

The Devil's Hide

A screenplay adapted from a Finnish Fairytale
by

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FADE IN:

EXT. - A CABIN IN THE WOODS - DAY

Through thick trees, streaks of sunshine leave a speckled pattern on the grass. The calls of birds are ever-present, accompanied by an occasional gust of wind that rustles the leaves. A pile of cut firewood is neatly stacked against a low stone wall.

The muffled voices of young men grow, distant and unintelligible at first, until...

TALON (O.S.)

Brothers, brothers, please. The time
has come.

(beat)

It's time.

ERKKI is clearly the youngest of the three brothers outside the cabin. His cheeks are pink and flush and has the smoothness of a teenager. His two older brothers, TALON and JAAKKO, stand before him.

TALON

It's time for me to go out into the
world and earn my living. You two
younger ones wait here at home till you
hear how I get on.

TALON hoists his knapsack over his shoulder, nods and heads down a path, disappearing into the woods.

EXT. - VILLAGE STREET - DAY

TALON pauses in a shopkeeper's doorway as he leaves the store, looking back into the building.

SHOPKEEPER (O.S.)

I haven't any work for you here. If you
ask me, you're wasting your time in
this town. There's no work anywhere.

TALON closes the door behind him and steps onto the street. He takes a deep breath and exhales, surveying the street. His attention is caught by THE DEVIL, a well-dressed figure wearing a cloak with a hood pulled up over his head.

THE DEVIL slides over to TALON.

THE DEVIL

Come work for me. I promise that you'll
be comfortably housed and well fed.

TALON, desperate, turns to THE DEVIL and looks around to see if anyone is watching. He looks down and sees THE DEVIL is wearing a well-worn pair of leather boots.

THE DEVIL (cont.)

We'll make this bargain... the first of
us who loses his temper will forfeit to
the other enough of his own hide to
sole a pair of boots. If I lose my
temper first, you may exact from me a
big patch of my hide. If you lose your
temper first, I'll exact the same from
you.

TALON nods and they set off together down a cobbled side street toward the edge of town.

EXT. - THE DEVIL'S HOUSE - DAY

TALON holds an axe by the handle at his side. A tangle of uncut wood sits in a pile before him.

THE DEVIL (O.S.)

(shouting from a distance)

After you've chopped all the wood, you
may come inside for supper!

TALON holds the axe in front with both hands, swings it behind him and up over his head before bringing it down with all his strength onto the largest piece of wood. The axe bounces off the wood, barely leaving a dent in the bark. He delivers another blow with the axe, again, barely leaving a mark.

TALON examines the edge of the axe blade and discovers that it is no sharper than the edge of a nickel. He looks down at the pile of wood and throws the axe to the ground.

He looks back over his shoulder toward the Devil's house.

TALON

He must think I'm a fool!

INT. - THE DEVIL'S HOUSE - DAY

THE DEVIL looks out the window, watching TALON as he starts toward the woods at the end of his property. THE DEVIL smiles and looks down at his boots.

EXT. - A WOODED PATH - DAY

TALON walks with a scowl on his face, stomping when, from nowhere, THE DEVIL appears on the path ahead of him. TALON stops, facing THE DEVIL.

THE DEVIL

Where are you going? Why are you not cutting my firewood?

TALON

I don't want to work for you!

THE DEVIL

Very well, but don't lose your temper about it.

TALON

I lose my temper as I will! What tomfoolery! Expecting me to cut wood with such an axe!

THE DEVIL

Well, since you insist on losing your temper, you'll have to forfeit me enough of your hide to sole a pair of boots. That was our bargain.

THE DEVIL pulls a long knife from his belt and holds it out for TALON to see.

EXT. - WOODS - DAY

Off-screen, TALON screams in agony in the distance.

EXT. - A CABIN IN THE WOODS - DAY

Outside their home, JAAKKO and ERKKI are home from a hunt. The two brothers are butchering an elk.

TALON emerges from the woods toward the cabin. He is covered in blood and his clothes are in tatters. He is barely able to walk, but stumbles forward. As he gets closer, JAAKKO and ERKKI see the massive wound on his back and help him to a seat on a bench.

ERKKI

What happened, brother?

TALON

I'm tired and sick and I need to stay home and rest. One of you will have to go out and find work.

JAAKKO nodded.

JAAKKO

I will go. I will go find work in the world.

JAAKKO gathered a few belongings, wrapped them in a blanket and threw it over his shoulder.

INT. - CABIN - NIGHT

In a candlelit room, TALON is awake in bed, face down. ERKKI, seated beside the bed, brings a ladle of water to TALON's lips. The linen dressing across TALON's back is soaked in reddish-brown blood.

TALON

It was the Devil, I tell you. He did
this to me.

EXT. - CABIN IN THE WOODS - DAY

ERKKI picks up fresh bones from the elk they had butchered a
couple of days earlier, tossing them one by one into a pile.

JAAKKO emerges from the woods, staggering and moaning in pain.
As he gets closer, ERKKI sees the same wound on JAAKKO that
TALON had suffered. He helps JAAKKO inside the house and onto a
bed.

INT - CABIN - DAY

ERKKI brings a ladle of water to JAAKKO and puts it to his lips.
The massive wound on his back glistens with blood.

ERKKI

Are either of you going to tell me what
happened... what ails you two?

JAAKKO

You go out into the cruel world and
hunt work and you'll find out soon
enough what ails us.

TALON

And when you find out, don't come
limping home and expect sympathy from
us, for you won't easily get it!

ERKKI stands up.

ERKKI

I will leave at sunrise to go find
work.

EXT. - CABIN IN THE WOODS - DAY

With the low sun at his back and his belongings packed and slung over his shoulder, ERKKI walks into the shadows of the forest.

EXT. - VILLAGE STREET OUTSIDE BLACKSMITH SHOP - DAY

ERKKI stands beside his knapsack, which he has set on the ground outside THE BLACKSMITH'S business. THE BLACKSMITH holds a horseshoe, glowing orange with heat, and submerges it in a wooden barrel filled with water. Steam explodes from the surface of the water.

THE BLACKSMITH

Even if you had done blacksmithing
before, even if you were the best in
the land, there's no work for you here.
I've barely enough for myself.

As ERKKI turns to leave, he sees THE DEVIL wearing the same cloak he wore earlier with the hood pulled up over his head, and a shiny new pair of leather boots

THE DEVIL slides over to ERKKI.

THE DEVIL

Come work for me. I have plenty of work
for you. And I promise that you'll be
comfortably housed and well fed.

ERKKI nods and picks up his knapsack.

THE DEVIL (cont.)

We'll make this bargain... the first of
us who loses his temper will forfeit to
the other enough of his own hide to
sole a pair of boots. If I lose my
temper first, you may exact from me a
big patch of my hide. If you lose your
temper first, I'll exact the same from
you.

Side by side, ERKKI and THE DEVIL set off down a side street toward the edge of town.

EXT. - THE DEVIL'S HOUSE - DAY

ERKKI holds the axe at his side. The same tangle of uncut wood sits in a pile before him.

THE DEVIL (O.S.)
(shouting from a distance)

After you've chopped all the wood, you
may come inside for supper!

ERKKI brings the axe down with all his might onto the largest piece of wood. The axe bounces off the wood, barely leaving a dent in the bark. He delivers another blow, again, barely leaving a mark.

ERKKI examines the dull edge of the axe blade. He presses his thumb against it then looks at his thumb. Not a scratch. The faint sound of something moving near the wood pile catches ERKKI's attention, so he starts pulling logs away, revealing a grey cat resting underneath.

ERKKI

Hm. I bet you have something to do with
this.

ERKKI raises the dull axe high and, with one blow, cuts the cat's head off. Immediately, the axe recovers its sharp edge and ERKKI begins chopping all the wood into pieces perfectly sized for the fireplace.

INT. - THE DEVIL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

ERKKI and THE DEVIL sit at a table with bowls of food set out. A fire burns in the fireplace. THE DEVIL'S WIFE goes back and forth from the kitchen, putting food on the table. ERKKI and THE DEVIL begin to eat.

THE DEVIL

Well, Erkki, did you finish the work I
gave you?

ERKKI

Yes, master. I've chopped all the wood.

THE DEVIL
(surprised)

Really? Then... you found something
inside the woodpile, did you?

THE DEVIL'S WIFE sits down at the table and puts food on her
plate, then starts eating.

ERKKI

No, nothing but an old grey cat.

(beat)

I chopped its head off and threw it
away.

ERKKI continued eating, but THE DEVIL stops and sets his spoon
on the table. He and his WIFE exchange a glance.

THE DEVIL

You killed my cat? Did you not know
that was my cat?

ERKKI

There now, master, you're not going to
lose your temper over a dead cat, are
you? Don't forget our bargain.

THE DEVIL

No, but that was no way to treat my
cat.

THE DEVIL picks up his spoon and starts eating again. He, ERKKI
and his WIFE continue eating supper in silence.

EXT. - THE DEVIL'S HOUSE - DAY

THE DEVIL and ERKKI are outside the house, standing next to an
ox tied to an empty ox cart. A black dog sniffs and scratches at
the ground.

THE DEVIL

Head out into the forest, load as much
wood as you can on the cart and bring
it back here.

ERKKI

Yes, master.

THE DEVIL

This is my dog and he will go with you.
As you come home, you are to take the
same course the dog takes. Do you
understand?

ERKKI

Yes, master.

ERKKI slaps the ox on its hindquarters and heads toward the woods, the ox and the dog walking beside him.

EXT. - WOODS - DAY

ERKKI throws a log onto the top of a wood pile in the ox cart. He ties the pile down with rope, then clicks his tongue and swats the ox on the hindquarters. Again, ERKKI, the ox and the dog start walking.

EXT. - GATE LEADING TO THE DEVIL'S HOUSE - DAY

As they approach the gate, THE DEVIL's dog jumps through a small hole in the fence and runs off to the house. ERKKI shrugs his shoulders, then looks sympathetically at the ox.

ERKKI

(to himself)

I must follow the master's orders.

ERKKI grabs the ax and cuts the ox into small pieces, tossing each one through the hole that the dog had gone through. He then throws the logs through the hole, one by one, before chopping the ox cart into small pieces and putting them through the hole. ERKKI then climbs through the hole.

INT. - THE DEVIL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

ERKKI, THE DEVIL and THE DEVIL'S WIFE are eating supper. A fire blazes in the fireplace. ERKKI is shoveling huge piles of food into his mouth, savoring each one.

THE DEVIL

So, Erkki, did you come home from the forest the way I told you?

ERKKI

Yes, master. I followed the black dog.

THE DEVIL and his WIFE glance at each other, each with a confused expression.

THE DEVIL

You brought the ox, the cart and all the wood through the hole in the fence? How is that possible?

ERKKI

Yes, master. Go outside and see for yourself.

ERKKI and THE DEVIL rise from their chairs and start toward the door.

EXT. - GATE LEADING TO THE DEVIL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Carrying torches to light the way, ERKKI and THE DEVIL walk to the gate. They arrive and THE DEVIL sees a gory mess of ox body parts, logs and chopped up pieces of the ox cart piled just inside the hole in the fence.

THE DEVIL turns to face ERKKI. His eyes are wide and his nostrils flare with anger. He takes a step toward ERKKI.

ERKKI

There now, master, surely you're not going to lose your temper over a trifling matter like this, are you? Remember our bargain...

THE DEVIL
(seething)

I am not going to lose my temper,
Erkki. But I want you to know that I
think you've acted horribly and cruelly
today.

THE DEVIL starts to walk back toward the house, leaving ERKKI
near the gate.

THE DEVIL
(walking away)

But I am NOT going to lose my temper!