

## Donkey delight

Once, there was a girl called Lucia. Some time ago, Lucia had a mother and father, who loved her, but now she had only her stepmother and stepsister, Amelia, with whom she lived in a house overlooking a wooded valley in Croatia. Her stepmother would cosset and coddle Amelia attending to her every whim but to Lucia all she would do was shout, "Go and wash the dishes. Scrub the floors." And so on. Lucia worked her fingers to the bone but always had a cheerful disposition while Amelia would just sit by the fire eating and complaining.. Both girls were at a marrying age but when eligible men would visit the house, Lucia's stepmother forced her to do tasks which made her bend her head down, like scrubbing the floor on her knees, so that her dark hair swung forward and concealed her beautiful face.

One day, while taking out the rubbish, Lucia dropped the pail. *She ran after it down the hill and at the bottom looked right then left. There she saw a house and two very strange figures at the window. One was a man, one a woman, but both had\* very big teeth and long ears.. One held up the pail. Lucia knocked on the door and asked for her pail back. "Hee-haw," brayed the man. "But first could you do some jobs for us?" Lucia agreed. "Hee-haw, look at floor," said the man. "Floor bad. Break it."* But Lucia didn't break the greasy, grimy floor but cleaned it with a broom and mop. "Hee-haw, look at sink," said the woman. "Dishes no good. Smash them up." But Lucia didn't smash up the filthy dishes in the sink but scrubbed, rinsed and stacked them instead. "Good," said the woman. "Hee-haw. Now look at bedroom." The bedroom was a mess. "Hee-haw," said the woman. "See bed. No good. Throw it away." Lucia cleaned the bedroom and made the bed. The man and woman were happy and returned Lucia's pail, then said, "Before you go, stand on the threshold, turn around three times and look at the sky." Lucia did this and a star came from the heavens and landed on her forehead. Using the star's light to guide her home, Lucia returned. Her stepmother was astounded by how dazzlingly beautiful Lucia now was and locked her away in her room.

One day Lucia was sitting by her window when a prince went by and saw her. He knocked on the door and asked to see the beautiful maiden that shone like a star. Lucia's stepmother introduced him to Amelia saying that she was the only girl in the house. He quickly left. Then she let Lucia out to do all the undone housework and made her tell her everything that had happened. Wanting the same good fortune for her daughter, she told Amelia to take out a pail of rubbish. Amelia wasn't happy but took the pail to the compost and dropped it. *Amelia ran after it down the hill and at the bottom looked right then left. There she saw a house and two very strange figures at the window..*

Amelia laughed at the man and woman. When the man asked Amelia to break the floor she did, with a sledgehammer. And when the woman asked her to smash up the dishes in the sink, she did, \*hurling them happily at the ceiling, the floor and the walls. And when she was asked to throw away the bed, she did that as well. When Amelia was done, the man gave her the pail and told her to stand on threshold, turn three times and look at the sky. A star appeared in the sky and descended towards her but when it landed on her forehead it was very heavy smelly and dangled over her eyes, making her squint. It was a donkey's tail! When she got home her mother wailed with grief to see what had happened to her daughter and covered her with a veil. The next day the prince called again, wanting to see the girl with the star on her forehead. This time, Lucia's stepmother reluctantly agreed.

In time, Lucia and the prince fell in love, married and moved to the palace. Lucia had a kind heart and took her stepmother and stepsister with her and made sure that they were cared for, for the rest of their lives.

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