

# The Independent.

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## TIME'S WAREHOUSE.

BY GRACE DENIO LITCHFIELD.

"WHAT in the world can I get for my Christmas presents?" thought I, weighing my slender purse in my hand, and uselessly wishing that each penny it held were convertible into a bright gold coin, shining with delight at the joy it was to give. "What can I get that shall be cheap to buy, yet costly to offer, and rare and wonderful to possess? Ah me. Would that all that had ever been mine to give of old, all that I could have parted with for others' pleasure in by-gone days, were but laid before me again, to choose my gifts from now!"

And giving my poor purse a contemptuous shake in scorn of its slimness, I flung myself on the bed, and had just settled in my mind what the gift was that I would like best of all to give to my heart's dearest, when a little trap-door opened unexpectedly beneath me, and I fell plump through into Dreamland. At least I first fancied it was Dreamland, but I soon saw that I was in a great shop, a vast cone-shaped room, brilliantly lighted with wax candles and glittering balls, and with articles of every conceivable description hung everywhere about on queer little forked hooks and twisted green nails, while a most delicious odor, like the concentrated essence of a whole pine forest, filled the apartment to the tip.

Immediately upon my entrance, the proprietor stepped forward to meet me, lifting his glossy fur cap with one hand, while with the other he hastily removed a fat raisin (indicative of very recent plum-pudding), from his long white beard. And a dear little man he was—short and round and rosy, with the merriest of faces imaginable, and a pair of such loving, laughing, twinkling eyes!

"I'm Santa Claus, at your service," said he, in a voice for all the world like a jingle of silver bells. "I am glad you have found me out. This is where I do my wholesale business, the only establishment in the Universe, and a fine one it is too! What would you be pleased to

have?"

"Something to give away." I answered, with a devouring glance around the room.

"Ah, *that* to be sure," replied the little man promptly. "I keep nothing for those who would buy for themselves. Pray, with what may I serve you?"

"Why, really," said I timidly, "my purse is very light, and everything you have looks so costly"—

"Oh, bless you!" interrupted Santa Claus, with a spicy little laugh bubbling to his red lips; "how can my goods be anything but costly, even the simplest, when they are one and all made by Love? An able workman he is indeed, and the only one I employ. At work, too, day and night. He never rests."

"Perhaps, then, Love can make me my gifts," said I; "for I don't see them here."

"To be sure, to be sure," exclaimed Santa Claus briskly, rubbing his plump, old hands together. "There is nothing in creation save the impossible (which isn't in creation) that Love cannot do. What is it you want?"

"Many things," I replied, sighing. "I want a little hour that I threw away one day a great many years ago, to give now to a dying friend. And I want a pleasure that I squandered in youth, to give now to one old in sorrow. And I want a kind word I once neglected to say, a smile I once shut my eyes upon, a caress I once forbore to give, that I may bestow them all now upon one whose heart hungers for love. I have had them all. They were all mine once. But I lost them; and now I would fain procure them again to give to one dearer to me than life; so you, who hold all the gifts of earth in your keeping, surely you can find me these among them."

But Santa Claus was grown very grave as I spoke, nay sad, if that look were possible to his dear old smile-wrinkled face. "I am afraid, after all, that you have come to the wrong place," said he, slowly. "I have nothing old or second-hand by me. Love's gifts, whatever they be, are always new. However, come with me to

Love's workshop, and let him say."

And immediately I found myself seated beside Santa Claus in a tiny, fur-lined sleigh, and he snapped the whip with a brisk, glad sound, like the cheerful crackle of pop-corn over a fire, and the reindeer tossed their happy heads, and away we flew miles and miles over the crisp snow, till suddenly I came right out of the ice and the cold into a flower-sweet, sun-warm garden. Or rather, at first I thought it a garden, till looking closer I saw that I was really in a workshop, only the machinery was all most curiously made of flowers, with great fragrant wreaths going round and round like wheels, connected with each other by a wonderful network of creeping vines and trailing mosses. There was no noise, no jar, no confusion, no discord; nothing but that perpetual rush of perfume through the air, and a dropping of ripe rose-leaves to one's feet, and a sweet, glad silence throughout. In the midst of it all sat one alone at work, and though I had never seen him before, never even so much as any portrait bearing real resemblance to him, yet the minute my eyes rested upon him, I knew that this was Love. He saw me too the instant I entered (nothing escapes the observant eyes of Love !) and smiled; and I felt gladder for being near him, and stood a while watching him at work. Very, very skillful was he indeed, for he wrought marvels with the commonest materials, turning everything that he touched into a thing of beauty; but perhaps it was his smile falling on them as he worked that lent them their magic, for surely nowhere have I ever seen such wonderful gifts as those which I there saw made by Love.

"Dear Love," I said at last, "you who are so deft a worker, can you not fashion me these simple little gifts that I seek?" And I told him my needs; but alack, as I spoke, his sweet face clouded, and he shook his bright head gently and very sorrowfully.

"Alas!" he said, and his voice was like rarest music or like flowers shaken into speech; "I work with the present and future only—not with the past. I can make new things out of old, and fair things out of the plain and poor; but I cannot find the lost, nor remake the gone. I cannot restore to you the lost hour, the squandered joy, the forgotten caress. You must go for these to the great Warehouse of Time."

"And where is that?" I asked, with failing courage

"At the end of all things," said Love

sadly; and my spirit quailed.

"How can I venture so far?" I asked helplessly; but Love only smiled.

"Where will you not venture with Love for your guide, and where may not Love go?" said he; and I was afraid no longer.

And so I followed him forth, and was led for hour after hour and day after day, till I lost all note of time and place, and knew no more where I was. And then I found myself in a vast gray space, limitless and vague, with Time himself standing cold and stern and relentless by my side, while all around were the ghosts of dead years, and the phantoms of things that had been.

"O Time," I said, "Lost Time, have I caught up with you at last?"

"At last," he said.

"And what of mine have you gathered into your stores, O Time?" I asked, and drew back from him with a nameless dread, for he froze me with his breath. "Have you found that tiny hour that I flung away one day, for lack of aught to do in it?"

"Yes," said Time; "I gather up all the lost minutes as they fall, to bury in the graveyard of the years."

"And that delight that I let slip through my hands because there were so many to hold—have you found that, too?"

"Yes," said Time; "I catch all the fleet pleasures as they pass, to store amid the sorrows."

"And that one kiss that I did not give because I could give so many more—oh, have you found that, too?"

"I have," said Time. "I hold all the It-might-have-beens as threads in my hand, to weave upon the loom Despair."

"And the kind word that I left unsaid—the dear smile that I forgot to meet, are they, too, both here?"

"They are," said Time. "Into my eternal keeping drop all Life's richest jewels."

"Oh, then, give me them again!" I cried. "I need them oh, so sorely! Give me them back once more!"

"Nay," said Time. "They were yours once to have and to hold, and you cast them from you, and now they are mine forever."

"But then I knew not their priceless-ness!" I implored. "And now I have learned their value. Oh, give me but that one hour back that I may add it to the sum of a life that is nearly told! One little hour!—Is it much to ask when one that I love lies dying?"

"It is more than I can give," said Time.

"Then give me but that one little pleasure back, that I may gladden with it the end of that dear and sorrowful life. O Time, is it much to ask, when one that I love will so soon feel no more?"

"It is more than I can give," said Time.

"Then, oh then, give me back that unspoken word, that I may say it o'er and o'er to those ears that will so soon cease to hear! Give me back that forgotten smile, that I may smile it over and again into those eyes that will so soon cease to see! Give me back that ungiven kiss that I may press it close upon those dear lips that will so soon kiss no more! O Time, Time, is this much to ask?"

"Nay," said Time. "Not much to ask back from the misused years, the despised blessings, the neglected affections and forgotten duties of a lifetime; not much in truth; yet more than I can ever give to you again."

"But I will give all, all that I have in return!" I cried. "I will buy back that

pleasure, that kiss, with all the added joys and caresses of my future life—pay for that single hour with all the years that I have yet to live. O Time, relent ere it be too late! for say, is this not much to give?"

"Yes," said Time, "it is much; but it is less than I can take, and more than any can give. For no man living, from the day of his birth to the day of his death, may ever buy back that which he has once lost to Time."

"And I must return empty handed even as I came!" I cried in despair.

"No," said Time, "not so; for you take Remorse with you."

And he came near and nearer till I felt his cold hand upon me, and all my blood ran ice, and then—oh, thank Heaven!—then with a great cry I awoke, and lo! it was all a dream. It was not yet too late. The hour, the gladness and the love were yet all mine to give to whom I would!

SAN REMO, ITALY.

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### LISTENING.

BY GRACE DENIO LITCHFIELD.

I LISTEN and I listen  
For one I long to greet,  
And I hear the ceaseless passing  
Of footsteps in the street.

I hear them coming, coming.  
So straight, so sure, so fast;  
And I hush my heart to hearken;  
But all the feet go past.

Will it be so forever,  
As on my bed I lie,  
Counting the pleasures coming—  
Will every one go by?

Or will it one day happen,  
That when I hark no more,  
Some late, lone joy, unnoticed,  
Will linger at my door?

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