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Don Giovanni

R.H. Busk

In Rome they told another story of a Giovanni who did worse things than most men, and who never repented of any of them. Don Giovanni, they called him, and everyone in the city knew the name.

Among his crimes he had killed a great nobleman — the Commendatore — and though the sin of murder weighed on his soul, he carried it as if it were nothing, strutting through the streets as though he feared neither God nor man.

One day, walking in the Campagna outside the city walls, he saw a great white skeleton coming toward him across the open ground. It was the skeleton of the Commendatore he had killed.

"Good day to you!" said Don Giovanni, bold as ever. "I'm having a gathering at my house tonight — I'd be very glad if you'd come." He swept off his hat with mock ceremony.

"I will certainly come," replied the Commendatore, in a voice that seemed to rise from the earth itself.

Don Giovanni laughed.

That evening, in the middle of the party, someone knocked at the door. "All the guests are here," said the servant, confused. "And yet someone knocks."

"Never mind — open it," said Don Giovanni carelessly. "Whoever it is, let them in."

The servant went, and came running back: he couldn't show the new guest in, he said, because it was only the miller, who had come in his white coat all covered in flour.

But it was no miller. It was the white skeleton of the Commendatore, and it walked past the servant and into the room. Terror seized everyone; they bolted behind doors and curtains and under tables.

Don Giovanni stood alone in the middle of the room. He held out his hand to the skeleton.

"Repent," said the White Skeleton, solemnly.

"A man of my sort doesn't repent like a common beggar," said Don Giovanni.

"Repent," said the White Skeleton again, with greater force.

"I have something far more amusing to do," said Don Giovanni, with a laugh.



"Don Giovanni," said the White Skeleton a third time, and now its voice was terrible. "Though you took my life, I am come to save your soul if I can. I say to you again — repent. Or understand what follows."

"Well said, old fellow! Very generous of you," said Don Giovanni, still laughing, and he extended his hand once more.

Those were his last words. The next moment he gave a shriek that shook the whole house. The White Skeleton was gone. In its place stood the Devil, who had taken Don Giovanni's outstretched hand and dragged him off.

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