

Don Giovanni de la Fortuna

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Italian

Advanced
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There was once a man whose name was Don Giovanni de la Fortuna, and he lived in a beautiful house that his father had built, and spent a great deal of money. Indeed, he spent so much that very soon there was none left, and Don Giovanni, instead of being a rich man with everything he could wish for, was forced to put on the dress of a pilgrim, and to wander from place to place begging his bread.

One day he was walking down a broad road when he was stopped by a handsome man he had never seen before, who, little as Don Giovanni knew it, was the devil himself.

‘Would you like to be rich,’ asked the devil, ‘and to lead a pleasant life?’

‘Yes, of course I should,’ replied the Don.

‘Well, here is a purse; take it and say to it, “Dear purse, give me some money,” and you will get as much as you can want. But the charm will only work if you promise to remain three years, three months, and three days without washing and without combing and without shaving your beard or changing your clothes. If you do all this faithfully, when the time is up you shall keep the purse for yourself, and I will let you off any other conditions.’

Now Don Giovanni was a man who never troubled his head about the future. He did not once think how very

uncomfortable he should be all those three years, but only that he should be able, by means of the purse, to have all sorts of things he had been obliged to do without; so he joyfully put the purse in his pocket and went on his way. He soon began to ask for money for the mere pleasure of it, and there was always as much as he needed. For a little while he even forgot to notice how dirty he was getting, but this did not last long, for his hair became matted with dirt and hung over his eyes, and his pilgrim's dress was a mass of horrible rags and tatters.

He was in this state when, one morning, he happened to be passing a fine palace; and, as the sun was shining bright and warm, he sat down on the steps and tried to shake off some of the dust which he had picked up on the road. But in a few minutes a maid saw him, and said to her master, 'I pray you, sir, to drive away that beggar who is sitting on the steps, or he will fill the whole house with his dirt.'

So the master went out and called from some distance off, for he was really afraid to go near the man, 'You filthy beggar, leave my house at once!'

'You need not be so rude,' said Don Giovanni; 'I am not a beggar, and if I chose I could force you and your wife to leave your house.'

'What is that you can do?' laughed the gentleman.

'Will you sell me your house?' asked Don Giovanni. 'I will buy it from you on the spot.'

'Oh, the dirty creature is quite mad!' thought the gentleman. 'I shall just accept his offer for a joke.' And aloud he said: 'All right; follow me, and we will go to a lawyer and get him to make a contract.' And Don Giovanni followed him, and an agreement was drawn up by which the house was to be sold at once, and a large sum of money paid down in eight days. Then the Don went to an inn, where he hired two rooms, and, standing in one of them, said to his purse, 'Dear purse, fill this room with gold;' and when the eight days were up it was so full you could not have put in another sovereign.

When the owner of the house came to take away his money Don Giovanni led him into the room and said: 'There, just pocket what you want.' The gentleman stared with open mouth at the astonishing sight; but he had given his word to sell the house, so he took his money, as he was told, and went away with his wife to look for some place to live in. And Don Giovanni left the inn and dwelt in the beautiful rooms, where his rags and dirt

looked sadly out of place. And every day these got worse and worse.

By-and-bye the fame of his riches reached the ears of the king, and, as he himself was always in need of money, he sent for Don Giovanni, as he wished to borrow a large sum. Don Giovanni readily agreed to lend him what he wanted, and sent next day a huge waggon laden with sacks of gold.

‘Who can he be?’ thought the king to himself. ‘Why, he is much richer than I!’

The king took as much as he had need of; then ordered the rest to be returned to Don Giovanni, who refused to receive it, saying, ‘Tell his majesty I am much hurt at his proposal. I shall certainly not take back that handful of gold, and, if he declines to accept it, keep it yourself.’

The servant departed and delivered the message, and the king wondered more than ever how anyone could be so rich. At last he spoke to the queen: ‘Dear wife, this man has done me a great service, and has, besides, behaved like a gentleman in not allowing me to send back the money. I wish to give him the hand of our eldest daughter.’

The queen was quite pleased at this idea, and again messenger was sent to Don Giovanni, offering him the hand of the eldest princess.

‘His majesty is too good,’ he replied. ‘I can only humbly accept the honour.’

The messenger took back this answer, but a second time returned with the request that Don Giovanni would present them with his picture, so that they might know what sort of a person to expect. But when it came, and the princess saw the horrible figure, she screamed out, ‘What! marry this dirty beggar? Never, never!’

‘Ah, child,’ answered the king, ‘how could I ever guess that the rich Don Giovanni would ever look like that? But I have passed my royal word, and I cannot break it, so there is no help for you.’

‘No, father; you may cut off my head, if you choose, but marry that horrible beggar—I never will!’

And the queen took her part, and reproached her husband bitterly for wishing his daughter to marry a creature like that.

Then the youngest daughter spoke: ‘Dear father, do not look so sad. As you have given your word, I will marry

Don Giovanni.' The king fell on her neck, and thanked her and kissed her, but the queen and the elder girl had nothing for her but laughs and jeers.

So it was settled, and then the king bade one of his lords go to Don Giovanni and ask him when the wedding day was to be, so that the princess might make ready.

'Let it be in two months,' answered Don Giovanni, for the time was nearly up that the devil had fixed, and he wanted a whole month to himself to wash off the dirt of the past three years.

The very minute that the compact with the devil had come to an end his beard was shaved, his hair was cut, and his rags were burned, and day and night he lay in a bath of clear warm water. At length he felt he was clean again, and he put on splendid clothes, and hired a beautiful ship, and arrived in state at the king's palace.

The whole of the royal family came down to the ship to receive him, and the whole way the queen and the elder princess teased the sister about the dirty husband she was going to have. But when they saw how handsome he really was their hearts were filled with envy and anger, so that their eyes were blinded, and they fell over into the sea and were drowned. And the youngest daughter rejoiced in the good luck that had come to her, and they had a splendid wedding when the days of mourning for her mother and sister were ended.

Soon after the old king died, and Don Giovanni became king. And he was rich and happy to the end of his days, for he loved his wife, and his purse always gave him money.

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