

DEVIL'S DUE

EPISODE TWO: THE SERPENT

Written by

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Adapted from the short story "Devil's Due" by Paul Knauer

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INSERT: COMPANY THEME MUSIC

INSERT: HOST'S EPISODE INTRODUCTION

INSERT: MUSICAL FLOURISH

INSERT: PREVIOUSLY ON

INSERT: DEVIL'S DUE THEME MUSIC

INT. SALOON - NIGHT

STORYTELLER

It had already been a long day for Walt. Tracking the thieves. Baiting the trap. Watching Marvin wiggle free as he and Dirk clumsily cheated the old man out of his due nightly earnings. Still, in this business--the gambling game--one had to be nimble enough to adjust to new cards. And, the preacher had definitely been a new card. He would play that particular hand soon enough, but first, Walt had an itch to scratch. Something that had been bothering him all day.

MARVIN

Oh, what momma's gonna think of me when I come home with a fancy pocket watch and a new ring.

STORYTELLER

Marvin bubbled with confidence, as one would with the advantages before him. Until...

WALT

Think I'm gonna change my luck for this one.

STORYTELLER

...Walt switched seats.

MARVIN

That ain't necessary.

WALT

Necessary or not, it's done. Deal 'em out.

SFX: CARDS HITTING THE TABLE

STORYTELLER

It was over almost before it started. Marvin, without Dirk's watchful eye, was not a skilled player.

MARVIN

Maybe one more? Let me win it back.

WALT

Seems to me a player of your talent level ought to be satisfied with a pocketful of my money.

STORYTELLER

Walt scooped up the ring and his watch. He and Nathan made for the exit, but not before Walt tipped his cap to Dirk.

WALT

Next time, you ought to join us.

STORYTELLER

Dirk would never catch the true meaning of the invitation. It didn't diminish Walt's small sense of self-satisfaction from the communication. Besides, there was plenty of time for education. He pushed the saloon doors open and stepped outside. No matter the outcome, an after-poker shot of night air was always welcome.

EXT. SALOON - NIGHT

STORYTELLER

Walt turned the corner of the saloon, Nathan anxiously trailing behind.

NATHAN

For a minute there, I thought you were gonna shoot them. Before the preacher showed.

STORYTELLER

Walt pulled a pistol from its holster, held it up to his temple.

NATHAN  
What are you--?!

STORYTELLER  
He pulled the trigger.

SFX: CLICK, CLICK, CLICK, CLICK

NATHAN  
Empty?!

WALT  
Told you. I don't kill people. That don't mean I can't bluff once in a while.

NATHAN  
(stunned)  
A gun and no bullets.

WALT  
I got bullets. Right here. Front pocket. I may be a fool, but I'm not stupid.

NATHAN  
Where are we sleeping tonight?

WALT  
Night's not done. You know where that coach was going? 'Fore it got robbed?

NATHAN  
Yes, sir.

WALT  
Good. You take this ring, give it back to that fellow and his wife.

NATHAN  
I don't understand. Why the ring, but not the money? You could have easily whipped that guy at the table--if you kept 'em honest.

WALT  
Money flows this way and that way. I don't concern myself with the specifics of it. It's unimportant. I just make sure enough flows to me so I can keep going. The man that got robbed--that was his mother's ring. Stealing a man's memories?  
(MORE)

WALT (CONT'D)

Things like that have to matter.  
It's what keeps us civilized. Now,  
go.

STORYTELLER

Walt watched the young man ride  
off. Then--he waited. Several hours  
passed before Dirk and Marvin  
stumbled out of the saloon, drunk  
as the night was dark.

MARVIN

God almighty, that was fun. You  
hear what he done said to me?  
(mocking)  
"You got an angel on your  
shoulder."

DIRK

(laughing)  
I got me wings and a halo, Marv.  
S'pose we should hit that  
chucklehead again tomorrow? Maybe  
win that ring back?

STORYTELLER

The words were barely out of his  
crooked mouth when the gun barrels  
dug into the back of each man's  
head.

WALT

You boys strike me as the something-  
for-nothing type.

STORYTELLER

Walt cocked the pistols.

DIRK

(wavering)  
I--we didn't--

WALT

Just the type I'm looking for.

STORYTELLER

Walt lowered the guns. Relief  
washed over Dirk and Marvin, though  
it was almost certain Dirk had  
little idea what was going on.

WALT

That preacher--converting the town's guilt into money--it's a shakedown, plain and simple, but it's a good one. Very lucrative. I need you boys to help me nip that big bag of shame he carries.

DIRK

Shame?

MARVIN

Money, you idiot. It's a bag of money.

WALT

We split it three ways. You up for it?

MARVIN

Shoot, yeah, we're up for it.

WALT

Great. He hides the money upstairs. Tomorrow morning, I'll distract him. That's when you hit.

MARVIN

That's a good plan.

WALT

Simple plan. That's what makes it good. Now, you boys too drunk to remember this conversation?

DIRK

No, sir. We'll be there.

STORYTELLER

Walt turned for the saloon. The gambling and scheming made him tired. Tonight, he would sleep well. At least--he hoped.

INT. SALOON - WALT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

SFX: A MAN SNORES

STORYTELLER

Walt's beard shivered with the vibrations of his prolific snoring. He was indeed sleeping well.

(MORE)

## STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

The saloon downstairs was finally quiet, the sinners exhausted from their sinning. The frilly ladies slept, their purses full, the piano player home to rest his tired fingers. Walt didn't care about any of it. He dreamt of teaching the old preacher a lesson. That he stood to procure himself a fair amount of money didn't hurt.

(beat)

He didn't see the young woman lean over him and whisper in his ear.

## RACHEL

I'm coming for you.

## STORYTELLER

He didn't see the door push open behind her.

SFX: A DOOR CREEKS OPEN

## STORYTELLER

Nor the snake, several feet long and thick as a cow's leg, inching into his room.

(beat)

He didn't see it slither across the wood floor and up the leg of his bed. He didn't feel it squirm its way under his covers and past his right knee.

(beat)

He felt it, though, when it finally sank its fangs into his hand.

## WALT

What in God's—!

## STORYTELLER

Walt leapt from the bed, shaking his right hand as the snake dropped to the floor and wound its way back into the hall. Walt stumbled as blood dripped from the large bite wound on his now badly bruised hand. His view narrowed. His breath slowed.

BEGIN VISIONS SEQUENCE

RACHEL

They're going to betray you. Like you did me.

STORYTELLER

Walt's eyes shot to the young woman --now sitting across the room.

WALT

Rachel? You're--

RACHEL

Can you see it? What's about to happen?

STORYTELLER

Walt grabbed his head--a desperate attempt to stop the spinning room. The visions came quickly: Marvin and Dirk walking toward the saloon.

RACHEL

They'll be here soon.

STORYTELLER

The two men sneaking down the upstairs hallway, past Walt's door.  
(beat)  
Dirk, grabbing the money from under the bed.

RACHEL

They'll take what's yours.

STORYTELLER

The two men kicking at their horses as they rode away. And, finally, the two men asleep in a field, the bag of money between them.

RACHEL

You'll get what you deserve.

END VISIONS SEQUENCE

STORYTELLER

Walt fought to focus his vision. The woman was gone. All that remained was the coming betrayal.

WALT

Those sons of bitches.

## STORYTELLER

Walt wrestled his pants over his wobbly legs and struggled to pull on his boots and hat. He fumbled his way toward the door, each step a precarious balancing act. Walt collapsed to the floor--his cheek slamming against the rough wood planks. His eyelids clenched closed as the poison rippled his muscles in a wave of spasms that swept from his temples to his toes. He never saw the shadows under the door as two figures snuck past.

INT. SALOON - HALLWAY - NIGHT

MARVIN

That room there. Be careful.

DIRK

I'll just take a peek.

SFX: A DOOR CREEKS

DIRK

Ain't no one in there.

MARVIN

Check under the bed.

DIRK

Just like you said, Marv!

SFX: THE BAG DRAGS ACROSS THE FLOOR, COINS CLASHING INSIDE

EXT. PRAIRIE - NIGHT

SFX: HORSES GALLOP

## STORYTELLER

The two men rode hard. Every hoof beat brought a clash of coins as the bag of money tied to Marvin's saddle produced a steady rhythm of metallic notes. It would have been pleasant had Marvin not been so stressed. He wasn't worried about the preacher, but Walt was definitely the type to hold a grudge.

(beat)

(MORE)

## STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

The men grew tired before the horses. Turns out a night of gambling, drinking, and stealing was not great preparation for a long night's ride. Dirk was the first to wilt. He laid his head against his horse's neck. Sensing Dirk's loss of will, the horse slowed to a trot.

## MARVIN

Can't stop now. Sure as a tick on a hound dog, he'll be out for blood.

## DIRK

I ain't got no more in me, Marv.

## STORYTELLER

Marvin spun his horse around. He looked for dust, movement, any sign that Walt was on their trail. He saw none.

## MARVIN

Alright. We'll grab a quick one. But when I say 'go', we go.

## INT. SALOON - WALT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

## STORYTELLER

Walt pulled himself to his feet. His head was still spinning, but an anger boiled inside him.

## WALT

Pull yourself together, old man. You don't get riding soon, you might never see those two idiots again.

## EXT. SALOON - NIGHT

## STORYTELLER

Walt examined the dirt outside the saloon. It didn't take long to find the tracks: two horses, riding southwest. He checked his saddle, then pulled himself up. Walt whipped the reigns and kicked his heels.

WALT

Hee-yah!

INSERT: MID-ROLL AD INSERTION POINT

EXT. PRAIRIE - NIGHT

SFX: A COYOTE HOWLS IN THE DISTANCE, A FIRE CRACKLES

MARVIN

We can't sleep long.

STORYTELLER

Dirk eyed the bag of money.

MARVIN

I'll put it right between us.

SFX: MARVIN SETS THE BAG DOWN

STORYTELLER

Each slept with a hand on the bag.

(beat)

Neither man stirred as the burlap rippled with movement. Slowly, the snake--its head swaying from side-to-side, its tongue licking at the cool night air--worked its way free of the weight of the coins and fabric. The snake slithered across the brown Kansas dirt, first toward the sleeping Marvin. The creature coiled, it's tongue dancing. With an almost gentle touch, it bit Marvin's hand. Just a kiss of poison. As the snake turned for Dirk, Marvin began to dream.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

STORYTELLER

Marvin could see himself in the field, sleeping under the blanket of stars. He watched from above, as if he were floating in the cool night air, as Dirk sat up, looked across the bag of money to his partner.

DIRK

You awake? Marvin?

STORYTELLER

Getting no response, Dirk carefully lifted the bag of money and tied it to his saddle. Marvin continued watching from above, his breath quickening as Dirk slowly turned. He held his breath as Dirk drew his gun, pointed it at his partner—*HIS* sleeping body—and pulled the trigger.

SFX: A GUN SHOT

END DREAM SEQUENCE

STORYTELLER

Marvin and Dirk bolted upright at the shocking finish to their collective dreams. They spun for their guns, both men quickly turning on the other. Sweat poured from each man's brow, the fever from the poison breaking.

DIRK

I saw you. In my dream.

MARVIN

I saw you.

STORYTELLER

Each stood to confront the other, their hands shaking with fear, anger, sickness.

MARVIN

You're going to shoot me and take the money.

DIRK

No. I saw it with my own eyes. You shot *me!*

STORYTELLER

Marvin's eyes danced from Dirk, to the gun--to the money.

EXT. PRAIRIE - OVER THE HILL - NIGHT

SFX: MULTIPLE DISTANT GUNSHOTS

## STORYTELLER

Walt pulled his horse to a stop. He had no interest in riding into an active gunfight. He waited, his ear turned toward the rise over which he had heard the shots. All that returned was silence. He dismounted, led his horse to the ridge. The view across the shallow valley was expansive--the sun, rising behind him, just beginning to light the view of the farthest edge. There was enough light, however, to see the bodies. Two of them, one atop the other. Marvin and Dirk.

(beat)

Walt waited.

(beat)

They looked dead, and there was no movement, but he wanted to be sure. He had been bluffed many times, and it could be deadly to be fooled now. The more he pondered the situation, though, the more his confidence rose. Marvin was too fidgety to lie still for even a moment, and Dirk wasn't smart enough to think to try. No. They were most certainly dead. Still, Walt was no fool, he chambered a few bullets and kept his gun drawn as he approached the site. Reaching the carnage, he kicked the two men, just to be sure. Convinced--he holstered his weapon and rolled the bodies off the money. He couldn't help but smile now. None of it had gone according to plan, but here he was, with three times the money he expected. All that was left was to grab the cash and stay clear of the preacher. Not that he was a threat. As Walt reached for the bag, he didn't see the snake coiled behind him.

SFX: THUMP

He felt the first strike on the back of his leg, just above his left boot. He yanked a gun from its holster.

SFX: THUMP

STORYTELLER

The second strike caught the side of his right boot as he spun to meet the attack.

SFX: TWO GUN SHOTS, THEN...CLICK, CLICK, CLICK

WALT

No. Please.

SFX: THUMP

STORYTELLER

The third strike hit his right thigh as he dropped to his knees.

SFX: THUMP, THUMP

STORYTELLER

He didn't feel the fourth strike, or the fifth. By that point, he was prone in the dirt, eyes frozen open as the venom overtook him.

(beat)

The snake hovered, watching. Waiting, perhaps, for Walt's bluff. Satisfied with his victim's demise, it slithered to the bag of money.

SFX: THE TRANSFORMATION BEGINS

STORYTELLER

Slowly, the snake transformed—an agonizing journey from reptile to human. Its tail split into legs. Arms pressed from its sides. Its mouth twisted and stretched. The creature's head jerked and its tongue flicked. Finally, the preacher pulled himself up, dusted himself off. The slits in his eyes narrowed before they rounded, the last of the metamorphosis.

SFX: END TRANSFORMATION

STORYTELLER

The preacher calmly took the bag of money and climbed into Walt's saddle. Guiding the horse to the bodies, he smiled at the sight.

(MORE)

## STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

Walt had been right--the old man definitely enjoyed his work. He held the bag above the bodies and poured the contents onto the lifeless men.

## PREACHER

More coins for thee. More souls for me.

## STORYTELLER

The preacher slung the empty bag over his shoulder. He would need it for the next town. The next Dirk and Marvin. Whenever that was. For now, though, he had other things to concentrate on. The trap had been set and sprung. Soon, he would collect. He gently kicked at the horse and calmly, happily, rode over the hill.

INSERT: END OF EPISODE CUE

INSERT: EPISODE MUSIC

## HOST

Thank you for listening to Devil's Due: The Serpent. Next time on Devil's Due--Episode Three: A Dance With The Devil.

INSERT: TRANSITION

## NATHAN

You were going to leave me. You *ARE* going to leave me.

INSERT: TRANSITION

## PREACHER

A regular Lazarus, I see. Come to save your soul? Or maybe you're here to return my money?

INSERT: TRANSITION

## PREACHER

Are you ready to dance with the devil, Walt?

INSERT: TRANSITION

SFX: A DISTANT GUNSHOT

NATHAN

Wasn't me.

WALT

Well, it sure as hell wasn't me.

INSERT: TRANSITION

SFX: POUNDING ON A CABIN DOOR

WALT

Wake up you son-of-a-bitch!

INSERT: TRANSITION

HOST

Episode Three--A Dance With The Devil, next week from Crooked Stories Theater. If you enjoy the program and wish to support our efforts, click to donate or subscribe. Or, simply help us spread the word. We also invite you to visit Crooked Stories dot com where you'll find more about the team behind Devil's Due as well as Crooked Stories' plan for future projects. For now, thank you for listening, we hope to see you again soon.

INSERT: POST-ROLL AD INSERTION POINT

INSERT: DEVIL'S DUE THEME SONG, FULL VERSION

INSERT: COMPANY TAG