

# The Noisy Donkey

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*By Stephen Davids*

On a small island named Santorini, in the Mediterranean Sea, there was a little village. Just outside the village there lived a tiny donkey on a farm near the sea. He was a very good donkey, most of the time. He had only one problem -- he made too much noise.

Every morning, when the sun rose over the sea in the East, the little donkey would wake up suddenly. The first thing that he did when he woke up was to bray very loudly. "HEEEEE-HAAAH, HEEEE-HAAAH, HEE-HAW, HEE-HAA, HEEEE-HAAAH," he said.

At first, the noisy little donkey amused the people and animals that lived in the village. They pointed at him and laughed merrily when the bright morning sunlight woke him up.

It didn't take very many days before they became rather annoyed by his braying. Instead of pointing and laughing, the village people were pointing and grumbling. "Why do you have to make that awful noise every morning?" one sleepy man said to the noisy donkey. "We hate that HEE-HA you make," complained one small child.

The donkey felt very sad. He could not stop himself from braying. He was just a noisy little donkey.

The following morning, after the donkey had woken up the entire village, the Elders gathered to decide what to do with him.

"We'll send him to Athens by boat if he does it again," said one, "someone will buy him in the market there." And so it was agreed that if the donkey woke everyone up the next morning, he would leave for Athens when the ferry boat came.

One Elder went to where the donkey was tethered to a tree. "If you wake us up again, we are sending you away to the market in Athens," he warned the tiny donkey, "and we don't care who buys you or what they use you for." This terrified the little donkey, and he decided to never bray again.

Late that night a sailor from the village was staggering home drunk from too much of a Greek drink called ouzo. He was smoking a cigarette, which he should never have done even if he was sober. In his hand he carried a half-empty bottle of the strong ouzo alcohol that had made him so dizzy. As he bounced from one wall to another down the path to his home, he stumbled, bumped his head, and fell in the gutter, dropping the ouzo and the lit cigarette into a pile of straw.

In seconds the heat from the cigarette started the straw ablaze, and the ouzo burned fiercely. The flames reached to the roof of the nearest house, which caught fire almost immediately. From there the fire spread quickly with the night breeze coming up and over the cliffs from the sea. In minutes the crackling inferno had consumed one empty house and was destroying a huge barn nearby. A row of houses stood next to the barn, and in them children and their parents slept peacefully.

The light from the fire glowed bright as sunrise, and that is what woke up the tiny donkey.

"HEE-HAW, HEEEE-HAAHHHH, HEE-HAA, HEE-HAA, HEEEEEEE-HAAAAAAAH!" he said as soon as he saw that the light was from a fire -- not the sun. "HEE-HAW!" His noise started to wake up the villagers. He brayed and brayed, while the flames moved closer to the first sleeping family's house. Many people were awake now, and some of them could smell the fire's smoke. Others could see that it was still night-time, but that there was a bright glow coming from the direction of the great barn.

"HEE-HAAAA," continued the tiny donkey, frightened of the heat he could feel coming from the fire, which had now caught the roofs of the next two houses.

As the villagers realized what was happening they started to join the donkey's shouting. "FIRE!" they yelled, "Get water to put out the fire!" "Wake up everyone, there's a fire in our village!"

The people rushed back and forth between the taps and the fire with buckets and pails, throwing water all over the flames. A loud hissing noise came from the places where the water hit the flames, and large clouds of black and gray smoke billowed up into the clear moonlit night sky. In twenty minutes the fire was out, and the village was saved. The drunken man that had dropped the cigarette and started the fire was still asleep. Everyone went back to their homes. They were exhausted so they fell asleep too.

The next morning everyone slept in. The sun climbed slowly into the sky, but the tired villagers did not notice. The silent little donkey shivered with fear. He had stayed awake all night after the fire, remembering the warning he had been given about making any more noise.

Finally a hungry child awoke, and woke up his parents. They looked around the village in surprise. The rest of the town was still asleep. The father went down to the small church and rang the bell there. That woke everyone up quite quickly, and it wasn't long before the whole village was outside to look at the damage caused by the fire.

As they examined the mess, they discussed the events of the night before. No one could clearly remember who had first noticed the fire, or how they had woken up. Whoever it was, they were a hero, for they had saved many homes and probably many lives. Then one very wise old woman said, "It must have been the tiny donkey!" "That's right," said a young boy, "I remember now. The donkey woke us ALL up with his noisy braying!"

Just then they realized that the donkey had not made his usual noise at sunrise, and they rushed over to see if he was alright.

When the donkey spotted the whole village coming towards him, he became very frightened. He did not understand how they felt about him now. He was sure they were coming to send him to the market in Athens. He bit through the rope that was tying him to the tree, and ran away before they got near enough to see him.

When the villagers arrived at the donkey's tree and saw that he was gone, they decided to try and find him.

Even though Santorini is not a very big island, it was three days before anyone noticed a tiny hungry donkey shivering in a small cave near the east beaches. When the farmer who found him approached, the donkey was too tired to run away. The farmer took him back to the village and gave the donkey food and water.

In the evening the whole village came to see the donkey. To his great surprise they covered him with beautiful flowers, and gave him the sweetest of grasses to eat. They took him to a tiny new barn they had built, and he lay down on a soft bed of clean straw. They sang songs to him and named him "Hero."

The same Elder that had threatened Hero with the trip to the Athens market now spoke softly in the donkey's ear, "Please forgive us, you wonderful animal, you have saved our village and many lives with your noisy braying that warned us of the fire. Please stay with us forever, and bray every morning as loudly as you wish, for you are our Hero, and we love you." Then the whole village cheered -- especially the drunk who had caused the fire with his careless smoking and drinking.

And the tiny donkey lives happily on Santorini to this day.

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