

# Donkey

A Story by William Loader

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“You’re an ass!” grumbled the old cow.

I was a bit scared. Yes, I was an ass, a donkey, only a few years old. I curled up in the corner of the stall where all the other animals were sheltering from the cold.



The goats were friendly. There was a baby at one end of our feeding trough and its mum and dad were lying down in the other corner. Perhaps there wasn’t enough room for them in the guesthouse. The cows mooed. The sheep and goats went “Baah!” But when I went, “Hee haw!” everyone looked around. The baby woke up. It was so embarrassing. But everything calmed down and we all fell asleep – until the camels arrived!

Camels! They spit. “Surely they’re not coming in here,” the old cow grumbled. “No way!” It must have read my mind. No problems: the camels stayed outside and in came three men, waking up everyone. We could see their faces. There were no clouds and a very bright star shone overhead like someone had thrown on a switch. They were into perfume: myrrh and incense have a nice smell and they’d brought it in a golden bowl.



They came and they went and we all dropped off asleep again. That was when I dreamt my dream. I was trotting down a steep road with a man from Samaria riding on my back, a Samaritan. We stopped and there on the side of the road he found a dead man. He looked dead to me, but when I looked more closely he was still breathing. The Samaritan hopped off my back, picked up this poor fellow and laid him on my back. I could feel his warm stomach. The Samaritan looked at me and said: “Be careful he doesn’t fall off!”

As we set off a priest from the temple came over with one of the other temple workers and said: “Gee, that was kind! I wish we’d thought of that.” The kindness made me feel very warm and when I woke up, I felt my back and it was still warm.



Everyone started to wake and get up. The cows started to eat the hay in the eating trough and dribbled on the baby. Its mum and dad picked it up, changed its nappy and wiped it with some of that nice smelling myrrh. They were about to head off when the dad said: "We need an extra donkey for the baby. It doesn't have to be big and strong." And then they looked at me!

Soon I found myself with a baby strapped onto my back and heading off down the road. We were going a long way. They made me walk very fast. "The soldiers are coming," they said. "We must hurry and find refuge in Egypt!" My refugee family managed to escape and I am very proud that I helped them do so. But it was very tiring.

At night I used to sleep like I had gone off into another world. Lots of dreams. Not all of them were pleasant. Once I heard soldiers all around me. I was very scared. One of them grabbed me and then let me go. He grabbed a farmer instead and made him carry a heavy log of wood on his back and behind him was a man who had been beaten, barely able to walk. I'd seen him before in my dreams. This time I could escape. The soldiers left me alone.

When we got to Egypt, some kind people welcomed my refugee family and gave them somewhere to stay. They even had a place where they tied me up and gave me water. I had to learn to eat apples and pears, not much hay. And one night I had another dream. I was in a garden full of apple and pear trees. There was one big tree in the middle of the garden with a big sign: "If you eat this tree, you will become so strong and powerful, you will be able to tell everyone what to do and if they don't, you'll be able to kill them. It was called the "Love-me Hate-them" tree.



There was a snake hanging in its branches and saying, "This will make you a tiger, a lion, whatever you like!" I didn't want to become a tiger or a lion, and I'm really scared of snakes, so, feeling very embarrassed and a little shy, but wanting to be polite, I said, "Thank you very much, but I'd prefer to be a donkey." "You're a silly ass!" said the snake. "You'll never go anywhere!"

I know why I dreamt that dream. While some people in Egypt were kind, some others were anything but kind. They hated us. "Get out of here and take that silly ass with you," they said.

We did eventually leave, back to where we came from and then we moved further north. I was becoming very fond of my new family and by this time the baby was already a little boy who started to play with the children of the neighbourhood.



Happy days. Happy dreams! And, of course, I dreamt a dream about little children. Their mums and dads had brought them to see that man I was talking about that I kept seeing in my dreams. His friends told them to go away. My dreams often have people like that in them. But the man said, “No, let them come!” Wherever people were mean, he was kind. I heard him say that he wanted people to help each other, to be kind and look after people who were poor, to get rid of hate and fill the world with kindness. In one of my other dreams I saw him sitting up on the side of mountain saying things like that.

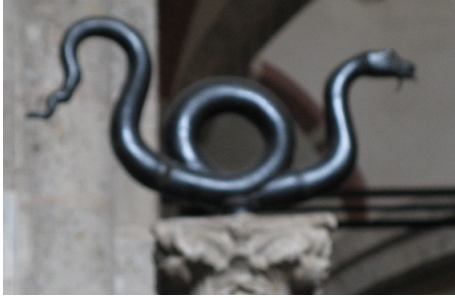
Then one day, some years later, when I had a change of owners and was being kept just inside the gates of a big city, there was a knock on the door and I heard someone say: “We need your donkey. He’s here and ready to ride in.” Who was this, I wondered to myself. They led me out through the gate and down to the bottom of the gully and there they dressed me up like something special was about to happen, putting their cloaks over my back and then it did happen.

I don’t have eyes in the back of my head, but I caught a glimpse of him, the man. It was the same man I had seen in my dreams. Up he hopped and sat on my back. I had that warm feeling again on my back. Off we went up the road to the gate. Crowds cheered us on, “Hosanna in the highest!” They even pulled down some branches from the palm trees and threw them on the ground in front of us. Better be careful I don’t trip, I thought to myself.



And that was it. Soon I was back in my stall, eating my hay. A few days later I was out on the road just outside the gate and again there were crowds, but this time there were soldiers. They were heading up a hill. And, yes, they grabbed me and then let me go and grabbed another man and yes, there I saw that man again, just as in my dream. The soldiers had beaten him. I looked up at the palm trees and there I saw the snake. “Hello, silly ass!” it hissed. “I told you you’ve got to learn how to hate your enemies. Kindness is for kids – for asses like you!”

I swished my tail and walked away. I didn’t want to be part of all this commotion, but I saw what happened and stayed fairly close. The soldiers killed him, this man. They made fun of him, calling him a king and making a crown for him out of thorns.



"That's the end of all this loving. All this talk about kindness," hissed the snake. I just cried. I cried with a whimpering, "Hee haw" and then a loud "Hee haw", like I couldn't stop myself. I'm sure he must have heard me because he turned his head and looked at me.

That was it. I had to go. I trotted back to my stall and crawled into the corner. My tears made everything wet. I was drowning, or it felt like it, as I fell asleep.

Sometimes it's hard to know what is a dream and what is real, but I know I dreamt another dream. I was standing beside a cave. In front of it was a large boulder. I pushed it with my head and kicked it with my strong hind legs and eventually it rolled aside.

And he was there, shining like he was from another world. He came to me, slid his leg over and mounted on my back. That warm feeling was there again. And as we started to move, it was like we had wings, we rose up, high above the cave, high into the clouds, high up into another world, a world of dreams, a world of kindness, a world of peace. And there I saw people from every country upon earth, black and white, red and yellow, old and young, and they were all there sharing a feast. Kindness was king. Love was lord.



And for me, well, there was water, and, surprise: apples and pears. In the morning I woke up and the cow – another cow – remarked: "You not only snored. You talked in your sleep and you sang. You're a bit of an ass." Inside I smiled: "Yes, I'm an ass. I'm a donkey. And I have learned the secret of life."