

THE DEVIL

Written by  
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EXT. TEXAS COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The long, flat sweep of a Texas cow pasture. Knee high golden grass bakes in the harsh morning light.

The bent figure of an OLD FARMER makes his way across the field toward a single, gnarled tree.

He stops at a mound in the dirt.

It's a dead cow, slumped on its side. Three parallel wounds puncture its chest. Somewhere between claw marks and bites.

They're clean, bloodless.

Kneeling, the farmer drags his hand through the dirt. It's dry.

INT. WHITE CLAPBOARD CHURCH - DAY

ERICKA, 11, wild curls and curious eyes, peers down at her hymnal, reciting with the rest of the congregation.

ERICKA (& CONGREGATION)  
Yea, though I walk through the valley  
of the shadow of death, I will fear no  
evil ...

Surreptitiously, she glances up at her father, THE SHERIFF, 41, tall and wiry with graying hair, who stands next to her.

He stares straight ahead, reciting dutifully.

PRE-LAP:

EXT. TEXAS RANCH HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

The BUZZ of a potluck dinner drifts across a sprawling back porch tacked onto the rear of the limestone ranch house.

Girls GIGGLE in Sunday dresses. Boys poke at the dirt. Old men with handlebar mustaches soak in the smoke from the grill.

Hand over hand, Ericka pulls herself quickly up an old oak tree, springing from branch to branch. Her curls float against the blue sky.

THE SHERIFF (O.S.)  
Ericka!

She glances over her shoulder at the sound.

Her father stands on the porch, gunless but in uniform. He shakes his head at her.

Frowning, she glances up at a bird wheeling high above her. A buzzard.

Then she drops nimbly back to the ground.

PORCH

As Ericka's feet hit earth, the Sheriff turns back toward the potluck where MARTHA, 30s, Mary Kay make up and baby bump, hands him a plate.

SHERIFF

Thanks, Martha. The potluck is lovely.

BACKYARD

Ericka squeezes into a huddle of a dozen CHILDREN and stands next to JAMES, 9, dark eyes and thick eyelashes.

He clings to the collar of SCOUT, a large Weimaraner.

JAMES

(to Ericka)

It's ghost in the garden. And you came last, so you're it!

ERICKA

Am not!

JAMES

Scaredy cat!

Ericka glares at him. The dog BARKS. The other kids watch them expectantly.

JAMES (cont'd)

You're scared to hide alone!

ERICKA

That's a lie, James Taylor, and you know it.

But all the kids continue to stare at her, waiting.

She stares back. Finally--

ERICKA(cont'd)

Fine. No peeking!

She ducks out of the circle. Scout shoots out after her and then darts away into a field of tall grass behind the yard.

The other children cover their eyes and begin chanting.

CHILDREN

One o'clock ... two o'clock ...

Ericka turns and scampers away toward the porch.

FIELD

CHILDREN (O.S.) (cont'd)

Three o'clock ... four o'clock ...

Scout wanders through the dry, knee-high grass as the children continue COUNTING in the distance.

Suddenly, the dog stops.

He's standing at the edge of a round patch of bare earth. A fear-filled, rumbling GROWL escapes him.

BENEATH THE PORCH

Ericka ducks under the deck and hides in the dark behind a pile of firewood. She pulls her knees up to her chin, waiting.

CHILDREN (O.S.) (cont'd)

... Midnight, I hope I don't see no ghost tonight!

Above her, adult footsteps WANDER across the porch boards.

She looks up, listening, as light filters through the cracks.

MARTHA (O.S.)

It's getting so I don't feel safe letting the kids out at night.

JACK (O.S.)

I heard old Buescher found another dead cow this morning. Not a drop of blood in sight. Thing had been drained dry.

MARTHA (O.S.)

I just don't understand what kind of animal would do that to a cow.

OLD GUS (O.S.)

It ain't an animal. It's chupacabra, sure as I'm breathing ...

A couple kids RUN past the porch. Startled, Ericka turns to watch their feet pass her by. She smiles to herself.

THE SHERIFF (O.S.)

Come on, Gus. Some coyote's got bit,  
that's all. Just make sure the kid's  
get their rabies shots. We'll bring it  
down soon enough--

Suddenly, there's a high-pitched SCREAM from across the yard.

Ericka shoots out of her hiding place.

BACKYARD

Ericka sprints toward a screaming James, who stands near the  
field, pointing in horror at something.

Behind Ericka, feet POUND. The Sheriff rushes past.

He reaches James and glances at a mass on the ground. Gently,  
he turns the boy away from it.

As a small crowd gathers, Ericka reaches her father's side.

Scout lies mangled at her feet. Three deep gouges cut across  
his throat. There's a noticeable lack of blood.

A GASP as Martha pushes through the group. She pulls James  
quickly to herself, her face contorting with fear.

MARTHA

Shh, baby, shh.

OLD GUS

Damn chupacabra.

The Sheriff reaches down and unconsciously takes Ericka's hand.  
She looks up at him, troubled but trusting.

EXT. TEXAS RANCH HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Crickets HUM and the sun hangs low in the sky as the Sheriff's  
pick up truck heads down the driveway.

Ericka leans out the window and waves goodbye to James, his  
eyes still tear-stained and swollen.

INT. PICK UP/EXT. TEXAS COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Ericka rides with her head out the window as the sun sets. The  
wind WHIPS by, muffling the country music PLAYING on the radio.

After a moment, Ericka turns back inside.

ERICKA

What's a chupacabra?

THE SHERIFF

You heard old Gus talking, didn't you?

ERICKA

Only a little.

THE SHERIFF

It's just an old story. It's not real.

ERICKA

But how can you know that for sure?

THE SHERIFF

Ericka, I shoot straight with you, don't I? I don't lie. I don't tell you things I'm not certain of. Right?

Ericka nods, reluctantly, unconvinced.

THE SHERIFF (cont'd)

You're old enough to tell what's real and fake, right? The chupacabra is supposed to be an alien that drinks an animal's blood like a vampire and then melts into the earth at will. Does that sound real to you?

ERICKA

I guess not.

A HORSE bolts across the road. Eyes wild, SCREECHING in terror.

The Sheriff slams on the breaks, swerving to avoid it.

CRASH!

For a moment, all Ericka sees is the white cloud of an air bag. There's a sickening CRUNCH of sheered metal.

Then Ericka opens her eyes, blinking. The dying light is all too bright. The noises too distant.

The pick up is in a ditch.

Through the window, Ericka watches as a long shadow, not quite human or animal, shrinks into nothing. She blinks.

The passenger door is yanked open, and the Sheriff rips away the air bag.

THE SHERIFF

Ericka?! Are you okay?

ERICKA

Daddy!

EXT. TRUCK, PASSENGER SIDE - CONTINUOUS

Carefully, the Sheriff lifts her to the ground.

THE SHERIFF

Are you okay? Does anything hurt?

Ericka shakes her head.

THE SHERIFF (cont'd)

Are you sure?

Distracted, Ericka glances at the wrecked the truck.

THE SHERIFF (cont'd)

(snapping his fingers)

Hey! Ericka. Honey, follow my finger.

He holds up a single finger and slowly moves it back and forth. Ericka's eyes track it's movement.

ERICKA

What happened to the horse?

The Sheriff almost laughs at this. Relieved, he straightens up and looks across the truck bed to the other side of the road.

There's a swath of broken grass marking the horse's escape.

Turning, he examines the truck. The front passenger's side is crumpled, useless. Oil drips from beneath the car.

There's a long streak of blood across the headlight.

THE SHERIFF

That damn coyote.

Frustrated, the Sheriff makes his way around to the other side of the pick up. Ericka tags along behind him.

TRUCK, DRIVER'S SIDE

Unlocking the truck box, the Sheriff pulls out a hunting rifle and a small satchel. He begins loading the rifle.

THE SHERIFF (cont'd)

I'm going to call Martha and get you a ride out of here. You can spend the night with James.

ERICKA

Where are you going?

THE SHERIFF

(grimly)  
Hunting.

ERICKA

Why can't I come? I'll be quiet, I  
promise. Not like last time.

THE SHERIFF

Ericka, a night hunt is no place for a  
kid.

ERICKA

I'm old enough. Please, I want to see  
the ch ... coyote.

The Sheriff pauses, troubled. He looks her dead in the eyes.  
She doesn't blink.

THE SHERIFF

... You do exactly as I say, *when* I  
say.

ERICKA

Uh huh. Do I get a gun?

THE SHERIFF

No. You haven't passed my safety test  
yet.

ERICKA

But it's more fun with a gun.

The Sheriff half grins at this. He shoulders the rifle and  
glances down at Ericka.

THE SHERIFF

There's nothing else out there,  
Ericka.

She stares back at him, impassive. He hands her the satchel,  
and the two start making their way toward the broken grass.

EXT. TEXAS MEADOW - NIGHT

The sky is a deepening black and star-studded.

Two flashlight beams cut across the dark as Ericka and the  
Sheriff make their way through the field.

One of the beams lights upon the dying horse.

It's laying on its side now, HEAVING. There's a deep gash across its hind leg, and three familiar holes in its chest.

Gently, the Sheriff calms the horse as he kneels down to get a better view of the chest wound. It's ugly and bloodless.

Ericka crouches next to him, her face sober.

ERICKA

You'd think there'd be more blood.

THE SHERIFF

Yeah ... it's strange.

He stands back up and checks his rifle.

THE SHERIFF (cont'd)

You remember when Marmalade broke his leg?

With a frown, Ericka nods.

THE SHERIFF (cont'd)

Alright then, stand back.

Ericka takes two steps back and plugs her ears. The Sheriff raises the rifle and points it at the horse.

Ericka looks away.

BANG! A single shot. The horse stops WHEEZING.

Ericka unplugs her ears and glances despondently at the dead animal. She shivers in the cool night air.

THE SHERIFF (cont'd)

What do we do next, partner?

Ericka lifts her eyes. In the distance, cows are LOWING.

ERICKA

It'll go to the cows.

The Sheriff nods.

THE SHERIFF

You sure you're up for a whole night of this?

ERICKA

Mm hm. It'll be like when we used to go camping without ...

Ericka stops herself, suddenly uncomfortable.

THE SHERIFF

Your mom.

When Ericka doesn't respond, the Sheriff lays a gentle but tentative hand on her head.

Resolutely, Ericka points her flashlight in the direction of the cows. The Sheriff re-shoulders his rifle.

EXT. TEXAS COW PASTURE - NIGHT

The moon is out now, and the flashlights are off. Ericka and the Sheriff sit against the trunk of a tree.

They're surrounded by the gentle RUSTLE and LOWING of cows.

ERICKA

Why don't you believe in the chupacabra?

THE SHERIFF

... It's an excuse, Ericka. It's like the devil, something people blame when they're too lazy or too scared to figure out the truth.

ERICKA

But, what makes it not true? For sure.

THE SHERIFF

(with a helpless laugh)  
Does it sound like something you've ever seen?

ERICKA

I don't know. I mean, sometimes at night, when I'm listening, the earth is just bigger than that.

The Sheriff sighs.

THE SHERIFF

Ericka, the real world doesn't work like your dreams. It's simple. You're going to have to grow up and realize that.

ERICKA

You don't understand. It's like when Mom left, and everyone was so busy telling me it wasn't my fault--

THE SHERIFF

It wasn't.

ERICKA

I know. But that's the problem, isn't it?

She turns to him. Her eyes straining to find his in the dark.

ERICKA (cont'd)

It wasn't either of ours fault. She just didn't belong. Not with us. Not here. It's like she was always going to leave us.

Desperate to comfort her, the Sheriff wraps Ericka in his arms.

THE SHERIFF

No, baby. She made plenty of decisions that were all her own. And so did I. You just got stuck in between.

ERICKA

I don't think so.

She looks from him to the horizon, watching a shadow slowly move across the sky--a cow, or maybe something more.

ERICKA (cont'd)

I think the devil chased her away.

EXT. TEXAS COW PASTURE - TREE - NIGHT

The moon is slipping towards the horizon now. The cows have settled into a muffled QUIET.

Ericka is up in the tree, staring at the stars.

Beneath her, the Sheriff CHEWS softly on a cigar.

Suddenly, a cow SCREAMS in pain.

ERICKA

What was that?!

She switches on her flashlight, raking the field, as below her, the Sheriff stands up and grabs his rifle.

The SCREAM again.

The Sheriff takes off running.

In the corner of her eye, Ericka notices movement near the base of the tree. A darker dark against the night. Her flashlight shoots toward it.

IN THE FIELD

The Sheriff stops short in the sudden darkness.

THE SHERIFF  
Ericka! I need that light!

Almost instantly, the flashlight beam floats back toward him.

Frantic, he scans the field.

ERICKA (O.S.)  
I'm coming down, Daddy!

The SHERIFF  
(too harshly)  
No!

That unearthly SCREAM again. His head whips toward it.

His breathing is ragged now. The whites of his eyes gleam.

And then, there! The flashlight lands on a calf, dragged to its side. Its legs jerking spastically.

A mangy COYOTE looms over the cow. It's coat is a patchwork of scaly skin and tufts of fur. Surreal but definitely animal.

Raising his rifle, the Sheriff exhales as he aims.

He almost looks relieved.

The coyote is frozen in the light.

BACK IN THE TREE

Ericka's face falls in disappointment.

ERICKA  
Damn coyote.

She watches as the Sheriff FIRES.

The coyote crumples.

The cows MOO, frightened. Then POUNDING hooves. A heifer barrels out of the dark into the Sheriff.

ERICKA (cont'd)  
Daddy!

She tumbles out of the tree, accidentally dropping the flashlight. It goes out.

Ericka's feet hit the earth.

All around her the night is black and still.

ERICKA (cont'd)

Daddy?

She gets no reply. Only the fading RUMBLE of the cows as they disappear into another corner of the field.

Carefully, she pats the ground around her, looking for the flashlight.

ERICKA (cont'd)

(frightened)

Yea, though I walk through the valley  
of the shadow of death ...

Her hands touch the flashlight. She wraps them around it.

Standing, she moves toward her father.

Her fingers fumble with the light switch.

ERICKA (cont'd)

... I will fear no evil.

The flashlight turns on.

And Ericka finds herself face to face with the CHUPACABRA.

Its dark, scaly skin fades into the night, but its eyes gleam yellow. Long claws glint in the moonlight.

It's maybe half a yard away from her. Just on the other side of the Sheriff, who lies face-down in the dirt. Unmoving.

Ericka stares at it, breathless.

Then the Sheriff stirs, struggling to sit up.

ERICKA (cont'd)

(calmly)

Don't move, Daddy.

She reaches out a hand and puts it gently on his head. Her eyes never leaving the chupacabra's.

ERICKA (cont'd)

You got knocked about. Just breathe.

THE SHERIFF

(scared)  
Where's my gun?

ERICKA

The coyote's dead.

The Sheriff closes his eyes, trying to block out the pain.

ERICKA (cont'd)

Count to twelve. You'll feel better.

The chupacabra blinks at her. She doesn't move a muscle.

THE SHERIFF

One ... two ...

As her father keeps COUNTING, Ericka watches the chupacabra.

Its eyes are large, almost the same gold as the Texas grass. They stare back at her. Unreadable.

Finally, she nods. At it.

Just like that, the chupacabra melts into the earth.

THE SHERIFF (cont'd)

... Twelve.

ERICKA

Hope I don't see no ghost tonight.

She's almost smiling.

EXT. TEXAS COW PASTURE - DAY

Golden morning light spills across the field, brushing against the dead cow and coyote.

Ericka kneels over her father who sits against their tree trunk. She dabs at his cut with an antibacterial swab.

THE SHERIFF

I'm sorry you didn't get your  
chupacabra.

He smiles at her. Ericka smiles back, but it fades as she presses a band aid firmly over his cut.

ERICKA

Do you think we need real life to be  
simple, Daddy? Maybe there isn't room  
for devils.

The Sheriff shrugs, pulling himself to his feet.

THE SHERIFF

Maybe. Something like that.

She nods to herself and then stands up next to him.

The two head out across the field, passing a distinctive patch of bare earth.