Donkey Skin – Elementary Level Story

Once upon a time there was a powerful king. He was kind and fair in good times and frightening in war. This made him greatly loved by his people, but greatly feared by his enemies. His queen was known throughout the world for her wisdom and beauty. They also had a daughter, who was said to be even more clever and beautiful her mother.

The king's palace was filled with many rich and unusual things. Of these, the king's favorites was an ugly donkey with two big ears. This was not a normal donkey. It was magic. Every morning, as it went toilet, pieces of gold dropped onto the floor.

One day the queen became very sick with a bad illness. The king looked for help everywhere. He asked the best doctors and magicians in the land. But none of them were able to help her. She became sicker every day.

Finally, the queen's last hour came. As she lay dying she asked the king to make her a promise. "Promise," she said, "that you will not marry again unless it is to a woman wiser and more beautiful than I." The queen was sure that it would be impossible for the king to find such a woman. And because of this, she believed that he would never remarry.

The king agreed to follow these last wishes, and shortly after this the queen died in his arms.

For a time the king was so sad, both day and night, that no one could make him smile. However, as the months went by, his hurt became less and less. After a year had passed, it was decided that the time had come when he should look for a new wife. But this was not an easy matter because of the promise he had made. He could not find a woman who was wiser and more beautiful than the dead queen.

The only woman in the kingdom who had more wisdom and beauty than the dead queen was the princess. The only way to keep the promise made to the king's dead wife was to marry their daughter. After thinking long and hard about it, he asked the princess to marry him. This frightened and saddened the princess. She tried to tell the king that it was wrong for a father to marry his daughter. He would not listen, so she decided to ask help from her fairy godmother.

"I know why you have come," the fairy godmother said. "In your heart there is great sadness. Remember that I am here to help you. Nothing can hurt you if you do as I say. You must do as your father tells you. However, there is nothing wrong with asking him to give you something first. Tell him that before you marry you must have a dress which has the color of the sky. He will certainly never be able to find a such a dress."

The young princess went to her father. The moment he heard what she wanted, he called his best dress-makers. He ordered them to make his daughter a dress the color of the sky by the very next day. He said that he would pay them well if they able were to make it, but that they would all die if they did not. The following day the dress was shown to the princess. It was the most beautiful sky blue color anyone had ever seen.

Filled now with both happiness and fear, the princess did not know what to do. But her fairy godmother soon appeared before her. "Ask for a dress the color of the moon," she said. "Surely your father will not be able to give you this."

No sooner had the princess asked for it than the king again called his dress-makers. This time he ordered them to make a dress the color of the moon. It was soon finished, and the princess was
again delighted with its beauty but frightened about what would come next.

Once more her fairy godmother appeared before her. "This time," she said, "ask for a dress as bright and shining as the sun."

The king went to a rich jeweler and ordered him to make a cloth of gold and diamonds. When the jeweler had finished the cloth, the king took it to his dress-makers. They made the cloth into a dress so beautiful and bright that it hurt the eyes of everyone who saw it. The princess did not know how to thank the king, but was once again in fear.

"Ask him for the skin of the magic donkey," said the fairy godmother the next time she came. "I am sure that the king will never give you this."

But the fairy godmother did not understand how much the king wanted to please his daughter. The donkey's skin was brought to the princess that very same day. Once again she was frightened, and once again her fairy godmother came to her. "Tell the king," she said, "that you will do as he wishes. Promise him anything he wants. But, at the same time, get ready to escape to some far country."

"Here," she said, pointing to a large box, "is a magic chest. Put your clothes, the things you need to wash and take care of yourself, and your diamonds and other jewels inside it. I will give you my wand. When you carry the wand, the chest will follow wherever you go. But no one will be able to see it. Whenever you wish to open the chest, touch the wand to the ground. The moment you do this, the chest will appear.

"The donkey's skin will be a good way for you to escape. Put it on and wear it always. No one will believe that anyone so beautiful could be hidden in anything so ugly."

Early in the morning the princess disappeared. They looked everywhere for her: in the palace, throughout the city, along the roads, wherever she might be. But they could not find her. No one could think what might have happened to her.

As they were looking, the princess journeyed far away. She asked everyone she met if there were some place where she might find work. But she looked so frightening in the donkey skin that no one wanted to take her into their house.

Farther and still farther she traveled. Finally she came to a large farm where they needed a girl to work in the kitchen and help take care of the pigs. She did most of her work in a corner of the room where all the other kitchen workers laughed at her and called her bad names.

On Sunday afternoons she could rest. After completing her morning work she would go to her room, close the door and wash. Then she would open the magic chest, take out her things, and make herself beautiful once more. Finally, she would try on her three beautiful dresses. First the sky dress, then the moon dress, and lastly the dress of gold and diamonds which shone like the sun. She was happy seeing herself young and beautiful again, and this good feeling carried her along from one Sunday to the next.

A young prince often stopped at the farm where Donkey Skin worked. He liked to rest there on his way home from hunting and have a cool drink with his friends.

Donkey Skin would look lovingly at him from her corner in the kitchen. She remembered that under the dirt and old clothes she had on, there was the heart of a princess. What grand ways he has, she
thought. How nice he is! How happy would I be to be loved by him! If he should give me the simplest of dresses, I would feel more beautiful in it than any of those which my father gave me.

One day the young prince, looking for something to do, came to the part of the house where Donkey Skin had her small room. He heard singing and put his eye to the key hole. It was a special holiday and Donkey Skin had put on her dress of gold and diamonds. The prince could not believe how beautiful she looked. He thought about opening the door three times, but each time he stopped himself.

On his return to his father's palace, the prince could not stop thinking about the girl he had seen. He asked who it was that lived in such a poor state. They said that her name was Donkey Skin, and that she was the ugliest woman one could find. This he would not believe, as he could not forget what he had seen. He fell into a state of great sadness, and became very ill. He stopped going to palace balls and parties, and would not eat.

His mother, the queen, asked him to tell her what was wrong. He cried that all he wanted was for the girl called Donkey Skin to make him a cake with her own hands.

"But he can't want that!" the people from the farm told the queen. "This Donkey Skin is nothing but an ugly country girl. She works in the kitchen and helps take care of the pigs."

"It makes no difference," said the queen. "We must do as the prince asks. It may be the only way to save him."

So Donkey Skin took what she needed from the kitchen and shut herself alone in her room to make the cake. But first, because of the important job she had been given, she washed her face and hands and put on a clean dress from her chest.

As Donkey Skin was making the cake, an expensive ring fell from her finger into the bowl. The story goes that this was because she was working a little too quickly. But some people say that it was all part of a plan to marry the prince. And they are probably right. For when the prince first stopped at her door and looked through the key hole, it is likely that she heard him. She could be sure that the prince would be very pleased when he saw that she had sent him a beautiful ring.

The prince found the cake so good that he almost ate the ring in his great hunger! When he saw it, his heart filled with happiness. At once he put it under his pillow. But this did not help the prince's illness. He seemed to be getting sicker every day.

Finally the doctors decided that he must be sick with love. Marriage, whatever may be said against it, is the best thing for love sickness. And so it was decided that the prince was to marry.

"I will marry if it is the king's wish," he said, "but I will only marry the person whom this ring fits." This surprised the king and queen very much, but the prince was so ill that they agreed.

Word was sent out that the prince would marry any woman who could fit the ring on her finger. It did not matter what her job was, or how poor her family were. It was well known that in order to win the prince, one must have a very thin finger. Many people made a lot of money by saying that they knew how to make fat fingers smaller.

When the day came for women to try on the ring, they started with the daughters of the men who lived and worked in the palace. However their fingers, although small, were all too big for the ring. Then the daughters of all the other rich and important people in the land were asked to present their
hands. Again the ring was too big. Next came the working girls, who often have thin and beautiful fingers. But the ring would not fit any of them. Finally they turned to the kitchen help and those who work outside with their red and dirty hands. None of these could put on the ring.

At last the only woman left was Donkey Skin, sitting alone in her far corner of the farm kitchen. Who would dream that she could ever be princess?

"And why not?" asked the prince. "Ask her to come here."

Some people cried out against bringing such an ugly woman into the palace. Others started to laugh as she was brought before the prince. But they stopped laughing when she reached out a small white hand from under the donkey skin and the ring went onto her finger easily.

They wanted to take her to the king at once. She said that first she needed to change her clothes. Again there was laughing at this. However, when they saw her in the bright and shining sun dress, all agreed that she was the most beautiful woman in the land. The king and queen were completely delighted with her. The prince found his happiness almost more than he could bear.

The king and queen started to make plans for the marriage at once. Other kings and queens came to see it from all over the world. But one visiting king stood out above all the others in riches and power. It was none other Donkey Skin's father. He knew her at once and told her how sorry he was for wanting to marry her. Crying with happiness, he took her in his arms. "How kind God is," he said, "to let me see you again, my dear daughter."

Everyone was happy at the news, and the prince was delighted to find that Donkey Skin's father was such a powerful king.

It is not hard to see the moral of this story. It is better to go through the greatest hardships than to do what is wrong. You may think that doing the right thing all the time can sometimes lead to problems, but people who do this always win out in the end.

The story of Donkey Skin may be hard to believe. However, as long as there are children, mothers, and grandmothers in this world, it will be told and remembered.