

Old Gods of Appalachia  
Season 1: Barlo

Episode 4  
The Covenant

FADE IN:

**INT. GARVIN HOME, CLETUS' OFFICE- DAY**

CLETUS GARVIN'S OFFICE IS A MODEST SPACE WITH A DESK, CHAIR, AND A FEW BOOKSHELVES. THERE'S A RUG ON THE FLOOR. THE DESK SITS AGAINST A LARGE WINDOW WITH GAUZY CURTAINS SUFFUSING THE MORNING LIGHT. PASTOR GARVIN IS AT HIS DESK, WRITING A NEW SERMON. THE SMALL RADIO NEXT TO HIM CRACKLES AND HUMS.

BARELY HEARD WHISPERS MAKE HIM TWITCH AND MUTTER TO HIMSELF.

### **RADIO**

The Earth, she feeds us.  
Generations of fire damp  
bituminous and volatile, black  
breath burning or burial we belong  
to her all the same. Respirator  
and headlamp, overalls and steel  
toes, dress rehearsal for a last  
Sunday shift. We do not speak ill  
of her that sustains and consumes  
us, wrap ourselves in her womb,  
smothered in promised security. We  
all know that the only light in  
the deep dark is a paycheck. So  
hush. Count your blessings, boy.  
Roof over your head, food on the  
table, diesel and grease, work  
boots on the porch, crippled back,  
crumbling joints, and silence.  
Company and even union, tuck you  
in, shut you up, and leave you to  
rot. And God damn it, you'd better  
be grateful.

THE BOOM OF THE OLD NUMBER SEVEN EXPLOSION IS MUFFLED, BUT STILL RATTLES THE ROOM.

**RUBY (OS)**

Cletus!! Oh God, I think that was  
the mine!

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

**EXT. TABERNACLE OF THE ELDER COVENANT- AFTERNOON**

**RUBY GARVIN** (LATE 30'S, A LOYAL HOUSEWIFE WITH A PENCHANT FOR HEALING AND A COMMANDING VOICE WHENEVER SHE NEEDS TO USE IT) DIRECTS SOOT-STAINED MINERS AS THEY CARRY THE SCREAMING AND THE DEAD BACK TO TOWN ON MAKESHIFT STRETCHERS HASTILY IMPROVISED FROM LARGER SIGN BOARDS AND THE SHIRTS FROM THEIR OWN BACKS.

THE REST OF THE TOWN CONGREGATES NEARBY- FAMILY MEMBERS SEARCHING FOR THEIR MEN. SEVERAL OF THE WOMEN GATHER NEAR MRS. RUBY.

**RUBY**

Take the wounded inside! And lay  
the dead over yonder, 'round the  
side there. (*turning to the women  
nearby*) I need all you ladies to  
run home and gather whatever spare  
linens y'all can find.

THE WOMEN NOD THEIR ASSENT AND ACT IMMEDIATELY. A LITTLE GIRL WALKS UP. **VIRGINIA GARVIN** (10, FIFTH-BORN CHILD, LOVELY AND OBEDIENT. LOVES TO PRETEND THAT SHE'S HER MOMMA)

**VIRGINIA**

Momma?

**RUBY**

Oh Virginia, there you are! I need someone to run home and fetch all the candles and my herb box from the kitchen cupboard. You know the one, don't you baby?

**VIRGINIA**

(nodding) Yes, momma. I'll be right back!

**VIRGINIA** TURNS AND SPRINTS IN THE DIRECTION OF HOME, WHICH IS BACK BEHIND THE CHURCH.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

**INT. TABERNACLE- CONT.**

PEWS ARE BEING STACKED AGAINST WALLS AS MEN LAY DOWN THE WOUNDED. SEVERAL MEN GATHER NEAR THE PULPIT, WHERE **CLETUS** IS STANDING, BARKING ORDERS.

**CLETUS**

...The Good Lord asks much of us,  
but we all know how well He  
rewards our service and sacrifice,  
don't we, my brothers?

(cont'd)

And such a tragedy requires much sacrifice to mitigate. Brother Andrew, go home and fetch one of your best sows. Brother Henry, we'll need two of your chickens. Brother Marcus, bring me the black goat that's been tearing up your barn.

**MARCUS**

Ain't gotta ask me twice!

**MARCUS** GRINS AS HE LEAVES. SEVERAL OTHER MEN CHUCKLE.

**CLETUS**

Brother Gaye, I'm afraid we'll need that trusty hound of yours as well.

**BROTHER GAYE**

*(Hesitates, but nods grimly)* Yes, Pastor Garvin.

THE REMAINING FEW LOOK TO CLETUS, WAITING FOR THEIR OWN ORDERS, GRIM AND EXPECTANT.

**CLETUS**

I think that'll be all for now, family. The rest of y'all, make yourselves useful. My wife is outside somewhere giving more orders- see if she needs any hands.

THE REST OF THE MEN SCATTER TO MAKE THEMSELVES USEFUL. **CLETUS**  
LEAVES THE PULPIT AS WELL.

**RUBY** ENTERS THE CHURCH, **VIRGINIA** AND **SEVERAL LADIES** IN TOW.

**RUBY**

Where's those men going, Cletus?  
I'm gonna need every able body if  
we wanna save—

**CLETUS**

They've gone to collect the  
sacrifices, baby. We're gonna need  
all the help we can get if we want  
to save all these poor souls.

**RUBY**

That's all well and good, but I'm  
a bit more concerned about these  
men's bodies rather than their so—

**CLETUS**

*(Raising a hand.)* You have plenty  
of hands to go around already. I  
need these men. *(places his hands  
on his wife's overflowing ones,  
and kisses her cheek.)* All your  
hard work will be for nothin' if  
we don't have the blessings of the  
Almighty this day. And such  
blessings require a hefty toll.

(cont'd)

Now, I need to go into the back office to pray. See that I'm not disturbed, will you, baby?

**RUBY**

(sighs, resigned) Of course. Go on. Come on, Ginny. Let's get these herbs to grindin'.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

**INT. TABERNACLE, PASTOR'S OFFICE- CONT.**

**CLETUS** CLOSES THE DOOR TO THE TINY PASTOR'S OFFICE, SITUATED AT THE BACK OF THE CHURCH. HE LOCKS THE DOOR.

**CLETUS** BEGINS TO COUGH, WHICH GETS STEADILY WORSE UNTIL HE IS ON HIS KNEES, HACKING UP GREAT GOBS OF BLACK PHLEGM OVER THE WOOD FLOOR.

**CLETUS**

Damn black lung... Thought They'd fixed that up for me...

SOFT, INCOHERENT WHISPERS FLOAT THROUGH THE ROOM, MAKING CLETUS LOOK UP. THE SUNLIGHT FROM THE WINDOW DIMS CONSIDERABLY, THEN ALL AT ONCE BLINKS OUT.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

INT. OLD NUMBER SEVEN MINESHAFT- FLASHBACK, TEN YEARS AGO

**VOICES**

...Cletussssss...

SUDDENLY, **CLETUS** IS HOLDING A COAL-STAINED METAL LAMP AND DRESSED IN MINER'S OVERALLS. A HARDHAT WITH A DYING HEADLAMP IS CROOKED ON HIS HEAD. AND HE'S STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF A DARK MINING SHAFT. HE'S HAVING A VISION OF TEN YEARS AGO, WHEN HE HAD JUST BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH THE BLACK LUNG.

**CLETUS**

The hell...

**VOICES**

...Cletussssss...

**CLETUS**

I'm here! That you, Eddie?

**VOICES**

...Cletussssss...

**CLETUS** SWINGS AROUND AND SHINED HIS LIGHT BEHIND HIM, BUT THERE'S NOTHING THERE. HE REALIZES THAT IT'S COMING FROM FURTHER DOWN THE MINE, NOT BEHIND HIM. HE SHINES HIS LIGHT DOWN



INTO THE DARKNESS, FOLLOWING THE WHISPERS, WANDERING FURTHER  
DOWN AND AROUND A BEND.

**CLETUS**

Who's down there? somebody need  
help?

AT FIRST, THERE'S NOTHING MORE. HE STARTS TO TURN BACK, BUT THE  
VOICES - FOR THEY WERE MANY, AS IT TURNED OUT, NOT JUST THE ONE  
- BEGIN TO SPEAK TO HIM. THE VOICES COME FROM ALL AROUND HIM AS  
TENDRILS OF DENSE COAL SMOKE SEEP FROM THE WALLS, THE CEILING,  
AND THE FLOOR. THEY CURL AROUND HIM, DIMMING HIS LIGHTS.

**VOICES**

*We come not for your aid, Cletus  
Garvin, but to grant you ours. All  
that pain. So much sickness and  
rot inside you. We can feel the  
tar which floods your body and  
turns it against you. We know your  
suffering, And we can take it all  
back. Make you strong and whole  
again.*

**CLETUS**

(chuckles uneasily) Am I gonna  
have to visit that Yank doc again  
for my mind, too? damn, I gotta  
get outta here...

**CLETUS** TRIES TO TURN TO BEGIN HIS HIKE OUT OF THE MINE, BUT THE SWIRLING TENDRILS SNAG AN ANKLE, THEN HIS RIGHT WRIST, TURNING IT UPWARD AND FORCING HIS PALM OPEN. THE TIP OF ONE TRANSLUCENT TENDRIL TRACES THE SCAR THAT TWISTS AROUND HIS RIGHT THUMB AND INTO THE MEAT OF HIS PALM.

### **VOICES**

*Such a pretty thing, that straight razor your daddy had, wasn't it? He carved that handle from a boar tusk himself, did he not? And so sharp. And the blade so shiny. You couldn't help but sneak it out to play with it, could you, Cletus? And when you tried to spin it the way you'd seen your daddy do it... so much blood from such a small hand...*

BLOOD BEGINS TO WELL ALONG THE OLD SILVERED SCAR. **CLETUS** SHRIEKS IN HORROR AND DROPS HIS LANTERN. HE PICKS IT BACK UP TO EXAMINE THE WOUND, BUT IT'S NO LONGER BLEEDING.

### **CLETUS**

What the hell... What kind of—

### **VOICES**

*Such a mean man, your daddy. Remember what would happen when he would return to your home back in West Virginia? Do you remember the smell of that rye whisky as he passed your bedroom and into sweet little Ruth's?*

CLETUS'S EYES FILL WITH TEARS AT THE HORROR AND ANGUISH OF THE MEMORY.

**CLETUS**

No, please—

**VOICES**

*Do you remember how she sounded as your daddy did all those horrible things to her? And her screams that final night...*

**CLETUS**

(sobbing) STOP! Please stop!  
You're real! You're real... just stop... I don't...

**VOICES**

*We are offering you much, Cletus Garvin. You can have your health back, make you feel ten years younger. And we can give you so much more. Strength. Power.*

**CLETUS**

What do you want from me?

**VOICES**

*All we ask from you is service. Service outside of these blackened tunnels. You are a church-going man, are you not? Be our voice to the lost sheep of Barlo. Become our shepherd, and we will lift you above all the rest...*

BOTH HIS HEADLAMP AND THE LANTERN DIE AT ONCE.

CUT TO:

FADE IN:

**INT. TABERNACLE, PASTOR'S OFFICE- CONT.**

**CLETUS** IS BACK ON THE FLOOR OF HIS CHURCH OFFICE, THOUGH THE BLACK SLIME HE HAD PUKED UP HAS DISAPPEARED. TENDRILS OF BLACK DUST GATHER IN THE CORNERS OF THE ROOM—THE DARK PLACES WHERE THE SUNLIGHT DOES NOT REACH.

**VOICES**

*Remember our covenant, Cletus  
Garvin...*

**CLETUS** WALKS TO THE BOOK SHELF AND PULLS DOWN HIS OLD, BATTERED BIBLE, AND GOES TO THE TINY DESK TO READ. HE PLACES THE BOOK ON THE DESK AND IT FLIPS OPEN ON ITS OWN. MANY OF THE WORDS AND EVEN ENTIRE PASSAGES HAVE BEEN BLACKED OR SCRIBBLED OUT. TINY SCRIPT FLOODS EACH MARGIN, SOMETIMES DIRECTLY OVER THE PRINT. THERE ARE OCCASIONAL STRANGE SYMBOLS SCRAWLED ACROSS PAGES AS WELL.

**CLETUS** SIGHS, DEFEATED, AND BEGINS TO READ.

END