

# Malevolent Maine

## Season 2 Episode 3: The Graveyard Man

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Malevolent Maine is a horror podcast, and may contain material not suitable for all audiences. Listener discretion is advised.

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### **INTRO:**

**LUCAS:** A librarian who seems to offer dark, occult power from a forgotten collection at the back of the library. An alien encounter that seems to defy explanation. And a farmer who specializes in decidedly dangerous crops. These are just a taste of the stories we'll be bringing you in the coming weeks.

Hello there, this is Lucas. We love telling stories of the weird and unexplained here at Malevolent Maine. But we can't do it without your help. Keep sending us your stories so we can investigate them. Keep liking us on social media, and keep telling your friends about us. Please leave a review of our show wherever you listen. Not only does it help us stay in the cycle for new listens, but we get a little kick out of seeing your supportive messages. We love interacting with our fans and there's no better place to do it than on patreon. By joining our Malevolent Mob for just a small monthly fee, you'll have access to cool behind the scenes stuff like pictures of the artifacts we recover during our investigations, outtakes and audio extras from the podcast, and even access to side stories like *The Black Tarot*. If you feel like joining, head over to [www.patreon.com/malevolentmaine](http://www.patreon.com/malevolentmaine) .

We appreciate all you do for us and we promise to keep bringing you more and more stories of the odd and the strange.

The gym is full of people milling about. Tables line the outer walls and everywhere you look you see people hawking their goods. One man is selling old saw blades painted with outdoor landscapes. A woman is selling what appears to be bracelets and

necklaces made from recycled plastic, and yet another is selling a series of romance novels she herself wrote. But that's not what catches your eye. Tucked in a corner you see a tall man, dressed in a shabby gray suit, standing behind a table, draped in black. Before him are jars filled with what appears to be dirt. He seems to stare at you from across the crowded gym. He never moves, never gestures to you, but your eyes trail down the sign hung across the table. In faded golden letters are the words: Grave Dirt.

This is Malevolent Maine.

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Guys, what was that?

I saw it with my own eyes

No, seriously, what was that?

It's just not scientifically possible.

I can't explain it.

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God.

This stuff is wild, man. It's real wild.

But... what was that?

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Welcome back, MMers. Today's story might leave you feeling a little dirty.

Maine has a long history of selling things. From Uncle Henry's classified ad book to Facebook Marketplace, from yard sales and flea markets to craft fairs, Mainers have a long history of selling things. And it's not just things like old books and used gym equipment. We've seen haunted dolls, magic potions, even

jewelry made from purported Bigfoot dung for sale across this great state. Mainers like to sell stuff best classified as just plain *weird*.

Longtime listener Linda from Gray sent us an email about something she said didn't sit the right way with her. I've asked Mark to read that email:

**MARK:** Dear Malevolent Maine, I regularly attend craft fairs in the southern Maine area and had an encounter I thought would be perfect for your podcast. I really enjoy listening to your show while I'm on the treadmill and knew right away I had to tell you this. I was at the craft fair at the George E. Jack School in Standish when I encountered a man selling what he said were vials of dirt taken from graves. He said these little jars had the power to bring good luck, vivid dreams, and minor curative powers. He was really weird, so I didn't buy one, but thought this might be something you'd be interested in.

Thank you for the kind words, Linda, and the tip. We contacted her and she was able to give us a better description of the man. She said he was tall and thin, with skin like leather. He wore a suit, she said either black or dark gray. She said it was shabby, as if it had been worn a lot, and he wore a matching top hat. The top hat was pretty battered, but she remembered a charm had been tied around the band. She said it was a classic toe pincher coffin with a small skull in the middle of it. She said he had a beard and long hair that hung to his shoulders in straggly clumps.

The grave dirt seller had a booth set up that was a simple table with a black cloth on it. A hand-painted banner hung across the front of the table that said "Grave Dirt" in faded golden letters. Dozens of glass jars were arranged on the tables. Each jar or vial had a handwritten label across its front. She said each one had a name, location, and a date written on them in a rigid, old-fashioned handwriting. She said he wasn't scary, necessarily, and could be charming in a spooky sort of way. She

said the man reminded her of a character from the Addams Family or a Tim Burton movie.

To be honest, while we don't find a lot of our cases at craft fairs, they do tend to be a good place for gathering information, and a strange man selling jars of grave dirt did pique our interest. So Mark and I spent a couple of weekends visiting craft fairs.

We didn't see this Grave Dirt Man at any of the craft fairs we visited in Cumberland County - the area around Standish where Linda said she saw the man. We didn't see him, but we did run into several people who had.

For those who are unfamiliar with the world of craft fairs, there are two types of vendors at these things. The first is the local crafter - the woman who knits scarves, the grandfather who builds reindeer out of birch logs. They build up their wares all year and when the craft fair in their local town comes along, they rent a table and sell their wares, hoping to offset the cost of their hobby.

The second type of vendor are the ones that travel the craft fair circuit, going from town to town peddling their wares like an old time traveling salesman. These often rely on their sales as a part of their income. They arrive with trailers full of merchandise, professionally printed banners or signs, and often have more elaborate setups.

It was to these people Mark and I were drawn to. They tend to run in the same circles and unlike the one-offs, they would most likely have seen the Grave Dirt Man at one of their stops.

We talked with a man named George Newkirk who had beautiful hand-painted birdhouses for sale. He was sixty-eight, retired, and was a regular on the craft fair circuit. He said he remembered the man. He said a few weeks prior he had been at a fair down in Alfred and had been set up two tables down from the man.

He told us the man seemed friendly enough if a little odd. He said he watched the man draw people to his booth. George said the man reminded him of an old school conman, like the kind of guy who would run a three card monte or shell game table on a boardwalk. He was nice enough, but there was something "greasy" - George's word - about the man.

George said he grew interested and during a particularly slow time, he wandered over to the Grave Dirt Man's table. There were two or three other people there and George said he stayed towards the back, but he got to hear the man's entire sales pitch.

He talked in a low growl that was both soft and somehow contained just a hint of menace or mystery. It was the kind of voice you'd use to tell a really good campfire ghost story, George told us. He told us the man explained that each vial of dirt was taken from a specific person's grave and the labels documented who the deceased had been, where they were buried, and when the sample had been collected. The Grave Dirt Man called himself Dr. Caskett - with two ts - though George said he doubted the man was an actual doctor. Dr. Caskett claimed the dirt taken from the grave of a dead person could bring good luck in life. Placed under a pillow, it offers deep, restful sleep. It could ward off evil spirits or help bring peace to a grieving friend. Plus, the doctor added with a grin, it makes a really great discussion piece.

Dr. Caskett then snatched a bottle from the table, popped the cork and poured some of the dirt into his hand. He closed his eyes and breathed deep. He held his breath for a moment, then released it with a sigh. George said he smiled wide for a moment, then poured the gravel back into its bottle.

George told us none of the people watching bought a vial of the dirt that time, but later he noticed several people walking away from the booth with the little glass jars tucked into their pockets or purses. We asked him if he knew any of the people who

bought them and he said he thought a woman had purchased one of his birdhouses. He said she paid with a check and that he could probably find out her name. A few days later he called us and left the name and phone number for a woman who lived in Harpswell who he said he was pretty sure bought one of the vials of dirt.

We reached out to the woman and she agreed to an interview but she didn't want us to use her name or her voice. She confirmed that she did purchase some grave dirt from Dr. Caskett, and what she had to say about the experience was eye-opening. Here's Mark to talk about his meeting with the woman we're going to call Sasha.

**MARK:** So, I met with Sasha told me she thought the little jars were cute. She's always been into Halloween and thought it would make a nice accent piece on her shelf. She thought Dr. Caskett had a good schtick and never once broke character, and she said that helped convince her to buy one.

She said that's when things took a surprising turn. When she asked the man how much for a vial, he said he only worked on a barter system. Her direct quote was, "I can only trade soil for soil." The deal he offered was that she could choose whichever vial she wanted as long as she agreed that he could come and take a handful of the dirt from her grave when she died. Sasha laughed a little at the idea. She thought the grave dirt man was twenty years older than she was, and probably wouldn't be around to collect on his debt, but she agreed. She said he took a little book out of an interior pocket of his suit jacket and wrote her full name down. Then he snapped it shut with a big smile and waved his hand over the table, offering her her voice of jars.

Sasha told us she looked over the vials, reading the names and locations. In the end she says, she chose one labeled Dexter Collinsworth. She said she thought the name sounded funny.

According to the jar, Collinsworth was buried in the Winchester Cemetery in Lowell, Maine. She said the dirt was taken in 1997.

Sasha said that at first she put the jar on a shelf with some other knick-knacks, hoping it would bring her some of the good luck Dr. Caskett promised it would bring. She said she had always been a good sleeper and couldn't bring herself to put the bottle under her pillow.

She said she couldn't stop thinking about the jar on her shelf. Every time she entered the room her eyes were drawn to it. She would find excuses to rearrange the jar, touching its cool surface. It became something she had to do every time she walked by it.

**MARK:** Eventually, she told me, one day she took the jar off the shelf and opened it. She poured a handful of the sand into her palm and for some inexplicable reason, she held it up to her nose and breathed deep.

What happened next, Sasha says, she can't explain. She said when she closed her eyes she felt a slight tug, as if someone had grabbed the back of her shirt and pulled it quickly. Then, she said, even though she knew her eyes were closed, she was suddenly looking out over a lake.

She said she was sitting in the front of a canoe. It was green with a wooden interior. It was gliding out into the middle of the lake. She could hear the ripples as the boat slid through the water and could feel the warm summer sun on her face. It was impossible, she knew, because she was in her house, but somehow she was sitting in a canoe on a summer day.

Her body felt different. Bigger, stronger. She looked down at her hands and they didn't look like her own. She looked all around, trying to understand what was happening, but all she could see was woods and the occasional house on the far shores of the lake.

She looked behind her and saw a man she didn't recognize. He had brown hair and a thin face. He grinned at her and said, "Isn't this great?" She said she couldn't help but nod her head.

After a few more strokes the man in the back of the canoe stopped paddling and pulled the wooden paddle up across his knees. "What a great day," he said. "Hey, what is that?" he said pointing at something just off the side of the canoe.

Sasha looked, but couldn't see anything. She told us in a lot of ways it was like she was actually there, but in others, it was like a dream. She said she felt no real control of the body she was in, more like a passenger along for the ride.

She looked over the edge of the canoe but couldn't see anything. "Right there," the man said behind her. She leaned over closer and for the first time she saw her reflection in the lake's surface. Sasha was shocked because she was... a he. She said the face that looked back at hers wasn't her own. It was a young man's face. He had dark brown hair, almost black she said. It was short but curly. He had thick eyebrows and a dark shadow of stubble on his face. Sasha said she saw the man's face turn up in surprise. "Where?" she heard him say. And more than that she felt the words come up from deep in her lungs, through her throat, and out of her mouth.

Except it wasn't her lungs, throat, or mouth. It was the man whose body she inhabited.

"It's swimming away," the man behind her said, and she looked back at him. He was pointing at something a short distance away.

Sasha said she stood up and the canoe rocked gently.

"Careful," the man behind her said.

Sasha looked out over the water, bending over at the waist and shielding her eyes with one large hand. She said that's when



something heavy hit her in the small of the back and before she could react she was falling overboard into the lake.

The water was cold despite the summer heat and the shock of it was like a smack to the face. She floundered in the water, her suddenly too big body moving awkwardly. She said she emerged from the lake, sputtering water and saw the man who had been sitting behind her standing and holding out the paddle.

"I'm sorry, Dexter," the man said and she waved her arms trying to stay afloat. "This is the way it has to be. I'm sorry."

Then he pushed at her with the paddle. She briefly went under again and realized for the first time she wasn't wearing a life jacket. She kicked, but her heavy feet and legs were already starting to lose their strength. She bobbed up to the surface again and saw the other man staring at her with that same, sad expression on his face.

"There is no other way," he said, and pushed at her again with the paddle.

She tried to grab it this time, but the man in the boat was too fast. She tried to swim towards the canoe, but every time she did, the man pushed her away with the paddle. The whole time he was watching her intently.

Her arms grew heavy and the man's clothing that was stuck to her body dragged at her. She could feel her strength failing. Now she noticed a strange smile on the other man's face. It was small, she said, just a little uptick at the corners, and a malicious gleam in his eyes.

She dipped beneath the surface again and this time some water got into her mouth. She tried to spit it out, but she started coughing. She said in that moment she understood she was going to die. She kicked fiercely and thrashed her arms, but she didn't seem to move anywhere. She tried to take a deep breath as

her head slid under water again. She could feel herself sinking and this time knew she didn't have the strength to fight it.

As she sank down the water around her grew dark. She looked up and saw the other man leaning over the side of the canoe peering down at her. She said his tongue was sticking out of one of the corners of his mouth and his eyes were wide with excitement.

Then everything faded to black. Sasha said she felt the last bit of air bubble out of her lungs and a heavy stillness surrounded her.

Then she was back in her living room, the small pile of grave dirt clutched in her hand. She said she gasped for breath, sucking in great heaves of air, but she was perfectly dry, standing firmly on solid ground, back in her own body and completely safe.

She said she dumped the dirt in her hand back into the vial, stoppered it, and put it back on her shelf. Two days later, wearing heavy gloves and using kitchen tongs to carry it, Sasha said she buried the jar in her backyard. She had never felt so relieved as when it was out of her house.

**MARK:** After Sasha's story I did a little digging. A quick online search for Dexter Collinsworth revealed a man from Old Town, Maine was found drowned in Pickerel Pond in 1989. The news reports I found online claim that his brother had reported him missing when he hadn't returned after going out on a canoe ride while the two men were staying at their family camp in Burlington. The reports said Collinsworth was found floating in the lake and his green canoe was found washed up on the far shore. It took a little work but I was able to find a picture of Dexter Collinsworth's brother, Chet. He passed away in 2016, but when I showed Sasha the picture of Chet, her reaction was visceral. "That's him," she said. "That's the man that knocked me... knocked Dexter out of the boat. That's the man that killed him."

Dirt from the grave of a dead man that causes visions of the man's death.

Is that possible? If you believe Sasha it is. It made finding this Dr. Caskett all the more important to us.

Mark and I began regularly attending craft fairs, something neither of us thought we would ever catch ourselves doing. It became a little bit of a habit for us. We would make plans on Friday before we left work, meet up Saturday morning and try to go to two or three fairs close to each other. We rarely bought anything, though once Mark did buy a necklace with a stone shaped like the moon on it that he planned to give to his sister for her next birthday.

We did talk to several other people that knew of the Grave Dirt Man, and a few that had purchased the small vials of soil. Each of them told a similar story - Dr. Caskett charged nothing for the jars except the promise to extract dirt from their own grave upon their death. Each of the three we spoke to, after some trepidation, revealed that they too had felt compelled to hold the dirt and had also experienced visions of the person on the label's death.

One young man we talked to who claimed he only came to craft fairs because his girlfriend made him, said he thought the entire experience was cool. He said he got a little rush from his dying experience - an old woman who expired by drifting off to sleep in a hospital bed surrounded by her family. The man said he didn't like to admit it, but a few days after he first experienced the woman - he said her name was Charlotte Porter - he went back and did it again. He said he watched the woman die five times over a two week period, but after that the dirt stopped working. He told us he tried a few more times, but nothing happened when he held the dirt. He said he still had the little glass jar in the back of a drawer in his nightstand and we were welcome to it if we wanted it.

It was on a Saturday in early January when Mark and I finally came face to face with the man we had been searching for. We were at a craft fair in Cumberland. We were taking a lap around the elementary school gymnasium when we saw him. His booth was just as Linda had described it in our first conversation with her. Black tablecloth, hand painted sign, and maybe twenty jars of dirt.

Dr. Caskett, the man, lived up to our expectations as well. He was wearing the same dark suit and top hat as had been described, and had the demeanor of a carnival barker inviting patrons into the freak tent. There was nothing inherently sinister about him, but an air of mystery hung about.

**MARK:** I felt he was like a scorpion or a snake, something that was just going about its business, but at any moment could strike.

We approached his table slowly. We waited until any potential customers had moved on and then we stepped up to him. Dr. Caskett declined to be interviewed for the show. In fact, he almost refused to speak to us when he heard we worked for a podcast. In the end, he relented when we told him we wanted to hear his sales pitch and maybe ask a few questions.

His accent was thicker than I had imagined, but I couldn't quite place where it was from. It was almost a Southern drawl at times, but then shifted into a thick Yankee patois. He told us of the curative and restorative powers of grave dirt. The whole time his hands moved, danced through the air above his wares. He had such long, delicate fingers for a man who dug up graves for a living.

Which raised the question of who exactly this man was. Did he dig the dirt himself or did he have someone else do it for him? Was he the owner of this business or just the salesman? He looked like the classic local grave digger, home in some quasi-medieval fantasy story or a wild west township, but he spoke like an educated man. I agreed with George Newkirk's

description of him as greasy. He reminded me of a swindler but I couldn't detect any lie or deceit in his face or his story.

We asked him where he got the dirt and he said the labels indicated from where he had procured the soil - his exact words, not mine. We asked him if this was legal and he replied that he wouldn't be here if it wasn't. He declined to reveal whether or not Dr. Caskett was his real name or if he had another occupation. He told us he was here to sell his craft just like everyone else at the fair.

In the end we brought up the visions his dirt instilled in others. He smiled revealing big teeth, slightly yellowed with age. "The Egyptian sorcerers believed in the soils' magic," he told us. "As did the pagan druids and the voodoo queens. Who am I to say if such things are real. It's you who has to believe."

He wouldn't say any more on the subject and instead offered us a look at his jars. They were glass, about the size of a bottle of cough syrup, the kind of things hippies would make sand art in or wizards would store potions. Each was stopped with a small brown cork with a parchment label indicating the deceased, their eternal resting place, and the date the soil was collected, just as we had been told.

I offered him twenty dollars for one, but the Grave Dirt Man declined. I offered him fifty, but still he said no. "I can only trade soil for soil," he said, but with his thick accent I was unsure whether he was actually saying "soil" or "soul."

Mark refused, but I found myself drawn to the little glass jars filled with different colored dirt. In the end, the allure was too great. A little bit of unneeded soil forty, fifty years from now seemed like a small price to pay for the chance to experience what Sasha and the others had gone through. I knew it might be foolish, but I couldn't pass this experience up. I agreed, and Dr. Caskett wrote my name in his little book. I looked over the jars carefully before selecting one. I chose the one with the most recent date, May, 2021. My reasoning was that,

if like Sasha, I could help solve a murder or bring peace to a grieving family, I should at least take that opportunity.

The Grave Dirt Man thanked me for my purchase, though I noticed he was careful never to touch any of the jars once he had signed my name until our transaction was complete. Then he clapped his hands and smiled that too wide smile and sent us on our way.

It was on the drive home that Mark made me question my purchase.

**MARK:** What if the whole time he was saying "soul"? What if the souls of the dead are trapped in the dirt he's taking from their graves? Maybe that's how Sasha and the others were able to experience their final moments.

I remembered what the young man with the insistent girlfriend had told us about how after the fifth time reliving the dying woman's last breath the soil had stopped working. Was her soul finally free... or was it all used up, consumed in some last exploitative final viewing?

I wondered if I had made a dangerous mistake.

In the end, I decided to put the vial I purchased, the grave soil of one Finn Curran, buried in the Maple Grove Cemetery in Randolph, Maine, on a shelf above my desk in our office. It's next to the used up vial of Charlotte Porter's grave soil we got from the craft fair guy, and the one belonging to Dexter Collinsworth that Sasha let us dig up. I haven't opened mine yet, and I've done my best to forget it's even there. Still, there are sometimes when I'm at work, researching a case or on the phone with a client, when I'll find myself staring at the small vial and wondering.

I haven't brought myself to look up Finn Curran. I think if I know anything about how he died, I'll be tempted to use the soil. If what Mark suspects is true, that may be causing the spirit of the departed to experience the trauma of their death

all over again or using up a portion of whatever energy they have remaining.

So I'm keeping them safe, resting on the shelf, where I can *just* see them if I crane my neck a certain way when I'm sitting down. Maybe if I keep them there, unopened, the souls of the dead can rest just a little longer. It's all I can hope for, and that some day, someone will have the same respect for me.

Mark and I went to several more craft fairs before finally tapering off. It had almost become a hobby for us now. We saw familiar faces, behind familiar booths, and new faces to fill the empty ones. Everyone was selling the same thing, just with a different shape, a different color, a different name. We never saw Dr. Caskett and his Grave Dirt again. If he is still selling, perhaps he's moved on to a different circuit or perhaps we just haven't run into him again. Either way, we can't stop thinking about the tall, lanky man, scooping up handfuls of dirt from the graves of the departed, pouring them into small glass vials, and trapping them there with wooden corks.

If you happen to be out at a craft fair, and come across a strange man offering to trade your name for a vial of dirt, we suggest you think twice. No one knows exactly what necromancy he's peddling, but it's a good bet to stay away from it.

Stay safe out there, Maine.

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Malevolent Maine is Lucas Knight, Tom Wilson, and myself, Chris Estes.

If you'd like to read more about our investigations check out our website at [malevolentmaine.blogspot.com/](http://malevolentmaine.blogspot.com/)

While there, don't forget to check our merch store. And, if you're so inclined, support us on Patreon at [patreon.com/malevolentmaine](http://patreon.com/malevolentmaine)

Thank you for listening to Malevolent Maine.

And as always, stay safe out there, Maine.

