



# Daniel the donkey and the devil's deal

A local legend about Tarragona in Catalonia  
...adapted for 21st century children and with  
a cartoon to colour in.

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Thousands of years ago, in a magical forest, where the birds were so happy that they sang songs that made the leaves dance, an old man lived with his wife. The ancient man, David, and his elderly wife, Caterina, lived such a long time ago that there were no planes, no trains not even cars, phones or tablets. No-one had even thought about making a bicycle and only the rich people had horses to take them places. The couple had the help of their strong, stubborn old donkey, Daniel, with his deep brown eyes, big ears and funny hee-haw sounds.

Catarina and David lived in a beautiful land, called Catalonia, where the sky was so blue sometimes when it met the sea below, the two seemed to become one. The elderly couple lived a simple life, surrounded by lots of gorgeous green trees, that sheltered them. They loved the trees, the birds, and all the creatures of the forest who came to visit them every day. The couple lived in harmony with all of nature. The squirrels were their friends and often brought them nuts.

They woke up each day in tune with the beautiful light of dawn. While getting ready for the day, the couple loved to watch the bright, yellow sun making its entrance onto the azure blue sky.

As there were no supermarkets at that time, each day they had to make their way to a nearby market to sell products to be able to buy food. They would load up Daniel, their donkey, with as much as he could carry without it being too heavy for him. Then the three would set off on their walk to the market. Although the journey wasn't too long, the road to the village went across an old wooden bridge, which stood over a deep river. It was a long, scary drop down into the gushing river.

This trip had become more difficult over the years. With legs that were no longer young and strong, David and Catarina had to walk slower than before. So did Daniel, the donkey. The three took their time, especially as they crossed over the ancient bridge.

But they also had fun on their journey. The deep wrinkles on Catarina's face seemed to dance as she told stories and jokes to her husband and donkey. When she smiled her eyes sparkled just like the stars that twinkled over their forest at night. Her infectious smile sent ripples of joy and love to her two companions. It was clear that the three adored each other and their simple lifestyle. Little did they know that this was all about to change.

One evening, in early November, when the sky was no longer blue, but dark and threatening, the couple were sitting down after dinner, holding hands and relaxing. "Look at how dark the sky is," David said to Caterina. And just as she opened her mouth to answer, a loud crashing sound of thunder clapped overhead. Then the heavens opened up and down came big sheets of rain. Suddenly there was so much rain that they could hardly see the trees around them, and all the animals of the forest disappeared to find shelter.

Lightning made big zigzags in the sky above, and the noise of thunder became louder and louder. They were terrified, and the animals stayed in the safety of their shelters. The storm continued right through the night, making it hard to sleep much. The couple used that time to talk about the many good times they had enjoyed during their lives.

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In the morning when they woke up, there was a feeling of calm after the storm. Even though they had slept very little, they felt happy about their chat about the good times. The birds were singing cheerfully again, as the sun was starting to peep out of the sky. The couple began to get ready to go to the market.

Daniel, the donkey, stood patiently while they loaded the goods onto him and then the three of them set off on their daily journey. The donkey had no idea what a drama he would have that day.

When the three reached the place of the old wooden bridge, the couple looked at each other in shock. Catarina said to her husband "Oh my love, what are we going to do?" He replied: "I have no idea, my darling." They knew what they could see in front of them had entirely changed their lives. The ancient bridge had been washed away in the floodwaters of the storm.

David's head dropped down in sadness, and he said to his wife: "This is a disaster. We have no way to get to the market, and now I am too old and weak to build a new bridge." The couple felt defeated. If they couldn't get to the market, how would they sell their goods and be able to eat the food that they needed to survive. They both felt old and helpless.

As they were discussing their seemingly hopeless situation, a strange looking man appeared, as if out of nowhere. He was too thin and too tall, and wore a funny pointy hat, that shot up towards the sky. They had never seen this unusual man before, yet he spoke in the same way as them and the other local people. And although they both felt unsure about the stranger, under their desperate circumstances, it didn't seem important to enquire further about who he was.

He asked David: "Why do you look so shocked and sad, old man?" So David explained to the stranger all about the storm and the destroyed bridge. The stranger simply replied: "Don't worry, during the night I will build you a new bridge. I will make it from stone, so that it cannot be washed away like the old wooden bridge."

"What should we do?" David said to his wife, "There's only one way that he could build a new bridge in one night, and that has to be some type of magic."

"Ask him what it will cost us" Catarina whispered, "We need a new bridge to be able to survive." So David asked the weird stranger the question.

He replied: "I'll build the bridge for free in return for the soul of the first living creature to cross the bridge."

The couple tried to hide their shock. Catarina leaned towards David and told him, "I need to think about this for a while." She knew in her heart if he could do what he promised, he could only be the devil himself.

A short time passed and she looked very sadly at her old donkey, Daniel, who had not only helped them each day in their lives, but had become a furry member of their family. She whispered into Daniel's big fluffy ear, "I am eternally sorry Daniel, but I don't know what else I can do. I hope you can forgive me, my loyal friend." Daniel looked at her with his big brown eyes, and hee hawed.

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Caterina turned to face the stranger and said: "Yes, go ahead and build us the bridge that we need to survive." She took her husband's hand, and the three made their way slowly into the enchanted forest. Back in this magical place, where the animals, birds and trees were very happy, the couple started preparing something to eat. They made an extra special meal for Daniel. Both humans couldn't stop thinking about how they could save their donkey next day. That night the couple tossed and turned, too tormented and worried to sleep.

In the morning, the three walked back to where the old wooden bridge used to be. They saw a fine stone bridge, with a double arcade that crossed perfectly over the deep river below. At the other side of the bridge stood the stranger, that they had come to realise was the devil. He was waiting with a smug smile on his face. The devil was looking forward to receiving his payment, but he had no idea what was about to happen to him.

"Caterina, what are we going to do?" David said, in a low, scared voice to his wife. Even though they had tried to make a plan to save Daniel, they were unsure how they could trick the devil. Catarina hugged and kissed Daniel, the donkey, with tears streaming down her face. She drove Daniel, who passed in front of her, crossing the bridge first.

The smile left the face of the devil, who was angry to have been deceived. Yet he remembered that he had said the words ..."first creature". And Daniel, the donkey, indeed was a creature. The devil was angry, as it was a human soul he had wanted. Even though he knew all animals had souls. The devil, like many humans, felt that a human soul was worth more.

Just as Daniel, the donkey took his last steps to the other side of the bridge, something strange happened. The devil, with all of his evil magical powers, had let himself become overpowered with anger and hatred, because of this clever Catalan woman. It was as if he had become a mere mortal for a few moments, with his dark gifts dissolved under a cloak of negative feelings.

Daniel, the donkey, used his innate animal instincts to sense the situation. He moved his strong body suddenly towards the devil, pushing him quickly, with special, stubborn donkey force. The devil fell down into the river. It only took the devil seconds to realise what had happened, and his evil magical powers were back, ready for him to use.

He levitated out of the river, flying up into the air towards the old couple and their donkey. His intention was to get his revenge and take all three souls with him to hell. Below him, the couple and their loyal donkey seemed frozen by fear. The devil flew around madly above them, gripped by anger and hatred for these simple beings. Possessed by his ugly need for evil revenge, the devil's flight path became more manic by the minute.

The four feet of the human couple and the additional four feet of Daniel, the donkey, appeared to be rooted to the earth. Paralysed by fear, it seemed impossible for any of the three to move even a millimetre. Scared of what the devil was about to do to them, the couple and donkey huddled close together. Even though they were all frozen by fear, as they touched each other, something magical seemed to happen. Their unspoken communication and love seemed to build an invisible bridge of support between them.

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Suddenly a beautiful, silvery light sparkled on the river, that somehow seemed to hit the devil's body, as if he was being struck by lightning. Caterina knew from her inner wisdom and intuition that an angel had come to rescue their souls. She grabbed David by the hand and with her other hand nudged Daniel. The three moved with such speed, just as if they were all young, fast and strong again.

The devil was so furious that he turned a weird, disgusting colour. At the same time his power to fly disappeared. He came crashing back down to earth bumping the beautiful land below so harshly that he left a big hole in it.

The devil had no choice but to accept defeat. Caterina and David hugged each other, and Daniel, the donkey. All three realised that a miracle had happened.

Each day after, for years and years, the three crossed the Devil's Bridge. It reminded them of how close they had come to losing the soul of their furry family member, Daniel, to the devil. In fact they remembered that all three of them had almost lost their souls to the devil. Had it been their love that had called on the angel's miracle?

Today the Devil's Bridge still stands in Tarragona. You can see it and explore the enchanted forest, where this couple lived with Daniel, the donkey, almost 2000 years ago.

**Daniel the Donkey and the Devil's Deal is adapted from a local legend**

This story is based on the Legend of the Devil's Bridge, in Tarragona. In the popular version of the legend, the devil takes the donkey's soul, as there are no "official records" of an angel appearing.

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