



THE DONKEY, THE TABLE AND THE STICK

Once upon a time there was a young boy named Jack. His father was a very cruel man, so one day he decided to run away from home. After his father left for work, Jack packed up his things and left, slamming the door behind him. He ran as fast as his legs would carry him until he suddenly came across an old woman gathering sticks on the side of the road. Jack didn't notice her, and he bumped right into her basket full of firewood, knocking it over and sending the wood flying in all directions.

Jack was very sorry for having knocked the basket over, but the old woman wasn't angry. She was a very kind-hearted and good-natured person. Together they picked up all the scattered wood and put it back into the basket, and after they had collected everything the woman asked if Jack would like to come work for her. She didn't have enough strength to take care of everything around the house anymore and she would really appreciate some help. She would pay him what she could, but she would also feed him and give him a place to stay. Jack was exhausted after his long journey, and his empty stomach was rumbling and grumbling, so he accepted the old woman's invitation.

Time flew and soon a whole year had passed. Jack and the old woman had become very good friends, and one day she called him to her and, as a reward for his hard work, gave him a donkey. This was no ordinary donkey, however!

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When Jack tugged at the animal's ears, the donkey brayed and gold coins started pouring out of its mouth! Jack was overwhelmed with joy that he had been given such an incredible gift. He decided to go home, not because he missed his cruel father but because there had been an old widow who lived across the street from him, who had a very lovely daughter who he loved very much. Jack said goodbye to the kind old woman, gave her a big hug, climbed up on the donkey, and headed home. As he travelled, he gave gold to every poor beggar he met, knowing the donkey could make him more if he needed it.

That evening, as the sun began to go down, he came across an inn. When he peeked in through a window, he saw big groups of people sitting at the tables, enjoying themselves and drinking and eating to their hearts' content. He was starving – he hadn't eaten since breakfast! – and he decided to go in and get some dinner. He found the innkeeper and tried to order something tasty, but the man was very surly indeed and said that Jack needed to pay first. Only then would he serve him.

Jack went back outside, took his donkey into the barn, and tugged his ears. In a jiffy the animal started spitting gold. But what Jack didn't know was that there was a tiny crack in the wall and the innkeeper witnessed the whole thing.

Jack went back inside and, after stuffing his belly with good food, went to bed and at once fell asleep. That night, the innkeeper snuck into the barn and replaced Jack's magical donkey with a completely ordinary one! In the morning, the poor boy didn't notice a thing, and happily set off on his way.

Jack was very excited to see the widow's daughter again. They'd been friends since childhood and they were very fond of each other. When Jack told his father he wanted to marry the girl, however, the old man got very angry.

"Never!" he said. "You won't marry anyone until you start making enough money to take care of the farmstead and the family!"

"Good thing that I have as much money as I could want," exclaimed the boy happily. He brought the donkey to his father and tugged at its ears. The donkey brayed, but not a single coin came out of his mouth. The boy tugged again, but nothing happened.

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Jack's father was very angry, and so he picked up a pitchfork and chased his poor son away. Jack ran as fast as he could until he reached a house in the middle of nowhere. Looking for a place to hide, he entered without knocking and quickly shut the door behind him.

"Hello, young man," said a voice on the opposite side of the room. "Are you here to help me? I'll give you a handsome reward."

Jack quickly learned that he was in the house of an old carpenter who could no longer move very well. He desperately needed someone to work with him in his workshop, and so the boy agreed to help. Jack began to work for the carpenter, doing everything the man asked. He cut boards for chairs and tables, constructed cabinets, and built shelves. His work was neat and swift, and the carpenter was very grateful.

A year passed, and the carpenter called Jack to him.

"I want to reward you for your service," he said.

He brought Jack into the next room and showed him a table. It looked like any ordinary table, just like those he had been making every day for a whole year. But this one was special, the carpenter said. This one was magical.

"All you have to do," the carpenter explained, "is say 'Table, deck yourself!' and the table will fill up with all the food and delicacies you can think of."

Once again the boy was very excited, and he shook the carpenter's hand and thanked him. Then he picked the table up, put it on his back and headed toward home.

Soon enough, Jack again arrived at the old inn. The pub was mostly quiet this time, with only a handful of guests drinking at the back of the room. Once the innkeeper saw him, he rushed to him and apologized that all the food had been already eaten and there was nothing he could offer him.

"Oh, don't worry," Jack said, putting his table down. "Let us all dine together at my table. Table, deck yourself!" Suddenly, the table was brimming with all kinds of delicacies. The other guests couldn't believe their eyes and hurried over to eat. Late that night, when all the guests and Jack had full bellies and were fast asleep, the greedy innkeeper snuck into the lad's room and replaced the magical table

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with an ordinary one.

Once again Jack woke up and didn't notice anything suspicious. He headed home and told his father a second time that he wanted to marry the neighbour's daughter. But his father was even older and meaner and lost his temper again.

"Never!" he shouted. "I don't want to be feeding some beggar girl in my house!" "Good thing I have a table that can give us any food we want," said Jack, and he put the table down. "Table, deck yourself!" But of course it was just an ordinary table, so nothing happened.

This time, the mean old man took a frying pan off the wall and started trying to hit his son with it. Poor Jack took to his heels and ran away as fast as he could, all the way to a raging river. The current was so strong, though, he couldn't cross to the other side.

"Hello," said a voice behind him. "Can you help me build a bridge over the river? I'll reward you well."

Jack turned and saw a strange man standing behind him. He agreed to help and together they built a bridge across the river. When they were done, the mysterious man cut a twig off a nearby tree and carved a plain stick out of it with a knife.

"If you say 'Stick, start bashing, smacking, thrashing', the stick will give a beating to anyone who angers you."

Jack thanked the stranger and at once set off to the inn where he had been robbed so many times.

When he reached the pub, he quickly found the crooked innkeeper and said, "You liked all my other magical items, but I don't think you'd like to see me use this one!" He brandished the stick and said "All I need to do is give it a command and it will give you the thrashing of a lifetime!"

The innkeeper wasn't sure he believed the boy, and began to lie, saying he hadn't stolen anything. As soon as he started to speak, the boy said,

"Stick, start bashing, smacking, thrashing!"

Immediately, the stick started flogging the innkeeper.

"Please! Stop!" The innkeeper cried out. "I'll give you your donkey and your table!"

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Jack stopped the stick. The innkeeper started crying and pointed to a back room where the donkey and the table were hidden. Happy to have his things back, Jack returned home with the donkey, the table, and the stick. When he got home, he made sure that his father heard the story about what his magical thrashing stick could do, and his father never bothered him again. Then he tugged at the donkey's ears and used the gold coins that came out of his mouth to build a beautiful house, and, not long after, he asked his beloved girl from across the street to marry him.

They didn't keep all the gifts for themselves, though. They made sure to always have gold on hand for any poor beggar or runaway who passed by, and they put the magical table outside in the yard with a sign, so that any traveller passing by could have the finest meal imaginable.