that light away from the job?
You gonna set the whole weeds on
fire sneakin around here with that
- where's your momma at? Who let
you out?

THE BOY STARES MUTELY AT HIM, HIS FACE EMPTY... HIS EYES NOT.

EARL

Boy. What are you doing out at
this hour?

BOY

(A deep man's voice) Been lookin'
for you, Mister Earl.

EARL

What you lookin' for me for-

BOY

Been lookin' for you for a long
time now...

EARL

Boy, you better make yourself
plain before I-

THE BOY COCKS HIS HEAD TO THE SIDE.

BOY

They called you Bobby in Avalon.
You done changed your name. Maybe
that helped you hide.

EARL, WHOSE REAL NAME IS IN FACT ROBERT, FREEZES AND PALES AT
THE SOUND OF HIS NAME AND AVALON.

BOY

You been back to Avalon lately,
Bobby? Place is hainted, they say.
Since the fire everybody there is
a sleepwalker. Walkin' around like
every day's a dream - but it ain't
a dream is it, Bobby? Cat got your
tongue? Oh, you think you're
dreaming now, Bobby?

THE BOY LIFTS HIS LANTERN.

SUDDENLY THE STREETS OF BARLO COME INTO SHARP RELIEF AND EARL CAN SEE THE ROWS ON ROWS ON ROWS OF BOYS. SOME ARE GHOSTLY PALE, SOME MUTILATED WITH BURNS AND MISSHAPEN SKULLS. OTHERS ARE MISSING HANDS OR LEGS.

EARL'S MIND REELS AND DETACHES. THE PRESENT HORROR FADES TO DARKNESS.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

INT. MINESHAFT, AVALON- FLASHBACK

THE LIGHT RETURNS, AND **EARL** IS NOW STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF A MINE SHAFT IN AVALON.

SOMETHING IS BURNING AND SMOKE IS FILLING THE SHAFT. HE HOLDS A PITCHFORK, OF ALL THE RIDICULOUS THINGS TO BE HOLDING UNDERGROUND. HE TURNS TO RUN, AND HE FINDS A LITTLE BOY NAMED **JACOB ERSKIN** LYING NEXT TO A MULE, BOTH SUFFOCATED AND DEAD.

EARL

J-Jacob? Jake Erskin?

EARL'S CHEST TIGHTENS AND HE THROWS DOWN HIS FORK FULL OF HAY. HE BEGINS TO RUN, MAKING TO SOUND THE ALARM.

OUT OF THE CORNER OF HIS EYE HE SEES LITTLE **JACOB** STIR. HE STOPS AND TURNS BACK AS IF TO GO TO THE BOY. A WAVE OF HEAT AND FIRE ERUPTS FROM DEEPER DOWN THE MINE, NEARLY KNOCKING EARL OVER.

EARL

Oh, God!

HE RUNS. SOMEHOW HE OUTFRONS THE FLAMES AND MANAGES TO MAKE IT OUT OF THE MINE JUST IN TIME, BLOOD-SPATTERED AND SMOKE STAINED, BUT ALIVE.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

EXT. EARL'S HOUSE, NEAR THE outhouse- PREDAWN

EARL EXITS THE MINE AND HE IS BACK IN HIS OWN YARD IN BARLO. BUT JUST BEYOND HIS PROPERTY LINE, BEHIND A LEGION OF DEAD BOYS, HE SEES THE EDGE OF AVALON BURNING

THE BOYS BEGIN TO SLOWLY TRUDGE TOWARD HIM. **EARL'S** HEART HAMMERS THE INSIDE OF HIS RIBCAGE AND A SLOW SCREAM BEGINS TO BUILD IN HIS THROAT AS THE LIGHT BLINKS OUT.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

INT. EARL HAMNER'S BEDROOM- DAWN

THE FIRST LIGHT OF DAWN STREAMS THROUGH THE WINDOW.

EARL SCREAMS AND SITS BOLT UPRIGHT IN BED. HE THROWS THE SHEETS BACK TO REVEAL THEM SOAKED THROUGH WITH PISS. IT HAD BEEN A DREAM.

EARL CROSSES THE ROOM AND LOOKS OUT HIS WINDOW TO THE STREET AND SEES THE DAY BEGINNING. CARTS BRING IN MEN FROM THE HOLLERS AND TOWN MEN START OUT ON THE WALK TO WORK.

BOY (O.S.)

*Place is hainted they say. Since
the fire everybody there is a
sleepwalker. Walkin' around like
every day's a dream. But it ain't
a dream, is it Bobby?*

EARL SHAKES HIMSELF AND GETS UP TO GET READY FOR THE DAY.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

EXT. OLD NUMBER SEVEN MINING CAMP- MORNING

EARL ARRIVES ON THE JOBSITE WHERE HE IS GREETED BY **UNION MINERS** ON STRIKE. HE PULLS HIS HAT DOWN OVER HIS EYES AND MANAGES TO MAKE HIS WAY THROUGH THE GATE AND INTO THE SITE PROPER. HE IGNORES THE YELLS AND JEERS THE MEN SHOUT AT HIM. A FEW BLACK MEN IN TATTERED B&L STANDARD ISSUE COVERALLS DISAPPEAR INTO THE MINE ENTRANCE.

A FIRE BELL SOUNDS. MEN SHOUT AND CALL IN THE DISTANCE. **EARL** BARELY HEARS THEM AND HE PISSES HIS PANTS- AGAIN. OLD #7 IS ON FIRE.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

INT. OLD NUMBER SEVEN, LEVEL THREE- AN HOUR LATER

EARL AND A SMALL CREW OF VOLUNTEERS STAND AROUND THE REMNANTS OF A SMALL STRUCTURAL FIRE. THEY ARE ALL PANTING AND COUGHING BUT BREATHING SIGHS OF RELIEF.

EARL

(loudly) Alright, all clear! Back to work!

A FEW BLACK MEN ARE SEEN MOVING PAST, GOING BACK DOWN DEEPER INTO THE MINE.

EARL LOOKS AT WHO HE IS DOWN HERE WITH: **ED** AND **PINKY AVERY**, **WAYNE CONNERS**, **NOAH GARVIN** AND **DAVID ELKINS**.

EARL

Well? You boys gonna finally give up your picket and get back down here for good, or just stand here with your thumbs up your asses?

WAYNE

You gonna start payin' us right?

EARL ROLLS HIS EYES.

ED AVERY

Someone oughta go check the
auxiliary tunnels. May be
stragglers up in them, may be
taken down by the smoke.

PINKY TRIES TO SAY SOMETHING IN AGREEMENT, BUT HIS STUTTER
PREVENTS HIM AND HE SIMPLY NODS.

EARL IS CAUGHT UP IN HIS OWN HEAD, THINKING ABOUT HIS DREAM. IT
TAKES HIM A MOMENT TO REGISTER THAT THE MEN ARE STILL LOOKING AT
HIM.

EARL

Do whatever y'all want. Go check
the damn tunnels. I'll go... secure
the entrance.

A COUPLE OF THE MEN SNIGGER. **ED** SHAKES HIS HEAD.

ED

Come on boys.

THE MEN FOLLOW **ED** FURTHER DOWN AND **EARL** MAKES HIS WAY BACK UP.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

INT. MINE, LEVEL ONE- CONT.

EARL IS SWEATING AND STILL PANTING. HE PASSES A NEAR-BLACK ALCOVE. A SHIVER RUNS THROUGH HIM- HIS BOSS'S INSTINCT STARTING TO TINGLE. SOMETHING IS OFF.

HE ROUNDS THE NEXT CORNER. IMMEDIATELY HE SEES TORN VENTILATION PARTITIONS, TANGLED UP, KNOCKED DOWN, LOOPED BACK IN. ONE WHOLE SIDE WAS JUST LYING FLAT ON THE GROUND.

HE SEES **TWO MEN** PASS BY, FOLLOWED BY **A LITTLE BOY** STRUGGLING TO LIGHT A LANTERN WITH A FLINT AS HE WALKED, TRYING TO KEEP UP WITH HIS DADDY.

EARL

HEYYYY!

EARL LEAPS TOWARD TOWARD THE BOY. HE JUMPS BACK, NEARLY DROPPING THE LANTERN.

EARL LANDS ON HIS STOMACH AT THE BOY'S FEET, KNOCKING THE WIND OUT OF HIS BODY. THE OLDER MEN CAN BE HEARD SNICKERING. HE SHAKES WITH RAGE AND FEAR AND READIES HIS HATEFUL-EST BOSS VOICE. HE STRUGGLES TO HIS FEET AND LOOKS UP AT THE BOY - AND STUMBLES BACK DOWN TO HIS KNEES.

THE LITTLE BOY IS NOW **THE BOY** WITH COAL DUST EYES. **THE BOY**
STARES BACK DOWN AT EARL WITH A COLD SMIRK.

THE WORLD FADES - THE SOUNDS OF WORK AND RECOVERY SEEM TO COME
FROM MILES AWAY. EARL'S BREATH STOPS AS HE LOOKS UP AND AROUND
FOR HELP. HE IS SURROUNDED BY BOYS - NO MEN, NO MULES, NO
SUNLIGHT - JUST BLANK FACED, DEAD EYED BOYS, ALL AGES, 5 TO 16.

BOY

Still feel like a dream, Bobby?

THE BOYS ALL AROUND START TO MURMUR THE NAMES OF TOWNS -ALL
PLACES THAT HAD LISTED ROBERT EARL HAMNER AS A BOSS OF SOME SORT
AT SOME POINT IN TIME, ONLY TO SEE HIM SHUFFLED ON TO A NEW
TOWN, SOMETIMES WITH A NEW NAME.

DEAD BOY 1

Bradshaw

DEAD BOY 2

Eli

DEAD BOY 3

Morganton

DEAD BOY 4

Cottonflower

DEAD BOY 5

Sampson Patch

JACOB ERSKIN

Avalon

BOY

You managed to do six before we found you - but we think seven is enough. Seven is always enough.

DEAD BOY 1

Bradshaw

DEAD BOY 2

Eli

DEAD BOY 3

Morganton

DEAD BOY 4

Cottonflower

DEAD BOY 5

Sampson Patch

JACOB ERSKIN

Avalon

THE SWISH OF A FLINT, A SPARK.

BOY

Barlo

BLINDING LIGHT FLASHES, FILLING THE SCREEN WITH WHITE LIGHT.

END