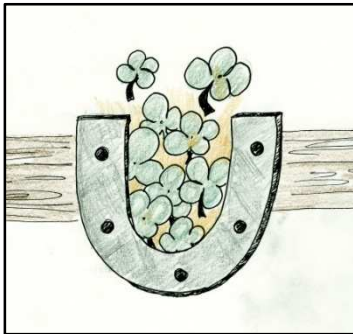


Four Shoes for the Devil

By Darby Patterson



A very long time ago, when there were no cars or airplanes, trains or trucks, horses were the most important mode of transportation. It was horses that carried people to church and pulled loaded wagons to village markets. It was horses that carried soldiers into battle and hauled treasures on their backs. In the earliest days of old, the horses who worked so hard wore no iron shoes on their feet and, after a few years of faithful service, their hooves wore down from walking over the rough cobblestone on village streets and on the ragged rocks of the mountains.

Then, one day so very long ago, a clever blacksmith stood over his hot forge making a round iron handle for the door to the king's treasure room. Every day, he heated bars of metal over a very hot fire and then hammered the iron with all his strength to shape it into something useful. This particular morning, the blacksmith looked up at his faithful horse named Jupiter and he felt very sad. You see, Jupiter's hooves had worn down so much that the noble horse now hobbled when he walked like an old, old man even though, in horse-years, Jupiter was still a youngster. As the smith pounded the iron into a circle, he suddenly had a great thought.

“Why, if I shaped the iron just so, I could make some sturdy metal shoes for Jupiter and he'd be as able as new colt.”

The kind and clever smith first finished his work for the king and then heated a new iron bar over the flames in the forge. When the rod was glowing bright red, he grabbed it with a long pair of tongs and laid it on his anvil where he began to hammer it into shape. Back and forth into the forge it went until the rod was shaped just like Jupiter's hoof. Then, the smith took the scorching hot shoe and plunged it into a

bucket of cold water. The blistering metal hissed and white steam rose like clouds from the water as the first horse shoe cooled.

After all four were made, the smith nailed them onto Jupiter's feet. Of course, this did not hurt Jupiter because hooves are hard like fingernails. Jupiter stood proud and still as the smith gently turned each hoof downside-up and fitted the new shoes. Jupiter seemed to know that something very important had been done just for him.

That same day, Jupiter happily pulled his master and a load of newly made iron fittings through the village to the castle on the hill. But, this journey through the village was unlike any other, for all the village folk turned to see what was making the new and curious noise. "Clip-clop, clip-clop," went Jupiter's feet as he pranced over the cobblestone. "Clip-clop, clip-clop," in a rhythm that made people want to dance a jig. Jupiter felt very important to have all eyes turned his way and his ears rose up with pleasure.

But, among the sellers and shopkeepers and plain-folk was the devil, disguised as a fine lady with lovely red hair. The devil was much taken by the new sound and saw that it attracted much "Ahhh, how clever" he said to himself and stopped the smithy and his wagon. "My good Sir," the devil said in his most lady-like voice, "whatever makes that enchanting sound?"

The smith, being a gentle man, politely explained that he had made a new set of shoes for his favorite horse so that Jupiter might accompany him on his journeys for many years to come. The devil smiled prettily, tossed her head of red hair and told the smith he was, indeed, a clever man.

As she spoke, the smith saw a flash of fire in her eyes and thought the woman possessed by a lively spirit. He bid her farewell and secretly hoped to see the mysterious woman again someday.

All the while the devil was thinking, "I must have a set of those shoes for myself so everyone will admire me also," and he made a plan. He waited until the smith had returned from his work at the castle and then turned himself from the red haired lady into a chestnut horse. Just after the sun had fallen and the village folk had shut their doors for the day, the devil in his new disguise, limped into the smith's shop, hanging his brilliant head low to the ground.

When the smith saw the poor horse hobbled with such sore feet, he immediately took pity on him and set about making another set of shoes. While he worked, the smith, who was uncommonly bright, looked up at the rust colored horse. "Surely, there is something about this steed that I have seen before," he thought. "But, a horse with such a bright chestnut red coat, I would recall."

While the metal was hot and soft, the smith took his hammer and pointed awl and made holes in the new shoes for nails. Again, he looked up at the waiting steed. The horse, because he was really the devil in disguise and very vain, tossed his head to show the smith how handsome he was. The silky red mane danced around his head and the smith caught the glow of a flame in the horse's eyes. The smithy suddenly remembered the beautiful woman with the fine red hair in the village square - the woman he had hoped to see again. They were the same eyes surrounded by the same crimson mane. The smithy knew then it was the devil in disguise and he made a plan.

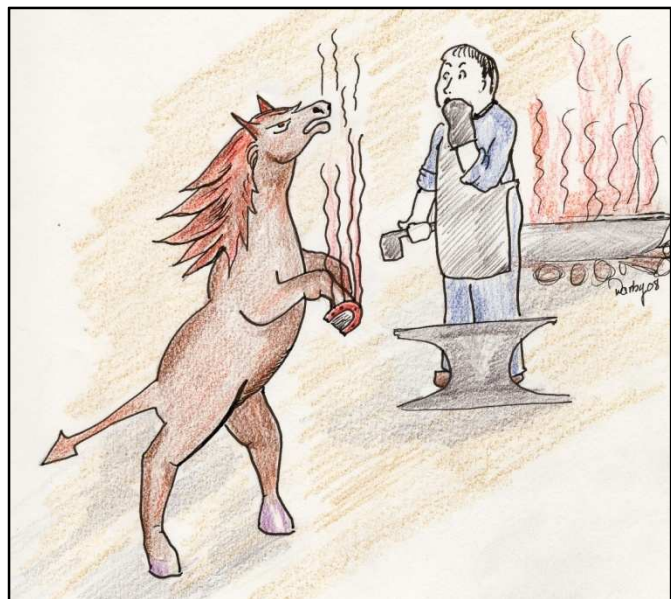
Looking up at the proud horse and smiling, the smith went back to work. Again he placed the shoe in the forge until it shimmered red and orange over the glowing hot coals. Then, before plunging the scorching iron shoe into the icy water to cool, he quickly nailed it onto one of the devil's bare hooves.

The hot metal sizzled and burned through the hoof and the devil howled and screamed like a hundred mad griffins and goblins. His disguise vanished like smoke and, no longer a horse but a demon with horns, the devil leapt into the air and flew from the clever smith's shop never to return again.

The story of the clever smithy's adventure quickly spread throughout the village and soon there were horseshoes hanging above every door. The smithy had work for the rest of his days, and as

townspeople watched him work they took to hanging the horseshoe upside down, to remind the devil not to enter their houses and to catch good luck as it fell from the Heavens.

And, over the hundreds of years since that day, people everywhere have come to believe that horseshoes keep bad luck away because the devil fears them like fire fears water.



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